

IN PERSON

Mr. Breuer's
Neighborhood

A Comedian Turns His Eye on His Town

By JOEL KELLER

CHESTER

JIM BREUER is a celebrity who likes to answer his own door.

Ring the bell of his house in the woods here, and there he is. No publicist, no handler, just him, barefoot, in an oversize T-shirt and baggy denim shorts. He looked glassy-eyed, but not for reasons that fans of Mr. Breuer, one of the stars in the cult stoner movie "Half-Baked" (1998), may think.

"I've been up since 5," he said. "I'm on kid patrol." Descending into Mr. Breuer's toy-strewn playroom, you can see why he would be so tired. His two older daughters, 6-year-old Gabrielle and 3-year-old Kelsey, were playing and yelling with an enthusiasm most adults only wish they had at 9 in the morning. Mr. Breuer swept his 8-month-old daughter, Dorianne, into his arms and carried her into his media room so he could play with her in peace.

A few minutes later, Dee Breuer retrieved Dorianne; Mr. Breuer hugged and kissed his wife good morning and assured her: "I'm awake. I'm all right." He let out a rapid-fire "heh-heh-heh" after he jokingly told her: "Take the kids to Nana's. You'll get rest there."

"It's like three chimpanzees," he said of raising the children without outside help. "You can train them all you want, but they're chimpanzees. There's nothing you can do."

That is what life is all about for Mr. Breuer, 37. For him, friends and family are the most important aspect of his life. In his popular show on Sirius Satellite Radio, "Jim Breuer Unleashed" (channel 104), the former "Saturday Night Live" cast member — best known for the character Goat Boy — sits in a Manhattan studio with two childhood buddies and an old friend from the stand-up comedy circuit to discuss their marriages, families and anything that they would consider funny about one another's lives, including Chester, which sits in Morris County west of Morristown.

Mr. Breuer's stand-up comedy often revolves around stories about his childhood in Valley Stream, N.Y., on Long Island, his marriage and his neighbors. Living in Chester speaks to how he wants to live. "As soon as 'Saturday Night Live' was done, I really

wanted to start a family," he said. "I loved my upbringing on Long Island. She was a Jersey girl, so she wanted to live in Jersey. I didn't need to be in a city anymore."

After a few false starts, the couple found their dream house right after Mr. Breuer's first daughter was born. "I saw the pool, saw the cul-de-sac," he said. "It just seemed like a great place for kids. Then I walked downstairs and saw a pool table — a pool table! A pool table and a pool!"

Mr. Breuer started doing the show on Sirius after getting encouragement during his guest appearances on radio shows like "Opie & Anthony." He shopped the idea to both XM and Sirius, but said that chose Sirius because of its management's enthusiastic response. He has been doing the show on a daily basis since November 2004. It runs 4 to 5 p.m. (with replays 9 to 11 p.m.) Monday through Friday.

Even a brief listen indicates that Mr. Breuer and his buddies Jimmy Sciacca (known as Shaka), Larry Schneidmuller — he grew up with them in Valley Stream — and Pete Correale are all having a blast doing the Sirius show. But the hours can be tough on the Breuers. He often leaves the house at 2 in the afternoon and comes back at 8 p.m. He tries to pre-tape the show once a week, depending on, as he puts it, "how bad the wife and family's breaking down."

But technology is helping. Mr. Breuer owns equipment that allows him to do the show from most anywhere. "It's me telling Jimmy" — Sciacca, the show's designated tech guy — "Be mobile. The more we can get out the better. Go buy it, I'll pay for it. Get me the technology so we can set up anywhere."

Mr. Breuer has been able to do some shows from Chubb Park in Chester, his house and the house of his sister, which is nearby. Fans love the dynamic of the radio show, no matter where it emanates from.

Mr. Breuer recently ended a stint of 10 summer Wednesdays at the Stress Factory comedy club in New Brunswick, where he and other stand-up comics worked out new material. All of those shows sold out and were packed with fans who yelled out requests for their favorite stories.

As any new listener to "Jim Breuer Unleashed" quickly finds out, there are no characters on the show, no recorded comedy routines. Aside from Mr. Correale, the main participants are not professional com-



Jim Breuer, at home in Chester with his daughter Kelsey, apparently does not adhere to the "it'll freeze like that" rule of parenting.

ics; Mr. Sciacca is a wedding singer and Mr. Schneidmuller works for an overnight delivery company at Kennedy Airport.

To Mr. Breuer, however, that is the key to the success of his show, which is gaining fans as people subscribe to Sirius in anticipation of Howard Stern's arrival in January; Sirius has no way yet to measure its audience, but it considers him integral to one of its most popular channels. "That's the golden rule of the show: We don't care what ya do. We don't care where ya been, what ya done. This is your chance to show that side, like 'Hey, I can hang and sit down with the guy from the airport.' It attracts me. And it attracts a lot of people in life." All he asks of his buddies and his guests is to be casual and relaxed.

As his appearance at the door indicates, Mr. Breuer is about being accessible. He is not shy about telling his radio audience that

he lives in Chester, telling funny stories about life in a buttoned-down town known for its antique shops.

For instance, his listeners know that Chester makes its residents put stickers on their garbage if they want it picked up. Sometimes, Mr. Breuer forgets to get the stickers and borrows them from his neighbors. "The garage smells," he said, "so someone's got to pay for it." "Heh-heh. We go around at midnight, one o'clock in the morning going, 'Who's got a lot of garbage? They won't be missing one sticker.'"

"Everyone knows where I live," Mr. Breuer said. "The whole town knows. They don't bother me. I've had no problems."

Listeners also know some of Mr. Breuer's neighbors, even if only by reputation. He has immortalized Joe Ionfrida, who lives across the street, through stories about Mr. Ionfrida's farm animals, punctuated by an im-

pression that matches his neighbor's old-school Italian accent.

Mr. Ionfrida doesn't seem to mind, though. "We got a huge party a couple of times a year in my yard, we've got over 100 people all the time," he said recently as his children darted around Mr. Breuer's front yard. "He's great with the people. Guy's a piece of work."

Mr. Breuer's Sirius contract runs through the first week of November, but he is in negotiations to continue. He also created a cartoon pilot based on his childhood stories that has attracted interest from one of the four major networks. "It's sort of like 'Stand by Me' meets 'Goodfellas' without the killing," he says of the cartoon.

But no matter what his successes, his life in Chester keeps him grounded. "There is no next big thing," he said. "As long as the home's stable, who cares?"

Nancy Wiegand for The New York Times