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### **Atlas Improv Co. celebrates 10-year milestone as Madison's premiere improv troupe**

MADISON, Wis.--Madison's only improv troupe with a dedicated stage will celebrate its 10th anniversary with a free 10-hour improv marathon.

On March 29 from 4 p.m. to 2 a.m., Atlas will present "[PhatCamp: 10 years, 10 hours](#)," a non-stop evening of improv including multiple formats, showcases and out-of-town featured performers.

"Ten years for Atlas is huge," Artistic Director Kristina Martinez said. "We wouldn't be celebrating this milestone without the community. It means that a number of people have worked to make Atlas a success, not just the players but the audience. There has been a constant community for the art of improv, specifically for our style of storytelling."

Improv is unscripted theatre that uses suggestions from the audience to create games and scenes of any and every genre.

Atlas Improv has made many strides as part of the Madison arts community in the decade since it formed in 2004. Before Atlas established its dedicated theater space at 609 E. Washington Ave. two years ago, the troupe performed everywhere from a now-extinct Pizza Hut, to the basement of a Planned Parenthood, to a coffee shop.

Jess Schuknecht, who has 18 years experience performing improv, has been a member of Atlas since the beginning. Ten years later, he said he's proud of how the company has evolved.

"We started with nothing except our people," Schuknecht said. "We had to earn money for rent, equipment, everything. It's nice to see all that pay off 10 years hence. We've also become better storytellers, both in the stories themselves and the ways we tell them.

"Ultimately, though, we still exist because our members love improv, and love storytelling. We don't get paid, and we're not out to make huge profits. We are just passionate about this."

Former Atlas Artistic Director Neil Pohl left the company in 2012 for New York, where he's a copywriter and is studying improv at Magnet Theater. Pohl, who's been improvising for 14 years, was also part of the company from its founding days. He said earning and building a stage to call home was a landmark. Before that, performances meant lugging equipment to and from shows. Classes and practices meant the atmosphere of a dank basement.

"I can still smell it," Pohl said. "It was like rancid oil mixed with musty concrete. You can imagine

how much getting our own venue meant to us. When the space at 609 East Washington was getting remodeled, I would go there alone, sit on the stage, run my hands on the wood, and tear up thinking about how many stories would happen there.”

The event’s title, PhatCamp, is a nod to a name that was an early contender for the company.

There is no cost to for the show but donations are welcome. Attendees are welcome to come and go as they please.

Atlas is partnering with other area businesses to combine PhatCamp with special offers like discounts at area restaurants and taverns.

“We are thrilled to count ourselves among the local, independently owned businesses that make up the near east side, and we want to use PhatCamp as an opportunity to build community,” Atlas Business Manager Ben Taylor said. “We want to say thanks to those bars and restaurants that keep the area alive by getting Madisonians to partake in live entertainment, spend money locally and have a wonderful experience in downtown Madison. The near east side thrives because of community.”

Former Atlas members have gone on to join improvisational companies and work for the entertainment industry in New York and Los Angeles.

“We have a good track record of bringing ridiculously talented performers into our company,” Schuknecht said. “I think no matter how talented people are, being in a group like Atlas gives those skills polish.”

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### ***About Atlas Improv Co.***

*Since its creation in 2004, Atlas Improv Co. has been a staple of Madison’s improv and comedy community. Founded by then-members of ComedySportz Mary Parmentier and Bryan Judkins, Atlas sought to build a creative environment that would challenge and fulfill its members artistically in a way the constraints of ComedySportz simply would not allow. Today, Atlas is Madison’s premiere improv troupe, performing four shows each weekend and teaching the art of improv in their own Atlas Improv Theater. Find Atlas Improv Co. on Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com/AtlasImprov>) and Twitter (<http://twitter.com/AtlasImprov>).*

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