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Audience identifies with 'Caveman'

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By **RANDALL G. MIELKE** For GO

Even though Ben Tedder is the only actor performing in "Rob Becker's Defending the Caveman," he does not feel like he is giving a solo performance.

"The audience is the other character," said Tedder, who appears in the Noble Fool Theatricals production of "Defending the Caveman" at Pheasant Run Resort and Spa in January. "You talk directly to the audience, and with the way they respond, it is like playing off another person. No matter where we play, the audience is laughing at the same stuff."

Rob Becker's one-man show, "Defending the Caveman," is a hysterical exploration of the gender gap. The play is about the ways that men and women relate, and both sexes will recognize themselves in the stories being told on stage.

"The whole idea is that men and women are different and that they have misunderstandings," said Tedder, who has been performing the role for four years. "In the caveman days, men were hunters and women were gatherers."

A stand-up comedian since 1981, Rob Becker mostly performed inoffensive, observational material until he started adding ideas about how men and women react to each other. Becker wrote "Defending the Caveman" over a three-year period during which he made an informal study of anthropology, prehistory, psychology, sociology and mythology. "Caveman" has since become somewhat of a peacemaker in the ongoing misunderstandings between men and women.

"A lot of relationship counselors get behind this show," Tedder said. "They want us to put it out on DVD or publish the script. But it does not hold up as well on paper."

Becker had a feeling that "Defending the Caveman" would be a hit after performing the show in San Francisco.

"The Improv in San Francisco was going out of business," said Becker in an interview in 2004. "They offered to put me in a one-man show, sort of a last gasp to save the club. The first night we had 20 or 30 people, the next night it was 50 people, the next night, 100 people. By week's end we were selling out. I immediately could see it was a phenomenon."

The show had a four-month run in San Francisco, then ran a year in Dallas. After that Becker spent about six months rewriting the play. "Defending the Caveman" opened on Broadway in 1995 and stayed there for 2 1/2 years, racking up 702 performances and becoming the longest-running solo play on Broadway.

Becker last performed the show in 2004. Currently, nine actors are each touring the country performing the same show, according to Tedder.

"It is a very funny show," said Tedder of the show's success. "I often hear people in the audience saying, 'Oh, God. It's so true. It's so true.'"

"People keep coming back to it because of the truth in the show," he continued. "When you are walking in your spouse's shoes for a while you are able to see how they see the world."

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