

Lucy's Café provides bright spot at Raue

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When the **Raue Center** for the Arts transforms into Lucy's Café for the night, it's all about "seating" the stage. Because the stage is the café. An eclectic nightclub where people can enjoy live music and a stand-up comedy act in an intimate setting, the café has become somewhat of a surprise hit at the **center**.

At \$20 a ticket, it's an affordable night out. And it's also unique in that audience members are able to get up close and personal with the performers.

"It's sort of like a storyteller night," said Richard Kuranda, executive director of the **Raue Center** for the Arts.

Performers can try out new material with the smaller, roughly 150-member audience, while the audience can interact with the performers, he said.

Past performers have included Dwayne Kennedy, who's performed on "The Late Show with David Letterman" and has appeared in numerous films and TV series, such as "Seinfeld."

People, it seems, are definitely in the mood to laugh.

"I think in many ways the program has been successful because of the recession," Kuranda said.

The **center** began developing Lucy's Café – named after **Raue** benefactor Lucile **Raue** – about two years ago after hosting numerous focus groups geared toward those ages 20 to 45 years old, he said.

"Everyone kept saying they wanted a night of entertainment that wouldn't break the bank, factoring in baby-sitting, transportation and parking," he said.

The café's later start time of 8 p.m. allows parents to put the kids to bed before heading out for the night, he said.

When it first opened, it drew most of its audience from those in their 20s and 30s, but it now draws people of all ages, he said.

A resident of Crystal Lake for 25 years, Peter Affrunti has supported

the **Raue** since its beginning and now has a regular table at the cafe.

"Lucy's Café has just been a nice surprise," he said.

"The talent is good," Affrunti said. "The atmosphere is just delightful. It's not a real large theater, which is perfect, because you're closer to the comedian."

A night out in Chicago becomes too expensive and a "very long night," Affrunti said. "It's delightful to have the **Raue** right in our backyard," he said.

Despite the success of Lucy's Cafe, the **Raue** has struggled the past couple of years. Ticket prices have been reduced across the board. The **center** has tried to work more closely with the community, especially nonprofit groups, Kuranda said. The nonprofit **center** itself relies on roughly 400 volunteers.

An endowment program allows schoolchildren to come to the theater at a capped ticket price of \$6, Kuranda said.

"During difficult times, kids' programming gets beat up on," he said. "We've been able to maintain a healthy environment for children and we're proud of that."

Patrons have taken notice.

The poor economy has led to a reduction in arts, music and theater in many schools, said Barb Walor of Crystal Lake.

"I'm particularly fond of what they do with the kids in the community," she said. "When you lose the culture of your civilization, things are much less than they would have been otherwise."

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