

SO BAD IT'S CREEPY

By Bill Chapin

bchapin@citpat.com — 768-4971

Want to see something really scary? Tune in to Comcast's Channel 19 at midnight as Friday turns to Saturday, and you'll see a group of Jackson men spouting streams of gags and puns that are so bad ... it's frightening.

How bad? Well, among the characters on this cable-access show, "Creep Theater," is a culinary-minded vampire named Count Spatula.

During the taping of an upcoming episode, "Spatch" (played by Michael Ancrile) opened a box to reveal a skull adorned with slices of processed cheese.

"It's a head cheese!" Spatch said in his high-pitched voice. "His name is Eddie 'Muenster.'"

"I'm just picking his brain a little bit," said host John "Johnny Nightmare" Robinson as he grabbed a chunk of cheese.

This week's episode will mark the five-year anniversary of the debut of "Creep Theater." Like an epidemic of brain-craving zombies, the show's signal has gradually spread beyond Jackson and now infects most of Comcast's Lansing-area market every weekend.

Robinson's inspirations were the old, campy, low-budget TV shows out of Detroit, where characters like Sir Graves Ghastly, The Ghoul and Count Scary would show old horror movies interspersed with bits of tongue-in-cheek humor.

"We all grew up watching these types of shows," Robinson said. "There's no (other) show like that on TV now."

The show taped at the Jackson County Career Center and Michigan Theatre for three seasons before finding its current home, a cast-member's wine cellar, decked out in fake cobwebs, lanterns, skeletons and gargoyle statues.

The cast has grown, too, to include co-host Ron Hiveley, aka Ron Zombie, and such recurring characters as Spatch and Sim Saminen, the grumpy janitor.

Phil Assenmacher, a neighbor of Hiveley's, came on board as producer, camera man and editor.

"I talked to Ron about it while we were taking out the garbage," Assenmacher said. "Now I'm producing and editing the garbage."

They usually put out 30 to 40 episodes each year, depending on how often they're able to get together for shoots.

The movies they show are mostly forgotten, black-and-white B-movies, such as this week's double feature of "The Beast from Yucca Flats" and "The Ghost of Rashmon Hall."

See **SHOW**, on F2





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Phil Assenmacher, left, runs the camera as James Korloch, John Robinson and Michael Ancrile perform a skit called "Barf Scrawley" for their public access television show "Creep Theater."

Show is frighteningly bad

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The upcoming "head cheese" episode includes sketches that poke fun at such local figures as Captain Jackson and Bart Hawley.

"It's probably good we don't get paid for this," said James Korloch, who joined the troupe this year after stumbling across the show while channel surfing.

Everything is shot without a script and in one take, leaving it to Assenmacher to

try and edit each scene into something halfway sensical and bleep any curse words that manage to slip out.

"Is that going to be too noisy?" Robinson asked when a dehumidifier kicked on just as they were about to start taping a scene.

Assenmacher thought for a second before answering, "Yeah."

"Will it hurt the bit?" Robinson asked, then answered his own question: "No."

"The bits hurt themselves,"

someone yelled from around the corner.

Robinson then launched into an homage to Johnny Carson's Carnac the Magnificent bit. Placing the envelope next to his head he announced the answer to the enclosed question: "Paul McCartney and Wings."

The question? "What did Spatch have for dinner?"

Ooh, that's scary.

— Read Bill Chapin's blog at blog.mlive.com/citpat-pluggedin.