

# Ventriloquist Todd Oliver bringing dogs & laughs to Raton's Shuler Theater

By Tim Keller— For the Comet | Posted: Saturday, January 31, 2015 12:00 am

RATON – Todd Oliver appears to do all the heavy lifting in his act. He spends his days driving across state after state, and his nights performing with his several co-stars, while they spend much of their time laying down and napping.

Oliver is an acclaimed comic and ventriloquist bringing his touring show to the Shuler Theater Feb. 4 at 7 p.m., the fourth of six shows in the Performing Arts Series presented annually by the Raton Arts & Humanities Council.

While Oliver carries the bulk of the workload, co-stars Irving and Lucy steal the show. They're dogs. Small, adopted, rescue dogs of indeterminate breed. Irving has been in Oliver's show for 14 years. He's getting pretty good at it. He stands at the microphone and talks.

"We live in Branson, Missouri," he says. "Branson's like Mayberry with a cover charge. The other day Todd took me on a walk downtown. He goes into a store and leaves me tied to a parking meter. He says 'Stay, Stay, Stay.' I'm thinking, 'I'm tied to a parking meter, Moron, Moron, Moron.'"

Billed as "clean, universal comedy that is situational and contemporary," Oliver voices his canine co-stars as well as three more-wooden characters named Pops, Miss Lilly, and Joey.

They're good enough that when David Letterman chose five ventriloquists to feature during his show's Ventriloquist Week, Oliver and Irving got one of the coveted nightly slots.

Todd Oliver and Friends reached the semi-finals on America's Got Talent, and they've been featured on The Today Show and late night shows hosted by Jay Leno, Craig Ferguson, and Letterman. They've performed often in Nashville and Branson. In Las Vegas, they've performed at the Hilton, the MGM Grand, and the Luxor. They've been featured performers on four cruise liners.

After being based in Nashville for ten years, the home base has now been Branson for longer than that. On their current tour the gang is performing 37 shows in 14 states in six weeks.



Ventriloquist Todd Oliver

Veteran ventriloquist and comic Todd Oliver brings three large puppets and a pair of live dogs that steal the show, presented at Raton's Shuler Theater Wednesday night, Feb. 4 at 7 p.m.

Oliver's website and press materials left unclear whether he's bringing three musicians that sometimes accompany him as "The Smiling Eyes," with Oliver playing guitar, piano, and lead vocals accompanied by lead guitar, bass, and drums in songs Oliver writes with his band.

One element that's certain in his shows is audience participation, along with Irving, Lucy, Oliver and his three ventriloquist's "dummies." Audience reviews on TripAdvisor and Ticketmaster show some people underwhelmed by the humor but most appreciating a laugh-out-loud family show enjoyed by all ages.

Call the Shuler Theater (575) 445-2052 for ticket prices and more information.