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ENTERTAINMENT
COMEDY



Jeff Justice, now 71, says he's having too much fun as a comedian to consider retirement. He has taught more than 3,000 students. COURTESY

Comic keeps the yuks coming

For three decades, Jeff Justice has mentored aspiring comedians.

By Candice Dyer
For the AJC

You are funny enough to be a comedian.

Anyone is, with help from Jeff Justice. Try out your dullest material on him, and watch him alchemize it into a set of jokes guaranteed to get laughs. The comic, with his iconic, bushy mustache, has been a beloved fixture of Atlanta's entertainment scene since he started Jeff Justice's Comedy Workshoppe — "six weeks to a funnier you!" — in 1990.

He has since instructed more than 3,000 students, who take the stage at The Punchline for their graduation.

Although the Facebook page for his "alumni" has been buzzing for months about his imminent retirement, Justice, 71, is still having too much fun and has decided, with old-school vaudevillian spirit, to keep the show going. ("71 is the new 69," he quips.)

The menschy, zenned-out elder statesman considers his work a public service of sorts. "If we laugh more, we'll stress less and avoid getting burned out," he says. "Plus, I like the George Bernard Shaw quote: 'If you want to tell people the truth, make them laugh, otherwise they'll kill you.'"

His classes cover joke-writing, timing, delivering a punchline, handling hecklers, dealing with stage fright, developing stage presence and discovering your own internal funny bone while learning what makes others crack up.

"One thing to keep in mind," he says, "comedy is 10% writing and 90% delivery, so to realize how funny a

Justice continued on E8

What's inside

Made in Georgia: Herb & Kettles
Physician couple sell premium teas, donate to wildlife conservation in India. E9

Get away to Santa Cruz
Surf, music, food and more in California seaside town. E14

HONORING THOSE WHO SERVED VETERANS DAY



Two of Sid Stein's brothers were killed in World War II when he was 9. The news changed their family forever. As an adult, Stein has painstakingly preserved their memory and shared their legacy in a way only a sibling can. BEN GRAY FOR THE ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION

Letters home

Longtime metro Atlanta resident shares a moving legacy of love, reverence and, above all, honor for his fallen brothers.

By Mark Woolsey
For the AJC

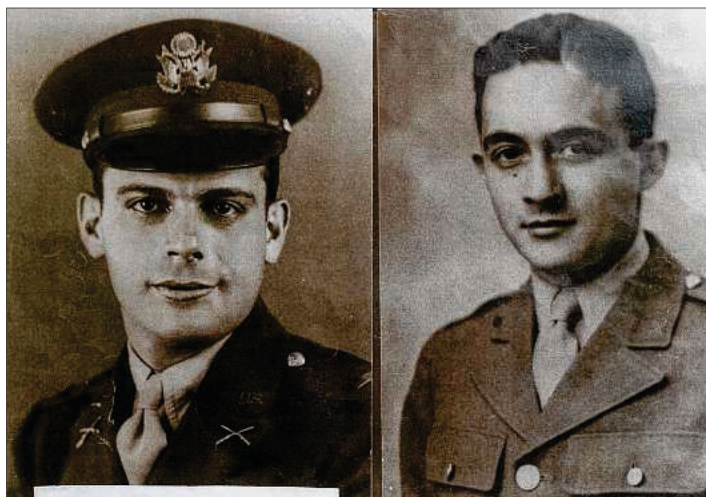
Sid Stein knew immediately something was wrong. Dreadfully wrong.

Recalling one of the most terrible days of his Mt. Pleasant, Tennessee, boyhood, the Duluth resident's expression takes on a thousand-yard stare.

"I was playing outside with my friends a couple of blocks away. I came home and a lot of cars were in front," Stein said. "There were a lot of people around the house. Everyone was over there consoling (my parents) and crying. Friends of my parents took us for a ride to get us away from there and tried to explain. I was 9 and my brother was 7."

It was the day Stein learned his beloved big brother, Hyman "Bubba" Stein, had been killed in France.

It was August 1944, in the thick of World War II. Telegrams beginning with the stilted but heart-stopping phrase, "I regret to inform you ..." were arriving at families' homes with hor-



Brothers Morris Stein (left) and Hyman Stein were killed within one year of each other during their tours in World War II. Hyman was killed by a land mine in France; Morris was killed by a sniper in the Philippines. COURTESY OF SID STEIN

rible frequency.

