

# Improv group to call Norfolk arts district home

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There's a world where everyone responds to your ideas with "yes" followed by "and." It's called improv.



"You accept and add to it," said Sean Devereux, executive producer and head writer of *The Pushers*, the improv/sketch comedy group opening a theater in the Norfolk Arts and Design District next month.

"It's a philosophy that you can apply to your everyday life. People are so used to being told 'no' or saying the word 'no.' It's an uplifting feeling when you have an idea and bring it to someone and they say 'yes' and build upon it."

Though improv allows you to be anything you want to be, there are a few rules. The first: no arguing, which isn't easy to do.

As guest speakers at the Rotary Club of Norfolk's weekly lunch meeting, Devereux and *The Pushers'* founder, Brad McMurrin, pulled two volunteers from the audience – Rotary members Lisa Domingo Sands, the Virginia Opera's director of development for Hampton Roads, and Jim Clary, a senior economist at the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission. Figure out your relationship, he said, and go.

"Oh my god, did you hear about that amazing thing that happened with the duck?" asked Domingo Sands, starting off the skit.

"Yes, son, but what we're talking about here is football," Clary replied.

McMurrin stopped them right there.

"See, right away this guy wants to argue," he jibed. "I want you to let go of your anger, sir." Laughs erupted

from the crowd. “Improv is all about keeping it positive.”

The Pushers, made up of four members – Devereux, McMurrin, Ed Carden and Alba Woolard, have been performing at area bars since 2009 and three years ago started teaching comedy writing and sketch comedy classes at The Muse in Norfolk.

“Classes have gotten too big for their space,” Devereux said. “That’s the main reason we decided to break out on our own.”

Not all of their students are budding comedians. Doctors, lawyers and magistrates have taken classes from The Pushers.

“We had a husband and wife take a class to be better communicators,” he said. “Improv makes you more aware of being in agreement.”

In addition to improv and sketch comedy, Devereux and McMurrin, with a former Pushers member, wrote the off-Broadway play “Cuff Me: The Fifty Shades of Grey Musical Parody,” now playing across the country. The duo just finished their second off-Broadway script, “Bite Me,” a vampire musical.

If all goes well with the upcoming fire and building inspections, The Pushers hope to have their theater at 753 Granby St., next to the former Texaco building, open in time for the Norfolk Comedy Festival July 24, 25 and 26. The event, put on by the Generic Theater, located under Chrysler Hall, in partnership with The Pushers, is a weekend full of standup, sketch comedy and improv shows.

After the festival, the Push Comedy Theater will be used as a classroom space during the week and for performances on Friday and Saturday nights. Tickets for shows will be \$5 to \$10, depending on whether the act is local and if it’s improv or sketch comedy.

The difference? Improv is made up on the spot. Sketch comedy is written and practiced beforehand. Beer, wine and concessions will be available during performances.

