

How funny are these two airmen? - Captain, Staff Sgt. compete for Texas comedy title

By Seamus O'Connor - Staff writer

Capt. Jose Sarduy and Staff Sgt. Walter Campbell work at separate bases but share the same dream: to be the funniest person in South Texas.

Sarduy, a flight instructor at Laughlin Air Force Base, Texas, and Campbell, a materiel management instructor at nearby Lackland Air Force Base, are both finalists in this year's Funniest Person in South Texas competition. Campbell took second and Sarduy took third in last year's inaugural version of the contest.

The airmen will each throw out their best seven minutes of material on March 26 in the finals at San Antonio's Rivercenter Comedy Club. To reach the finals, they had to prove they were among the 15 best comics in a field of 120. The finalists were chosen by panels of local celebrity judges — which for Sarduy included former Lackland training instructor Michelle Manhart.

"I'm glad that I was doing my sexual" routine instead of an Air Force-based routine, Sarduy said.

The South Texas laugh-off may seem like small potatoes, but the prize at stake is anything but. In addition to \$750 in cash, the winner gets to do a week of shows at Los Angeles' Laugh Factory.

"That's big," Campbell said. "If you do the Laugh Factory, any given night, you can have Jay Leno sitting in the crowd. That could jump-start your career right there."

Campbell's comedy career started at Cannon Air Force Base, N.M., where a successful talent night appearance landed him a monthly hosting gig for other talent nights. Whenever professional comics came to the base, Campbell said, he would meet them and "pick their brain."

Campbell has been in the Air Force for 13 years and on the comedy circuit for 12, having opened for Sinbad and "Weird" Al Yankovic among others. He toured with the Tops in Blue in 2001, performing what he calls "high-energy, clean comedy." Sarduy, a 1999 graduate of the Air Force Academy, started his Air Force career as a C-141 pilot, which gave him some of his first comedy material.

"People say, 'Oh, you're a pilot!'" Sarduy said. "And I'm like, 'Yeah, but I can't shoot back.'"

The Cuban native also draws material from his family's heritage, starting with their deportation when he was three years old. "It was a very painful period for my family, but now we joke about it," Sarduy said. "For my family that's how we know we've overcome something — we can joke about it."

Both comics also intend to try out for NBC's "Last Comic Standing," a sort of "American Idol" for comedians, at the end of March. Sarduy would like the chance to be on TV, as would Campbell, but the staff sergeant isn't ready to give up his Air Force job just yet.

"I plan on doing 20 ... my biggest goal is just to be able to work in comedy and do what I love, he said. Then again, "Comedy doesn't have Tricare."

Think you've got better material than these guys?



Courtesy Capt. Jose Sarduy

From left, Cleto Rodriguez, last year's Funniest Person in South Texas, with runners-up Capt. Jose Sarduy and Staff Sgt. Walter Campbell.

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<http://www.airforcetimes.com/news/2007/03/AFcomedians070313/>