

## Crank Calls Dial Up Career

When you were a kid growing up, in the days before caller ID, you probably made a few mischievous crank phone calls. Were you ever on the receiving end of a conversation like this: "Yes, I'm calling to ask, is your refrigerator running? It is? Well, you better go catch it!"

It was phone pranks, made at work (of all places) in 1978, that unknowingly launched the celebrated comedy career of Bob Nelson.

Nelson appeared at the Little River High School Gym on Saturday, April 1st, 2006. The show was made possible by a generous grant from the Little River Community Fund and is presented by the churches of Little River.

Nelson was once a paste-up artist for a company that created the business display ads that appear in telephone book directories. When a yellow page ad had an obvious mistake--where one part of the ad says, "Open 8am-8pm" and another portion of the ad copy says, "Open 24 hours," someone had to call and clarify the error. Instead of letting one of the secretaries call, Nelson himself would call as some goofy character:

"I'd call as a guy from New York named Tony Cappuccino [affects a Brooklyn accent] 'Hey, dis is Tony Cappuccino, you're ad's really stupid.' And the guy'd be going, 'I'm sorry, what'd you say?' And I'd say, 'I said you're ad's really stupid. You're not stupid, you're ad is stupid.' You know, doing that. The secretaries and everybody in the office would be listening on the speakerphone in the other room. And I'd be messing with the client. Depending on what the company was, we'd figure out some kind of character I would call down as."

One day, a secretary dialed the number of another client whose ad copy contained mistake. Nelson took the phone and the employees ran off to the speakerphone, once again ready for another laugh. But unlike all the other calls, the secretary made a mistake. She forgot to dial the area code. So instead of talking to someone hundreds of miles away, Nelson was talking to someone locally. Remembers Nelson, "The secretaries had forgotten to dial the area code, so we'd gotten a local business on Long Island where I live. It turns out that they had called Richard M. Dixon, a guy who happens to sound like President Richard Nixon." "Dixon happened to be opening a club on Long Island. Here I am thinking I'm talking to someone down in Texas or something, and I got this guy who doesn't now what I'm talking about. And I thought my office had set me up with someone else in another room. I thought maybe I was talking to someone else from my office in another room. It was like a sting, you know. They're trying to get me."

"So what I did was I poured it on. I really was making fun of this guy.

Saying, 'You can't be Nixon. You're supposed to be in jail.' And he was laughing on the other end. And he didn't know who I was, and he kept telling me he's opening up a club in Massapequa. I said, 'Well I'm from Massapequa and there's no club there like that name so now I know you're lying.' He said, 'No, no. This place used to be called The Hideaway. It's not The Hideaway anymore, it's now The White House Inn.'

"And after a while I started to realize, oh yeah, I remember that place. And it turned out to be legit, this guy was legit. He invited me to come down to do his open mike night the following Wednesday. So that's how I got started."

That one crank call has produced a 28 year long comedy career, with hundreds of appearances at comedy clubs, corporate events, and theaters. And yes, Little River, Kansas on April Fools Day!

That's no crank!