



Comedian Mark Poolos will perform in St. Charles during Gladiolus Days for the FFA Comedy Show. Submitted photo.

Mark Poolos to Perform in St. Charles for FFA Comedy Show

By Jill Veerkamp
 St. Charles Press Editor

Every year, the St. Charles FFA Alumni Association sponsors a comedy show over Gladiolus Days and this year is no different. Minnesota comedian Mark Poolos will be visiting the Moose Lodge on Thursday, August 25th to perform for a St. Charles audience. At 6 feet, 7 inches tall, and 350 pounds, Poolos will bring an interesting and unique perspective to his humorous observations on life that will be sure to provide an excellent evening of entertainment.

Originally from Edina, Minnesota, Mark Poolos now lives in Brooklyn Center. He has been a comedian for sixteen years and has been featured on Gotham Comedy LIVE in New York City, Laughs on Fox, WGN America, Sirius/XM Satellite Radio, Comcast Trial By Laughter, Comedy 10k, and the Laughing Skull Comedy Festival. In July, he was the opening act on a tour with magician and prankster Michael Carbonaro. Poolos also has released three comedy albums. "It's an amazing ride," Poolos said of his career.

Poolos's career in comedy began when he was working for KSTP Channel 5 in the Twin Cities. He worked the cameras and handled tasks on the floor for the news program. The station then recruited Poolos to perform voiceover work for the news. Poolos enjoyed this work so much he decided to become an actor. He went to New York to attend auditions and received an interesting and unexpected response. Poolos said, "Every audition I went on, they told me to be a comic."

Returning home to Minnesota disappointed, Poolos's mom suggested he take a class at a local comedy club. "I thought it was worth a try," said Poolos. "And the rest is history." The class instructors said Poolos was a natural in comedy, which became his life from that point on.

For Poolos, a life in comedy is a life on the road. He has performed in forty different states and all across Canada. Poolos has spent eleven weeks on tour in a stretch, although now with two kids, it is rare he will spend more than a week on the road. Poolos even met his wife while on tour, at a club in Columbus, Ohio.

Poolos specializes in clean, family-friendly comedy. He observed, "It's probably one of the toughest types of comedy in the world." He will often tailor his routine to his audience and his sponsors, and will even find out facts on the Internet to personalize the program. "That's one of my biggest corporate comedy secrets," Poolos shared.

Poolos's biggest comedic influences are Brian Regan and George Carlin. He was able to find inspiration in both of the comedians. For Regan, Poolos was in awe at how someone could be so funny, and yet, so clean. Poolos said Regan is the cleanest comic in the world, and yet also the funniest. For Carlin, Poolos enjoys how he uses words. "He was a real good wordsmith," Poolos said.

In addition to sharing a stage with Michael Carbonaro, Poolos has also worked with Minnesota comedian Louis Anderson and "Full House" star Dave Coulier. "He was a pretty interesting

guy," Poolos said of Coulier. Apparently, the comedian never wanted to meet with his audience following a show.

Poolos noted that one of the biggest challenges of a professional comedian is finding continuous work. This is difficult, especially since in recent years, there has been a falling interest in comedy clubs. Seven have recently closed their doors, including Goonie's Comedy Club in Rochester. Poolos also finds it challenging to be away from his family, now with a three year old and an eight month old at home.

In spite of these challenges, Poolos still finds comedy to be worth it. He said, "Nothing in the world is more exhilarating than standing on stage in front of hundreds and thousands of people and having them all laugh at something you wrote." He said the sensation can be addicting.

Since he tends to stay away from controversial topics such as politics and religion, Poolos noted that he doesn't receive many hecklers. Furthermore, his large size tends to discourage loud vocal criticism. On the rare occasion that he does get heckled, it is typically over a topic that is a complete surprise. For example, he once made a joke about making his own hats and a female audience member was upset he would joke about that. "Usually my heckles are silly, because it just comes out of nowhere," Poolos observed.

As he continues his career, Poolos hopes to one day perform on a late night talk show, such as "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert" or "Conan." He would also like to do a half hour special on Comedy Central, or perhaps compete on "America's Got Talent" or "Last Comic Standing." Above all, he would like to be able to support his family through stand up comedy.

