

## Entertainment

# Comedy-chain chief optimistic over laughs

By JOHN LAYCOCK

STAR ENTERTAINMENT WRITER

Mark Breslin clutches the mike on the stage of his new Yuk Yuk's as if he were born that way.

And maybe he was. The Toronto comic-turned-executive has built North America's biggest chain of comedy clubs, now numbering 14, most of them in Ontario.

Nothing else is natural, though, at 9 a.m. Thursday.

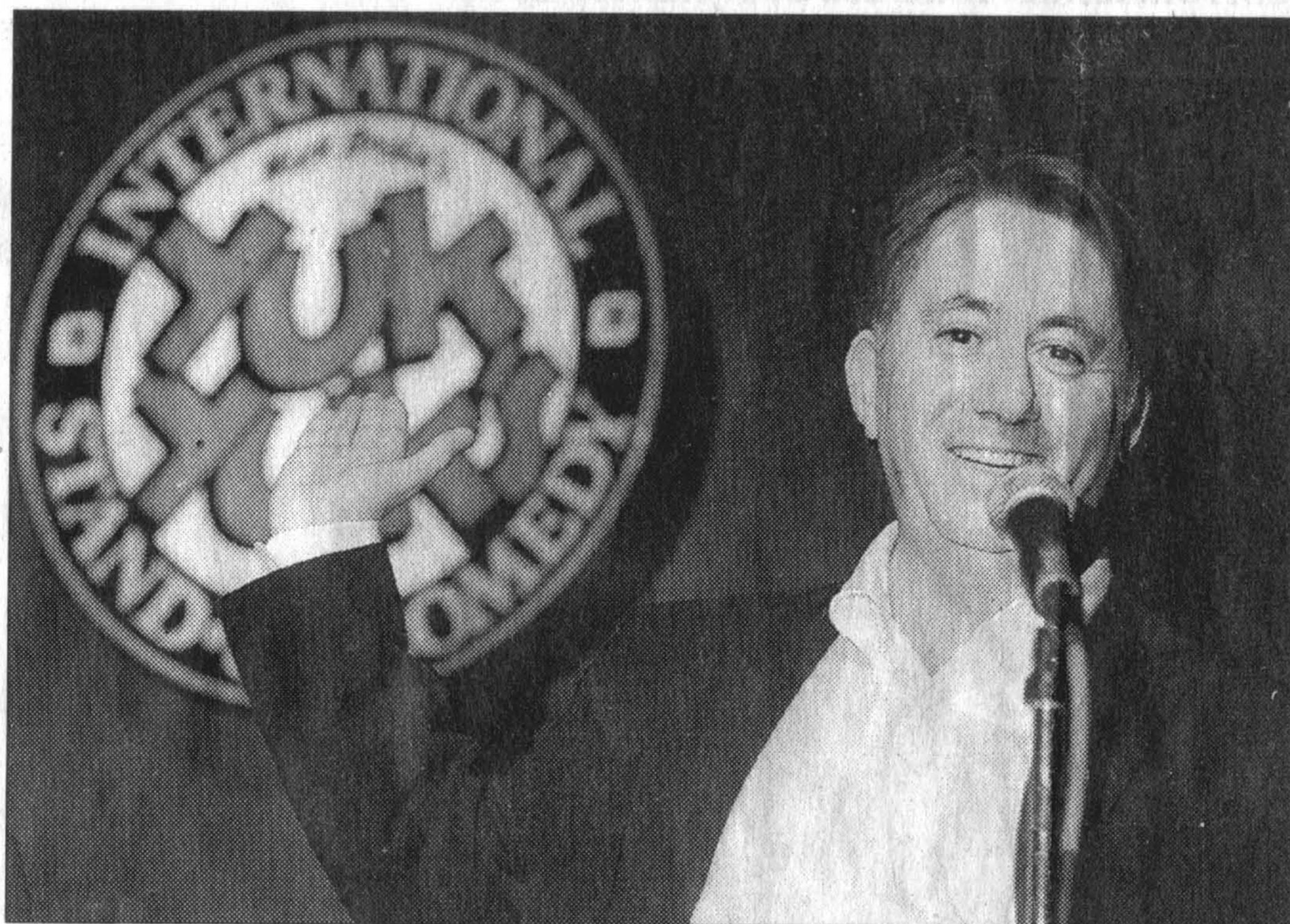
Usually, at that hour, Breslin is in the first nods of sleep, rather than having risen and shone for two hours of a live television program.

The night owl shook himself awake for a day of celebrating the new Yuk Yuk's. The club transported itself to the Palace Theatre building on Ouellette and University after nearly a decade in the lair underneath the hotel at Ouellette and Park.

Even with competition being renewed this year from Leo Dufour's club further south on Ouellette, and the novelty factor worn out years ago, Breslin was ready to invest in a more visible setting.

"It all started in the mid-'70s, when comedy clubs got hot. Everything now is a ripple," Breslin said, holding the microphone stand in both hands after settling on a stool. That's just what he did as a performer a quarter-century ago, when stand-up/sit-down rather than checking the books was more his style.

"Everybody was sampling comedy clubs then, they were curious," he recalls. The circuit levelled off in the '90s



Yuk Yuk's owner Mark Breslin in town Thursday.

Star photo: Scott Webster

and clubs closed, including Yuk Yuk's in at least six cities.

"But I think the business is growing slowly again," he went on. "We're approached on more deals and our attendance is growing."

"The real news is that comedy clubs not only survive but thrive."

So do some of the comedians. Gradually, stand-up has turned into a path to roles in situation comedy and films, rather than just Vegas.

"We didn't even think about that kind of success," Breslin said about his early days. "We wanted George Carlin's career."

"Now young comics come to me with

a briefcase carrying a five-year career plan." The role model has become Jim Carrey, once a skinny kid in an early Yuk Yuk's.

In the grey of morning, Breslin pauses and sorts through old speeches to analyse the durability of the stand-up form. Finally he produces a surprisingly esthetic description — minimalism.

"It's a pure art," he explains, a far-away look in his eye. "There's just you on the stage, no writer, no director, no lighting man. There's a beauty to it, a purity."

That heartbeat no longer pulses with the anger of the older comics, he sug-

gests. "But maybe it's just that there are more comics now, and more styles."

Some of them are sure to surface at Yuk Yuk's, owned by the parent corporation (some are franchised) and bedecked with hundreds of framed pub-

licity photos.

This weekend's attractions: Freddie Proia as master of ceremonies, Terry McGurrin, proclaimed the funniest comic in Canada by some contest, and headliner Glen Foster. Information at 256-5233.