Not once, but twice, Stein's family received them with trembling hands. They were brief messages that tore their world apart.

The first one bore news that Hyman, who had stormed

Omaha Beach on D-Day, died after stepping on a land mine on his 23rd birthday. Eight months later the second arrived. His older brother Morris was felled by a sniper's bullet as he led his

'I came home and a lot of cars were in front. There were a lot of people around the house. Everyone was over there consoling (my parents) and crying. Friends of my parents took us for a ride to get us away from there and tried to explain. I was 9 and my brother was 7.'

Sid Stein
On learning one of his brothers had been killed.

Letters continued on E10

HEALTH IMMUNITY

How to boost immune system during cold/flu season

Tips include staying active, getting rest, eating healthy and taking precautions.

Hannah Seo
c. 2022 The New York Times

As the days shorten and people trade their tank tops and shorts for sweaters and tights, the turn of autumn signals another new beginning: the start of flu and cold season, and COVID-19 winter No. 3.

According to Dr. Helen Chu, a public health researcher and infectious-disease physician at the Uni-

versity of Washington School of Public Health, it's a myth that simply being cold will make you more likely to get sick. But viruses do tend to transmit most efficiently in drier, colder conditions, leading to spikes in winter months. So now is the time to get serious about immune health.

Here are four things health experts say you can do to prepare ahead of fall and winter surges.

Get active

Exercise is a great way to bolster

Health continued on E8



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LIVING & ARTS

Justice

continued from E1

comedian's joke is, you have to hear it. Could you ever imagine laughing after reading this classic line from Steve Martin? "Excuse me. I'm a wild and crazy guy."

Alumni include Charles Brewer, founder of Mind-spring, and fashion entrepreneur Sara Blakely, who came up with the name "Spanx" in his class because he told her words that end in a hard "k" sound are inherently funnier. Others have become professional, touring comedians or gone into different fields in show business.

"I think the biggest thing I got from Jeff's class was the realization that the entertainment industry was just work, a regular job that you could realistically shoot for by just putting in effort based on a fairly simple set of rules," says Mike Billips, an Atlanta actor. "I grew up thinking it was just something for especially talented, beautiful people who won some sort of casting lottery in New York or Los Angeles."

Still, as they say, dying's easy and comedy is hard. "If it were that simple, everybody would be a comedian," Justice says. "In every class, I have one or two who want to pursue comedy as a career. I don't candy-coat it for them. There are things you have to give up if you choose that path."

The slang of standup is legendarily violent. Comedians "kill" or "bomb." "Getting laughs from a roomful of people is an incredibly euphoric high," Justice says, "and, on the flip side, bombing feels just awful, but it makes the successes that much sweeter."

He has been around long enough, and paid enough dues, to have done both.

It started with magic

Justice grew up in Yonkers, New York, the middle child in a happy family. "My folks were wonderful and supportive," he says. "I joke that if they'd just been more dysfunctional, I would've gotten really big."

In school, he was not exactly the class clown, but he was a "wise guy," he says. He earned an associate's degree at Miami-Dade Junior College, where he discovered magic.

"A friend showed me a great sleight-of-hand trick with cards," he recalls. "I used it all the time, and no one could figure it out. I was hooked!" So it



Jeff Justice discovered magic while studying for his associate's degree at Miami-Dade Junior College in Florida. "My love for magic led into my love for comedy," he says. PHOTOS COURTESY OF JEFF JUSTICE

COMEDY EVENTS

Jeff Justice's Comedy Workshoppe Graduation.

8 p.m. Dec. 12. \$25. The Punchline at Landmark Diner, 3652 Roswell Road, Atlanta. 404-252-5233, punchline.com

Jeff Justice's Comedy Workshoppe.

7 p.m. every Monday, Jan. 9-Feb. 13. \$300. The Punchline at Landmark Diner, 3652 Roswell Road, Atlanta. 404-312-3404, comedyworkshoppe.com

seemed like fate when, during his last semester at Florida State, he moved into a room in a frat house and found wedged behind the dresser a book titled "Your Hobby, Magic."

"I learned a few more tricks to add to my repertoire and found that I loved entertaining and amazing people. And my act was funny. My love for magic led into my love for comedy."