Although Poolos has never been to St. Charles before, he is able to point the town out on a map. He has performed often in Rochester and he is looking forward to visiting St. Charles. "I'm excited to do Gladiolus Days," he said.

To encourage people to come to his show, Poolos said, "I'm really hilarious. And it's definitely going to be non-offensive, clean comedy, which is a hard thing to find these days."

Mark Poolos will be at the Moose Lodge at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, August 25th. Tickets for the show are \$10 in advance and \$15 at the door. For advance tickets, call 932-0254. Support the St. Charles FFA chapter, the St. Charles agricultural students, and the FFA Alumni Association by attending.

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St. Charles Alumni Seth Ode and Leah Ode Kiser Publish Children's Book "Morgan the Ox"

By Jill Veerkamp
 St. Charles Press Editor

Following a passion for creativity, last fall, two St. Charles High School graduates Seth Ode and Leah Ode Kiser published a children's book, "Morgan the Ox." Seth wrote the story in rhyme, while Leah provided the colorful illustrations. Through their work, the siblings bring to life a tale of a musk ox, the game of ping-pong, and a lesson of good sportsmanship.

"Morgan the Ox" is the story of a musk ox with a love for ping-pong. After practicing all of the time and defeating all of his opponents, he is challenged to a match by a tiny cockatoo. Through the outcome of the game, Morgan demonstrates the importance of good sportsmanship and the best way to enjoy a competition with friends.

"Morgan the Ox" was the culmination of years of work. Seth Ode wrote the story in 2007 and gave it to his sister, Leah, to provide the illustrations. While she wanted to begin work on the book immediately, she was delayed by work and a new baby. It wasn't until 2012 that Leah was able to begin working on her art once more. She said, "I decided I was going to get back into drawing."

Leah has a degree in Fine Art and Philosophy from Coe College and always wanted to be an illustrator or a painter. Seth has a degree in Elementary Education from Winona State University.

When Seth originally approached his sister about collaborating on a children's book, she said she would like to do it, as long as she doesn't have to write it. Seth first came up with a different story, which he gave to Leah to illustrate. That idea didn't pan out, and he instead came up with a new idea, which became the basis of "Morgan the Ox."

It actually didn't take a long time for Seth to put the story together. He noted that his first draft only took about a half hour to write. After he finished the draft, he made a few slight changes, and after sending it to an editor, made more drastic changes. Yet after all of the revisions, the core story remained the same.

Busy with her family, Leah had found she let her art fall by the wayside. However, in visiting her father in the hospital as he recovered from a bad fall, she mentioned that she wanted to get back into illustrating again. Her mom then reminded her about the story that Seth wrote. Reviewing the story, Leah was inspired. "I had visions in my head," she said.

Leah's illustrations for "Morgan the Ox" took much longer to complete than Seth's story. At the same time, she had to get back into the routine of creating art. To create the book's illustrations, she dedicated two hours every day to working on it, using the time after work and after her kids had gone to bed. Inspired by the story, she was able to maintain her momentum. She said, "I loved the story. I believed in it, the energy in it."

After she completed a few of the illustrations, she took photos to show her brother, Seth, at their next family get-together. Her drawings brought tears to his eyes. This motivated Leah



Leah Ode Kiser and Seth Ode hold the children's book they worked together to create, "Morgan the Ox." Seth wrote the story in rhyme, while Leah provided the illustrations. Photo by Jill Veerkamp.

even further to get the job done. She said, "I thought, 'I've got to finish this.'" After a year of work, Leah managed to complete all of the illustrations.

The siblings completed the book in March of 2013 and began to search for a publisher. However, they soon found that rhyming stories are no longer popular and are seen as throwbacks to the 1960s and 1970s. Furthermore, publishers were not as interested in books with the illustrations already complete. "It was a hard sell," said Leah.

