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He covers health, food and society with a Florida spin and a smile

BY MATTHEW LIDDELL
NNB Student Reporter

SARASOTA – Joey Panek may be on the Monday noon news like many others, but he’s far from an ordinary reporter.

“I don’t really want to have, like, a news voice,” he told his assistant recently as they



Matthew Liddell | NNB

Joey Panek (left) interviews Perq Coffee Bar owner Keith Zolner for an ABC 7 segment on coffeehouse etiquette.

prepared to shoot a segment by the Ringling Bridge in Sarasota. “I still want to sound like myself... which I hope is very charming.”

It’s apparent from his joking manner that Panek approaches his work with a lot of levity. But he isn’t goofing off. It’s the reason why he is a social correspondent on WWSB’s ABC 7 News in the first place.

Panek, 36, grew up in Syracuse, N.Y., and earned an associate degree at Onondaga Community College. He spent 13 years on the professional stage before moving to Sarasota in 2006.

Panek, a self-proclaimed “man about town,” is a social media guru for a media group called the HuB, where he makes online content like ads and web series. He also covers pop culture on his own website, HowBoutJoey.com.

His talent comes from his jovial personality and his eye for social events, which is exactly what the managers at ABC 7 thought when they approached Panek last year.

He started at the TV station by reporting on weekend events for the noon Monday program. But he soon wanted to branch out.

“Practically, there aren’t as many events now that the (winter) season is over,” Panek said. “Personal reason was that it was exhausting. I was becoming a run-and-gun cameraman, sometimes covering three events in a single night. They realized they could send a cameraman to get footage for the news and that it was a waste to have me doing that.”

Now, Panek goes to the ABC 7 studio every Monday to introduce his series “What’s Up, Joey.” He covers trends – in health, food, weddings and travel – with Florida-centric spin and tries to keep the tone conversational and light.

This became evident recently as Panek and his crew worked on a few stories.

“Do it again, but this time with a smile!” yelled his assistant, Christine Alexander, after a bland take for a story at the Florida Studio Theatre. Panek’s face, voice and gestures immediately came alive, changing everything about his delivery and on-screen

presence.

It's no wonder that theater and acting are among Panek's great interests. With his experience on the professional stage, he knows how to present himself to an audience.

Panek was wrapping up on his next piece, a story about a couple of online health fads – adding butter, not cream, to coffee and “oil pulling,” or swishing a tablespoon of oil in the mouth for better oral health. He also went to the Perq Coffee Bar to learn about proper coffee shop etiquette.

It may not be hard-hitting or traditional journalism, but Panek strives for professionalism in his material.

“They've given me the freedom to go outside the box,” he said. “I didn't (do that) immediately because I wanted to show them I could do a professional package, and that's what solidified me there.”

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