After graduating with a degree in communications, he followed a woman to Atlanta in 1975 and bounced around, bartending. One night in 1980,

he wound up at The Excelsior Mill. "There was a guy doing comedy magic that night and after a few beers, I thought, 'I'm funnier than this guy.'" He landed a spot on the next show.

"The booker told me that I could do 20 minutes, and I said sure! I had no act. I had never been on an actual stage. I cobbled together 20 minutes of tricks, added a little more comedy and practiced my butt off for the next week," he recalls. "I killed! I did so much better than everyone else. Two weeks later, he booked me again, and I bombed, just like everyone else. I learned that the audience was basically the same 35 people every week, so my material wasn't fresh the second time. I learned a lesson – read the room."

His compensation? He got \$10, a slice of pizza and a beer. But that was enough. At age 31, he moved back in with his parents to be near the clubs in New York City. He became a regular at The Comic Strip, The Comedy Cellar and Dangerfield's, where he says he got \$7 a night – and no pizza.

It was a golden era for standup, when most midsize cities had comedy clubs. Jus-



Jeff Justice with Sara Blakely, founder of Spanx undergarments. Blakely came up with the name "Spanx" while taking Justice's class because he told her words that end in a hard "k" sound are funnier.

Justice became a "road animal" for 14 years, headlining around the country. He moved back to Atlanta in 1987 to marry Diane Pfeifer, a backup singer for Tammy Wynette and author of whimsical, novelty cookbooks (one of her titles: "Stand By Your Pan"). He realized he was missing out on his daughter's childhood, though, and found a new way to channel his creativity, by staying home and teaching corporate clients how to be funny, or at least relax a bit. Then he started his classes for the masses.

Finding the funny bone

The Comedy Workshoppe attracts an array of hammy misfits. One class had both a sex worker, whose material skewed awfully graphic, and a priest who was determined to curse on stage. "I said, 'The hell you will!'" Justice demands squeaky-clean comedy in his classes.

"It's a cheap, easy way to get a laugh, cursing and telling dirty jokes, and once you start, it's hard to stop," says Justice's protégé and assistant Mark Evans, who aspires to take over the "workshoppe" someday. "You're more attractive internationally when you

keep it clean and don't go blue." A travel agent whose job was dissolving into the internet, Evans took the class and decided to become a full-time comedian. Since then, Evans has played 46 states, several countries and "a bunch of cruise ships."

"Jeff Justice changed my life," he says.

So many graduates echo that refrain. Alera Jill Elliott was a drawing attorney when she took the class and ended up opening for Brett Butler and Steve Harvey. "Jeff reminded me that I didn't tell funny stories, I told stories funny, and that's how it gets to be about you and your life." (Her joke that killed? "I'm writing a country song. It's called: 'I got over Percodan, and I'll get over you.'")

Justice defies the stereotype of the demon-driven, drug-addled comedian. A long-time practitioner of tai chi, he seems virtually angst-proof. "I'm lucky to have a good, stable family and strong spiritual belief system," he says. "And I have the greatest job in the world – making people laugh, making people happy, one way or another. What could be better than that?"

Health

continued from E1

your health and reduce your susceptibility to disease, said David Nieman, a professor of biology at Appalachian State University who researches exercise, nutrition and immunology.

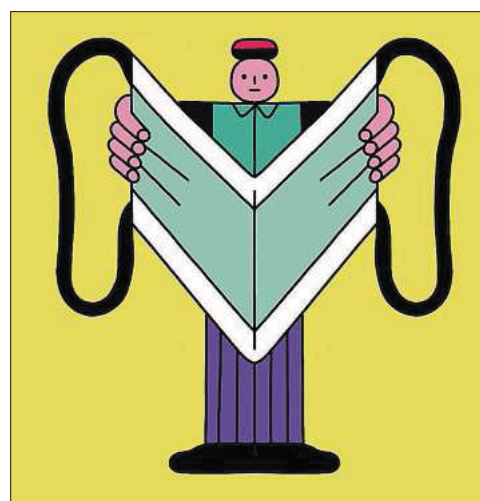
In one study published in 2011, Nieman and his colleagues followed more than 1,000 adults living in North Carolina for three months in 2008. They logged their lifestyle habits – including diet, exercise and exposure to stressful events – as well as how often they were sick with upper respiratory tract infections, such as common colds or laryngitis, and the severity of their symptoms.