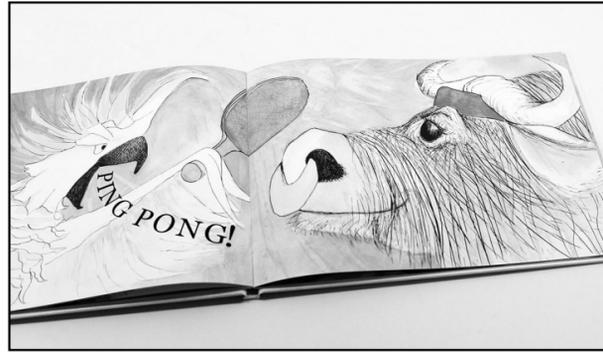
Faced with this challenge, Seth and Leah decided to publish the story independently and thus started a Kickstarter campaign to raise the funds. Leah combined the story text and illustrations through InDesign. The story was edited by Marlo Garnsworthy and printed by PrintNinja.

Leah and Seth received a lot of support from people they know for the project, but were also surprised by the support they received from people who were complete strangers. Donors from around the United States helped bring "Morgan the Ox" into reality. "That was surprising," Leah remarked. "When outside people push us, we realize we can do this."

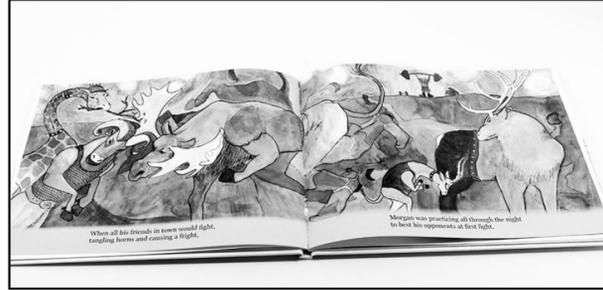
"It's been a great experience," Seth commented on the publication process. "It's been fun." With a background in preschool education, Seth believes that his illustrated children's book, in a small way, helps contribute to early literacy. He said, "The idea of helping kids read, it's so important to get kids started early."

Seth also wanted to create a story that was interesting, yet manageable to read to a three year old in one sitting. He said, "It was a challenge to write a story with so many words that a three year old can sit and listen to comfortably." It was also a challenge to get a message across through the story, without making it preachy.

The editing process provided its own challenges. Seth said he did not realize how much the story meant to him until the editor began to critique it. She was asking him to revise something that was very valuable to him. Although the criticism was helpful and improved the story, it was still hard for Seth to make changes to something he loved.



In Leah and Seth's story, a tiny cockatoo challenges Morgan the Ox to a game of ping-pong. Submitted photo.



Leah Ode Kiser's illustrations included a variety of different animals. Submitted photo.

Through "Morgan the Ox," Leah was able to indulge in her love of drawing animals. She actually illustrated many extra characters in the book that weren't written in the story. As the daughter of local veterinarian Wayne Ode, Leah has always enjoyed animals and even has completed animal wall murals. Leah's dad also inspired her design of the book's main character, the ox Morgan. She said that Morgan is a big and burly guy, like her dad, yet quiet, also like her dad. She added that while he doesn't say a lot, he has a "powerful presence."

Leah has since moved onto a new subject matter in her art, dinosaurs in dresses, which has been a huge hit. She sells her work both online and in art shows in Arizona.

Since Seth lives in Iowa City, Iowa, and Leah lives in Casa Grande, Arizona, collaborating on a book helps the siblings

remain connected in spite of the distance. Although they are only able to see each other in person once a year, they often email or talk on the phone for hours. Seth added that they feel comfortable giving each other criticism because they want "to make the best book we can make."

The success of "Morgan the Ox" has motivated the siblings to continue to collaborate to create a new children's book. The book has also motivated Leah to continue to work on her art. She said, "I had to give myself permission and [get] support from my husband." Now dedicating two hours a day to her art, Leah noted, "It's part of our life now. I just use my free time to paint."

"Morgan the Ox" is available online or by calling Trudy Ode. The St. Charles Public Library also has a copy for checkout. For information on Leah Ode Kiser's art, visit her website at www.artifactfa.com.

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 Copy of items for sale 15-20 items

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