

REVIEW

Mack brings her north woods comedy home to the Northland

BY MICHAEL KOOI
FOR THE NEWS TRIBUNE

Think of Mary Mack as a comic ambassador. Crisscrossing the country in her dilapidated Dodge Neon (which she's christened "Street Heat"), the Wisconsin native takes her reedy voice, trusty mandolin and north woods perspective to more than 300 gigs a year.

Ordinarily, Mack excels at placing her genial "waif from the woods" persona into different cultural contexts and then drawing laughs from the contrasts and misunderstandings that result. When she took the stage at Dubh Linn on Saturday night, however, Mack found herself in familiar territory (she grew up in nearby Webster, and her parents both hail from Duluth), begging the question: Could she draw enough humorous contrasts so close to home?

The answer: yes and no. While Mack scored some big laughs from the sellout crowd with bits about small-town life and local drunken-driving strategies, she struggled through portions of her 45-minute set to get everyone laughing at the same time.

The result was a patchwork of bits ranging from family matters to politics to the local hunting season —

Upcoming shows

■ The Shack in Superior, Aug. 13 at 8 p.m. Tickets: \$6 in advance, \$8.50 at the door. (Dinner served at 6 p.m.) Call 715 392-3463.

■ Beaner's Central in Duluth, Thursday, Aug. 14 at 8 p.m. Tickets: \$7. Call 624-5957.

each eliciting laughs from different sections of the room. In one clever segment about her ambivalence toward potential motherhood, she explained that she's interested in the job but doesn't like the hours. To underscore the point, she asked a mother in the crowd if her kids were out in the car.

Mack connected most effectively when she played the role of reporter. A part-time resident of Los Angeles, she detailed the different attitudes Californians have toward deer (they're "pro") and conversing with strangers (they're "con") to strong effect.

After about 30 minutes of starts and stalls, Mack won the crowd over for good when she launched into some of her signature songs. These included a number about a church roller derby team and another in which she

instructs gang members how to use "Minnesota nice" to resist peer pressure.

Mack followed a string of comics who warmed up the audience by relating to them directly. Veteran Minneapolis comic Rox Tarrant gleefully mined the gross physical indignities of growing old (often eliciting as many groans as guffaws), while Duluth native LeAnn Diler earned consistent laughs by chronicling her battles to manage her weight and her husband. Tim Harmston kicked off the show.

Each comic pursued an "I'm just like you, except funnier" approach — one that Mack's dry wit and quirky musical stylings largely preclude. But if you like witty little ditties about slices of contemporary culture viewed through a north woods lens, checking out Mack's act is time well spent.

In a nod to one of her favorite north woods customs, she's planning to raffle off processed meats on Thursday night as part of her appearance at Beaner's Central in Duluth.

MICHAEL KOOI is a freelance writer and communications professional living in the Central Hillside.

DAILY PLANNER

Duluth Duplicate Bridge Club, noon today, All American Club, 1931 W. Michigan St. Cost: \$3.50. Call 727-9419.

Gordon-Barnes Garden Club's annual flower show, 2-4 p.m. today, Gordon Town Hall, County Highway Y, Gordon. Flower show and competition featuring artistic arrangements in various categories and horticultural displays. Refreshments and door prizes.

Scott House presents, "It's a Grand Night for Singing," featuring a variety of songs from musicals like "My Fair Lady," "Annie" and "Sound of Music," 6 p.m. today, 1321 County Road 4, just south of Carlton. Tickets: \$15 for adults, \$8 for ages 5-12 and free for younger children. Picnic lunch available for additional \$7.50. Call 384-9005.

Organ Transplant Support Group, 7-9 p.m. today, Miller Dwan Medical Center Classrooms 2 & 3, 520 E. Second St. A support network that assists those who are waiting for or have received a transplant and their families. Free. Call 525-6371. Go to www.headofthelakesorgantransplantsupportgroup.org.

125th Field Artillery Association, 12:30 p.m. Tuesday, Pickwick, 508 E. Superior St. 345-6572.

People with Disabilities Support group, 2-3 p.m. Tuesday, Cloquet Workforce Center- Conference Room, 715 Cloquet Ave., Cloquet. Speaker: Carlton County Sheriff Kelly Lake on Identity Theft. Free. Call 878-1324, Ann@accessnorth.net.

Public Forum for WI 73rd Assembly District Candidates, 5-7:30

School leaders are getting hard to find in Minnesota

BY TANNER KENT
THE (MANKATO) FREE PRESS

MANKATO, Minn. — Five years ago, Keith Klein retired after 25 years as superintendent of the Pelican Rapids School District

Not the least of those reasons, he said, is the increasingly political nature of the job.

In this era of perpetual referendums and budget challenges, the superinten-

Authorities ID body found in Virginia pit