

'Wizard of Odd' brings smiles to Pinckneyville center

By Pam Marra

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Lilburn resident Greg McMahan will perform today at the Pinckneyville Community Center as part of its two-year anniversary celebration.

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Even Greg McMahan's parents think he's a clown.

That's a good thing, though, considering it's his job.

Known as "The Wizard of Odd," the Lilburn resident has a career goal many might envy — making people smile. But it gets better. He gets to share the fun with his

wife, Abbie, and 5-year-old stepson, Austin, who often accompany and assist him in performances throughout the

area as "The Odd Family."

"I guess you could say I have a dream job," says McMahan, who will be performing at the Pinckneyville Community Center today as part of its two-year anniversary celebration.

But McMahan, who is also a skilled magician, doesn't just perform, he also teaches his craft through Junior Clown Academy classes.

"I developed the classes while I was working with Atlanta's Circus Camp. That experience came in very handy when I taught hundreds of children while on the road with the Cole Bros. Circus," said the Ohio native, who just came off a nine-month, 110-city tour with Cole.

In the classes, kids learn how to "become" a clown, complete with giant red nose and funny skits. They also get lessons on magic tricks, juggling and the squeaky art of balloon-twisting.

But the classes are more than just fun and games, McMahan says. They were created with other principles in mind, as well.

"Kids can learn a lot from these classes. For instance, performing in front of others can work to build confidence and self-esteem. Juggling can help with eye-hand coordination and focus," says McMahan, who was involved in various aspects of theater in his native Cincinnati. "It can also teach patience and the importance of practice."

Even balloon-twisting contributes something worthwhile, he says. "That has always been the most popular class. It's a great way to express creativity, but because they're expecting the balloons to pop, kids learn how to handle nervousness and anxiety."

McMahan's path was forged at an early age, when his family lived near a junkyard. When he wasn't in school, he'd spend hours there, picking the locks off old doors and taking them apart.

"My mom was concerned about what I was doing and bought me a book on Houdini. From then on, I was hooked on magic and tried to learn everything I could," he says.

During a trip to Atlanta to visit his sister in 1984, McMahan decided to stay and pursue his magic craft, working as a computer salesman by day and doing magic show gigs on weekends.

"I've always done what I call 'comedy magic,' but one day after a show, a kid came up to me and said, 'Gee, you're sure a funny clown,'" he says. "I thought, hey, I can really increase my booking potential if I bill myself as a magical clown."

Today, he successfully and skillfully combines the two for some good times and great laughs.

"I've known Greg for about 15 years. He gave my kids magic lessons and he's just great at it," says Kay Watkins, director of the Pinckneyville Community Center, where McMahan will be offering a series of clown classes Oct. 12 through Nov. 16.

"He's one of those people who can relate to kids because he has a childlike quality in him. He's a playful, fun person."

Though he's admittedly "a big kid," his career isn't without adult responsibilities, however.

"Income can be sporadic so I have to work hard at scheduling and managing what I do, but that's OK because I'm actually a workaholic and very goal-oriented.

"I work very, very hard at this because there's much more to it than just getting up on stage with big feet and a bright red nose," says McMahan, 44, who prefers to perform without makeup because "it frightens the kids."

Not that he's complaining, though.

"When you think about it, I get laughed at for a living. But you know what? I wouldn't trade that for anything. After all this time, it still means the world to me to hear people laugh."

IF YOU GO

What: Anniversary celebration

When: Today, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Where: Pinckneyville Community Center, 4650 Peachtree Industrial Blvd., Norcross

Cost: Free

Call: 770-417-2200.

Note: "The Wizard of Odd" will be performing his full stage show at the Pinckneyville Community Center at 7 p.m. Oct. 8. Additional information on the show or the upcoming clown classes are available on www.wizardofodd.org or call 404-525-1865.