

Lavoie ready to laugh for life

by **GLENN COOK**

Saint City News

Lewis Lavoie's latest work is a laughing matter.

Lavoie, who has a studio just outside St. Albert, will once again participate in the Laugh for Life Gala this year, which is on Friday, Nov. 7, at the Winspear Centre in downtown Edmonton.

The event is a fundraiser for The Mustard Seed and the Candeo Housing Association, and will feature comedians Tim Hawkins and Bob Stromberg, music from the Tracy Dunham Band, and Lavoie on stage creating two paintings in less than half an hour that will be auctioned off.

Lavoie said he has no preconceptions of what he's going to paint — everything is spontaneous.

"My wife keeps saying, 'Lewis, you should come up with a recipe that works every time you do it,' but for some reason, I always try to do something different," he said. "I always try to paint a completely different painting for every one of these. I don't have any recipes, and I don't know 100 per cent if it's going to look good when it's done."

Some of that spontaneity is influenced by the music, which Lavoie also said helps him on the tight schedule.

"They give me about 10 minutes per painting to do this," he said. "That's about two fairly long songs, five-minute songs, that it takes to create one of these pieces. So the music really kind of keeps me focused and gives me a sense of timing. It's like, OK, the second song is just starting; I'd better be halfway

done.

"And if you can kind of move with the music and get your brush strokes to move with the music, I think what it does is it allows the audience to watch kind of a goofball dance onstage painting; that in itself is kind of entertaining. The second thing, I think, is you start to see an image come together, which is the second part of the entertainment. You're guessing, what is this thing he's painting?"

Organizer Craig Hutschal said having Lavoie involved in the gala is a real treat for everyone.

"I think he's one of these hidden jewels," he said.

"It allows the audience to watch kind of a goofball dance onstage; that in itself is kind of entertaining."

— Lewis Lavoie

"Within the art community, he may be well-known, but in the general public, I'm not sure if people fully realize the gifts and talents he has."

Hutschal said the gala raised \$27,000 for the two charities last year — almost matching the total from the first three years.

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SAINT CITY NEWS FILE PHOTO

Local painter Lewis Lavoie is getting ready for an evening of comedy and creativity at the fifth annual Laugh for Life Gala on Nov. 7.

Humble beginnings for gala

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"Whether that trend will continue, there's a whole pile of factors that weigh into that, including people getting nervous about the economy, and who's in the seats and whether they are feeling generous that night or if they're looking for bargains," he said.

Lavoie has been involved with the event for all five years of its existence, and he said he was on board pretty much the minute Hutschal approached him.

"I thought, what a great idea. There isn't a lot of opportunities for families to go and see live comedians where you can be guaranteed the humour isn't going to go too far for your kids to hear it," he said. "[Hutschal] has brought in these comedians, and my family just looks forward to going to this thing all the time ... If there was some way that I could contribute to help raise some money, I said, 'Count me in.'"

Lavoie said that the gala has come a long way from when it first started out.

"It started off as a little humble thing, where they'd have a small little silent auction table, and I was at the end of the table doing a painting, and then they'd auction it off. Now it has turned into a much

bigger event," Lavoie said.

Hutschal said the evening started out as a way for families to enjoy a night of comedy without worrying about it being too raunchy or too expensive.

"When you look at our ticket prices compared to other events at the Winspear or the Jubilee [Auditorium], it's incredibly affordable for people," he said.

But Lavoie still considers it a great honour to be able to lend his talents to the cause,

especially in such a hallowed venue.

"To be on a stage like the Winspear is a delight and an honour ... and to be able to do it with live music in that venue, that in itself is worth it," he said.

Tickets for the Laugh for Life Gala are available through the Winspear box office at 780-428-1414. For more information on the event or to view some of the other auction items, check out <http://www.laughforlife.ca>.