"The No. 1 lifestyle factor that emerged was physical activity," Nieman said. Those who exercised five or more days per week were 43% less likely to be sick with an upper respiratory tract infection than those who exercised for less than one day per week. But even those who did a little bit of exercise – at least 20 minutes of moderate exercise (as simple as a brisk walk) at least one day per week – were better off than those who did none.

We see this effect in part because exercise stimulates immune cells to "patrol the body" for virus-infected cells so that it can identify and eliminate them, Nieman said. Just a few hours of moderate exercise spread across a week is enough to get your immune cells circulating optimally, he said. And the exercises don't have to be intense – just walking, dancing or "vigorous yard work" is enough to experience a boost in your health.

Don't underestimate the power of rest

Too much exercise, though, can tax the body and tempo-



The top lifestyle factor for maintaining immunological well-being is physical activity. Also key in the ongoing quest for good health are adequate sleep, proper diet and a general observance of basic health safety precautions that have been encouraged during the pandemic.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY CRISTINA SPANO/THE NEW YORK TIMES

rally suppress the immune system, Nieman said, increasing your risk of infections. There's no simple formula for what constitutes too much exercise, the experts said, but if you're suddenly feeling unwell or constantly tired, or if previously easy workouts are feeling hard, it might be a signal that you need to slow down.

Research has also shown that not getting enough sleep, or sleep of good quality, can reduce your body's capability for fighting off infections, said Kathi Heffner, a professor of nursing, medicine and psychiatry at the University of Rochester Medical Center in New York. While not everyone requires the same amount of sleep, the general guidance for adults is six to eight hours each night, Heffner said.

Good sleep can also help regulate your stress, she added. When stress occurs chronically, it can reduce the body's response to vaccines and infections and can increase inflammation, "all of which can increase our susceptibility to infection as well as other kinds of chronic diseases," she said. Even day-to-day stressors – from your job, your commute

or your care-taking responsibilities, for example – can weaken the immune system, she added.

Reducing that kind of stress is often difficult, Heffner said, but if you can find time to do so, whether via practicing mindfulness exercises like meditation or yoga or even just "finding time to do pleasurable activities," that can reduce your stress and in turn help your immune health.

Follow a healthy diet

What you choose to eat and drink is one of the most important lifestyle choices that can influence your immune health, Nieman said.

A variety of brightly colored fruits and vegetables – berries, citrus fruits, red cabbage and kale, for instance – are great sources of flavonoids, chemical compounds found in plants that can help the body fight inflammation and illness, he said. Tea, coffee, dark chocolate and certain grains, like buckwheat, are also good sources of flavonoids. In Nieman's 2011 study, his team found that adults who ate at least three servings of fruit per day had fewer upper respiratory tract infec-

tions throughout the year than those who did not eat as much fruit.

Research has also shown that exposure to cigarette smoke and drinking of alcohol in excess – more than two drinks a day for men or one drink a day for women – can suppress your immune system. Minimizing your alcohol consumption (or at least keeping within the dietary guidelines) or quitting smoking can help reduce your risk of infections, Chu said.

If you're tempted to try supplements that claim to improve immune health, she added, don't – especially if you're already following a healthy and balanced diet. For the most part, she said, "there's really not much data at all to support the use of most supplements to prevent illness or to boost your immunity."

COVID-19 precautions

"Probably the most important thing that people can do right now is to get both their up-to-date COVID booster shots and their flu vaccines as soon as possible," Chu said, since flu and COVID-19 cases will almost certainly go up this fall and winter.

And while many people have

stopped wearing masks in public indoor spaces, continuing to do so will help protect you against all sorts of viruses, not just the coronavirus. This is especially true if you have a weaker immune system. Using rapid COVID-19 tests before gatherings or when you have symptoms, and asking others to do so as well, can also minimize everyone's risk of infection, Chu said.

"One of the things we've learned through this pandemic is just how important hygiene is," Heffner said. "Washing hands, keeping your distance when you have a cold – those kinds of things are highly effective for keeping people healthy."

In fact, Chu said, good hygiene includes staying home when you have symptoms of any type of infection at all. "People tend to try to power through, even if they're sick," she said. "They want to continue to do their job, to continue to go to school, to continue to do what they were doing before." But that behavior just increases exposure and risk of transmission to other people. Stay home and give yourself time to rest instead, Chu urged.