

## THE SIDEBAR

### Verbatim

"It is so exciting to be nominated, but working with Emma (Thompson) was reward enough. Don't get me wrong, I still want to win!"

— *Dustin Hoffman, nominated for best actor, comedy or musical, for "Last Chance Harvey" at the Golden Globes.*



### Game news

#### 'Midnight Club' deliver thrills

We've played dozens of driving games over the decades, from arcade classics like "Pole Position" to this year's addictive "Grid," but we've never come across an interesting character in a virtual racer.

That's because cars are the stars of this genre. If you play a deep racing simulator like "Gran Turismo," you get to know your vehicles better than most of the human heroes you might meet in other games.

But here's one that hit the mark. —"Midnight Club Los Angeles" (Rockstar, for the Xbox 360,

PlayStation 3, \$59.99): The protagonist here is a bland Midwestern dude who moves to California to build a rep in the illegal street racing scene.

But the real star is L.A. itself — or rather, a compressed version of the sprawling city, with plenty of familiar landmarks. It's a kick roaring down Sunset Boulevard or Mulholland Drive at 100 mph, although the cops will get on your tail if you create too much chaos.

### Tops of 2008

#### Springsteen offspring top best rock albums of 2008

Rock music in 2008 was dominated by relics from the past, most returning with respectable albums: Guns 'n Roses, AC/DC, Metallica

and, er, Coldplay. But there was better stuff to be found, even if it didn't, like "Chinese Democracy," take 17 years to create.

With apologies to fans of Kings of Leon and Bon Iver, here are the top 10 rock albums of the year.

1. Constantines, "Kensington Heights"
2. The Hold Steady, "Stay Positive"
3. Fleet Foxes, "Fleet Foxes"
4. Santogold, "Santogold"
5. No Age, "Nouns"
6. Lykke Li, "Youth Novels"
7. TV on the Radio, "Dear Science"
8. Black Keys, "Attack and Release"
9. Jenny Lewis, "Acid Tongue"
10. Dr. Dog, "Fate"

— *Free Press Staff and news services*

# Goofy comics



Submitted photos

Comedian Craig Allen's style has been described as bizarre and twisted.

By **Regan Carstensen**  
 Free Press Staff Writer

**MANKATO** — His comedy has been described as "bizarre" and "twisted," so it's no surprise Craig Allen appreciates strange humor.

"Goofy comics — ones that have a sick sense of humor — that's just what makes me laugh," Allen said, adding that his own routine has similar wit.

Those looking to get a taste of his humor at the seventh annual New Year's Eve Comedy Bash can expect a simple, yet entertaining act.

"No props. It's just going up there and firing one joke after another," Allen said. "It seems like I'm talking to a room full of my friends and just being really funny while I'm doing it."

Joining Allen at the show is Arizona native Shannan Paul, who says she likes to treat her audience like they're friends. She also prefers to perform in a conversational style, sans props.

"I am not a prop comic by any means," Paul said.

Another similarity between Allen and Paul — they write most of their material from life experiences. Allen's best jokes just pop into his head, and while half of them are from personal occurrences, he gets the rest from observations of other people.

Paul's jokes come from random things that happen to her, and her sense of humor is based on how she relates to the world.

Aside from doing stand-up, Paul is a regular radio personality on the hip-hop station B96 out of the Twin Cities. She began writing jokes for other comedians and hoped she would become the one performing.

Allen developed his interest in comedy during the days of Fozzie Bear, the particularly fuzzy Muppet who cracked jokes and battled hecklers. Years later, Allen's real start as a comedian came during a brief stint in

**If You Go**

**What**  
 New Year's Eve Comedy Bash

**When**  
 7 p.m. and 9:30 p.m.  
 Wednesday at the Holiday Inn, 101 E. Main St.

**Admission**  
 \$15 general admission, \$20 preferred seating  
 For more information, call 345-1234.

## Comedy Bash brings laughs to lift holiday stress

Grand Forks, N.D., where other comics had set up their careers.

"There was a club up there that did shows five nights a week," he said. "You'd move up there for six months to a year and you'd kind of be the house emcee."

The club, known to many comedians as "comedy boot camp," developed a loyal audience, forcing Allen to continually write new jokes and become funny in a hurry.

Of course a comedian needs to be funny, but another equally important attribute is the ability to think on their feet. Hecklers offer the perfect opportunity for comedians to sharpen their skills. While Paul said she hasn't encountered many hecklers, Allen has experienced the back-talking audience members, but he isn't afraid of them.

"When it comes down to a war of words, I can be louder and I can be meaner," he said.

Allen's experience has helped him realize it's important to adjust an act on the drop of a hat if necessary.

"You have to be able to just bail on your act if it's not working," he said. "I've got enough (material) now that I can usually read the audience and tell what's going to work."

Not only has he dealt with hecklers, but Allen has had his fair share of time doing the taunting.

"If it's a friend on stage, just to mess with them," he said. "If nothing's getting a laugh, that's when comics will really heckle each other."

With the exception of giving hecklers — and fellow comedians — a hard

time, Allen knows the audience comes to shows to enjoy entertainment and not to be made part of the entertainment. He said "they don't go to be insulted," and a lot of comics will take that route as an easy way out, instead of just coming up with good, solid jokes.

Allen and Paul, on the other hand, just want the audience to have fun. Despite a few nerves, the two comedians are all about laughs once they get on stage, and plenty of laughs are anticipated this year.

Before each show, Allen likes to get a gauge of the makeup of a crowd, and he said Mankato and other college towns make for a good mix of people.

"It's a fairly educated audience that likes to drink," Allen joked. "That's pretty much the perfect comedy audience."

People tend to take on a group mentality at comedy shows, Allen said, and all he hopes for is that fun-loving, loud-laughing mentality.



Arizona native Shannan Paul has a conversational comedy style, sans props.

At a brisk pace, Suzy Wiley (left) and Cyd Nelson, both of Kansas City, walk at Loose Park. In the annals of exercise research, increasingly the answer is "brisk walking."

McClatchy-Tribune News Service



## Walk briskly ... and carry a smaller stomach

McClatchy-Tribune News Service

**KANSAS CITY, MO.** — This is just what you need, in the aftermath of pumpkin pie and the advent of holiday parties: gross-out science about deep belly fat.

But first, some encouragement.

Cyd Nelson and Suzy Wiley, both of Kansas City, Mo., both trim and fit, were briskly hit-

ting the path around Loose Park on a recent sunny but chilly day. It was not a crowded place in December.

"The goal is to walk all winter long," said Wiley, breaking stride to answer a few questions. "I'm worried about footwear."

"I think we'll have to wear thermal socks," Nelson said. That's the spirit.

In the annals of exercise

research, increasingly the answer is "brisk walking."

What's the question? Most people think it has to do with exercising the heart or getting rid of love handles and saddlebags. But scientists are finding it's about belly fat, also known as visceral fat, the interior kind that's snug up against your internal organs.

Yeah, yuck. Put a glob of abdominal fat

and a glob of thigh fat in a petri dish, add a little stimulation, and the two behave quite differently, said Tim Church, director of preventive medicine research at Pennington Biomedical Research Center in Baton Rouge, La.

"The belly fat produces three times the bad chemicals," Church said. "And it's

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