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## Atlantans mesmerized by TruTV's 'Carbonaro Effect' debuting May 15

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The illusions themselves would be neat on a stage. Disappearing out of the trunk of a car. Lifting a bowling ball out of a pizza-box-sized package. Turning a duck decoy into a real duck.

But **Michael Carbonaro** on TruTV's "The Carbonaro Effect," debuting May 15 at 10 p.m., pulls these tricks off at the Georgian Terrace, an Atlanta shipping store and a local thrift store, respectively. He spent several weeks earlier this year playing employees or random persons at various Atlanta locales, confounding and surprising dozens of unsuspecting locals.

His unassuming, nice-guy persona and improvisational skills helps make this show work. He's often so convincing, he makes customers believe his often absurdist patter. The live chick, he says, pops out of egg cartons every so often, no big deal. And he offered a "scientific" explanation about how they "invert the air" enabling the bowling ball to "fit" in a pizza box. (See the clip)

"Nobody knows I'm a magician," Carbonaro said. "I'm a guy in the park. I'm a guy behind the bar. I'm a guy at a port-o-potty. I play kind of dumb."

A 32-year-old New Yorker, he said he enjoyed his time in Atlanta. "Everyone was so sweet and welcoming," he said. At the same time, "some folks are so polite, it was a challenge for me to open them up a bit."

Most people "fooled" by his tricks are cool with it once they are told what was going on. But at Pancho's Mexican restaurant on Buford Highway, he had a problem. "I pretended to be a guy who made table-side guacamole," he said. "As I cut open a guacamole, a live snake comes out. I convinced the customers that this is an ancient Mexican omen and means good luck for the rest of their lives." The customers loved the trick but told him adamantly they could not be on camera.

At first, he thought maybe they were in the witness protection program. But they admitted to him what the real issue was: they were having an affair.

TruTV, which is currently revamping its schedule, offered a teaser episode on April 1 and the reaction was so positive, Carbonaro was given a second season of 13 episodes even before the first season technically begins on May 15. (He will be going to different cities for the new season but plans a return trip to Georgia as well.)

Carbonaro, who looks a bit like actor **Jay Baruchel**, said he has been inspired for years by **Allen Funt's** groundbreaking hidden-camera show "Candid Camera," although it aired before he was born. ("I ordered all the DVDs," he said.) He began doing bits similar to what "The Carbonaro Effect" became for **Jay Leno's** "Tonight Show."

"He understands the creative process," Carbonaro said. "He trusted me."

Growing up on Long Island, he at first was fascinated by special effects and found a store that sold monster makeup but also carried magic tricks. "Magic is like special effects live," he said. A magician was soon born. He admired **David Copperfield**.

Ultimately, he was so good at what he did, he was hired out for parties as a teen. In the end, he never had another job. In college, he studied acting and theater, which he feels makes him a better magician.

At the same time, he said he wanted to be an actor and a comedian as well. This show enables him to dabble in all three of his loves.

His field producer Steve Barron directed A-Ha's classic video "Take On Me" and Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean." "We're a match made in heaven," he said. "His videos were magical!"



Michael Carbonaro, a New York magician, charms on "The Carbonaro Effect," shot in Atlanta earlier this year. CREDIT: TruTV