

The Oconee Leader

Mr. Keith the Magic Man

BY INGUIN MERCER

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Mr. Keith "the magic man" entertains children with his magic show and conveys a meaningful lesson at the same time.

From age 12, when one of his friends fooled him with a magic trick, Keith Karnok has been fascinated with magic. Through the years, he has played with it, then put it away, then started playing with it again, several times.

"I never thought I would do it professionally. I went to college, and got on with my life. But it was always a hobby. In recent years, I started thinking that time is running out. If I ever want to do anything with it, it has to be now," says Karnok.

Karnok and his wife have four children, so when he decided to pursue his magical hobby the most natural thing for him was to put on shows for preschools.

"Those little kids are not so interested in how things work, they just want to laugh and have fun. They seemed like they liked my show," he says.

From the preschool shows Keith Karnok's name came out, and he got more gigs. He now does shows for all age groups.

"I now perform for people of all ages, from preschool to college students and assisted living residents," he says.

The magic man is a full-time University professor at UGA, and uses his vacation time to go off campus and perform.

"Professors have quite a bit of vacation, but they hardly ever take it. Rather than losing that time, I will take off half a morning, when I don't have anything else going on at the campus, and go do a magic show," says Karnok.

His shows teach kids about the dangers of drugs, the joys of reading books, eating healthy, safety, attitude and different topics.

"There has to be a message. They have to learn something, for the school to allow them to make time for a show. Maybe it will make a difference," he says.

His wife, Melinda Karnok, helps him out.

"She videotapes my shows, and does balloon twisting and face painting. She is very much involved. It's a thing we do together, which is a lot of fun," Karnok says.

His character is a magician who messes up everything. The kids love that. He will try to do a magic trick, but when he messes it up, he will make the kids say the "magic words" and they will make it work. His big hit is his bird, Vern, who is a puppet he uses for his ventriloquist act. He usually ends his act with that.

"The kids sometimes think he's alive. I

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Keith Karnok is a professor at the University of Georgia, but his passion is just as much entertaining kids of all ages with his magic act.

have him on my arm, and make him grab my hat with his beak and pull my suspenders, those kinds of things. I end my show with summing things up with Vern. He has to learn about the theme of the day," says Karnok.

He took a ventriloquism study-at-home course, and it took him months to learn.

"I am currently working on getting another voice, and eventually getting a second puppet. That way I can have one on each arm, and they can interact, and I can be in

the middle. But it is tricky to do. You have to keep your own voice intact in the middle of it," he says.

The puppets come from a company that sells all kinds of puppets. Karnok says he's going to go and demonstrate his new voice, and see if they can help him find a puppet that fits that voice.

Mr. Keith, or Dr. Karnok at the University,

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sometimes uses magic in the classroom.

"It helps me illustrate a point. When I do it, it really hits home. I brought the bird once. It really gets the students' attention. I try to spice things up and illustrate things. My strength is teaching. But it is my responsibility to make sure the students learn something. If they sleep through my classes they're not going to. I think magic has made me a better teacher, and being a teacher has also made me a better magician," he says.