



DTH/TARIQ LUTHUN

Zach Ward stands on the stage at the DSI Comedy Theatre in Carrboro. Ward is heading north where he'll be the managing director of ImprovBoston.

Comedy leader going to Boston

By Tariq Luthun
Arts Editor

The man who has become the face of comedy in Chapel Hill and Carrboro is moving up in more ways than one.

Zach Ward, executive producer and owner of DSI Comedy Theater, is heading north to become the new managing director of ImprovBoston. Ward will enter the role on June 13.

Ward helped found the North Carolina Comedy Arts Festival more than 10 years ago, and opened the comedy theater almost six years ago.

As a result of his high level of commitment and involvement in comedy, Ward has spent a large amount of time traveling to other theaters to teach, mentor and perform.

"There are people that would come to North Carolina and see

me and were like, 'Oh, it's good to see you. I actually see you more in my hometown,'" Ward said. "It was strange for them to see me here at my theater when they had seen me so often at theirs."

The previous managing director of ImprovBoston stepped down in December 2010. The club began searching for someone to fill the position in January when members of the non-profit organization asked Ward to submit a resume.

"What we were looking for was someone who is not only passionate about what we do, but also gets what we do," said Deana Tolliver, associate managing director of ImprovBoston. "There is a difference between loving it and understanding it."

Ward said he was initially uncertain about leaving the theater he had built.

"I was in Chicago and moved

home to Carrboro to open this theater," said Ward. "I didn't imagine that I would not run this theater."

But, after weighing the pros and cons, Ward quickly came to welcome the prospect of a new challenge, he said.

Though ImprovBoston has garnered a great deal of success and built a strong reputation for itself, Ward and Tolliver agreed that the comedy club needed someone to help them take the next step.

"The pace of growth for the DSI Comedy Theater in Carrboro was just exponentially faster than what they've done in 30 years in Boston," Ward said.

Harrison Brookie, an instructor and performer at the DSI Comedy Theater, said Ward's promotion speaks volumes about the comedy scene in Carrboro.

"The person who now runs the theater in Carrboro is going

to run the theater in Boston," he said. "I think that says a lot about the theater in Carrboro."

As owner of DSI, Ward will continue his involvement with the comedy theater, but in a much more reduced capacity. His departure is an opportunity for others to step up, he said.

"The reason that I feel so positive about the move is because of the quality of the people that are here at DSI," Ward said.

Ward said he is confident that the new leadership will offer the theater a fresh outlook moving forward.

Brookie also said he is optimistic about the comedy theater's future.

"There may be someone different pulling the levers, but the show will still be the same."

Contact the Arts Editor
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Potential law would require voter ID

By Stirling Little
Staff Writer

Legislation that would require all N.C. voters to have a valid photo ID seeks to deter voter fraud, but some are concerned that it will deter voting in general.

The bill, currently in the N.C. Senate Judiciary Committee, would make it mandatory for voters to provide some form of state-issued identification at polling places. Legislators say the measure will prevent in-person voter fraud and make the voting process easier.

Sen. Jim Forrester, R-Gaston and a co-sponsor of the bill, said poll workers have expressed concerns about the security and efficiency of the voting process in the state.

"They want the elections to be fair, without people voting that shouldn't be voting," he said.

For residents without state-issued photo IDs — which could be driver's licenses, U.S. passports or state employee ID cards — the bill stipulates that each county's board of elections must supply a voter ID card free of charge.

State-issued ID cards would include student IDs from UNC-system schools — like UNC's One Card — but might exclude those from private institutions such as Davidson College, said Damon Circosta, executive director of the North Carolina Center for Voter Education.

But providing free ID cards and training poll personnel will require extra funds during a tough economic climate for the state. The Republican leadership in the state legislature has focused on cutting spending to close a budget shortfall of \$2.4 billion.

Sen. Jim Davis, R-Cherokee and a co-sponsor of the bill, said the cost borne by the state board of elections could be as high as \$20 million to supply voting equipment and educate voters and elections boards in each county.

But Davis said legislators con-

tinue to review estimates of the cost and don't expect it to be that high.

"We don't know for sure how much it's going to cost, but we think it's worth it," he said.

Voter ID requirements have been a nationwide priority for Republican-controlled state legislatures concerned about voter fraud after previous elections. One such bill was signed into law in South Carolina earlier this month.

Victoria Middleton, executive director of the S.C. office of the American Civil Liberties Union, said voter ID legislation in N.C. and other states are "copycat bills" that are part of a concerted, national effort to reshape access to voting. The bills could have unintended consequences that would suppress voting, she said.

Circosta said the legislation is attempting to address a problem that doesn't exist, as incidents of voter fraud are "few and far between."

"When balancing security and accessibility, it is always better to err on the side of accessibility," he said.

Potential voters without state-issued IDs by definition lack a driver's license, which makes it difficult to find transportation to sites that would offer free ID cards, he said.

A report by the state's Fiscal Research Division found that there are 885,537 registered voters without a valid driver's license or non-operators ID card.

Groups such as students, the elderly and the illiterate are most at risk, Middleton said.

But legislators say it is necessary to change ID requirements to ensure the integrity of the voting process.

"I know a couple of years ago I read a story about a dog voting," Forrester said. "We certainly don't want any more of that."

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