

Hooked on magic as a child, Craig shares talents with many



Carlotta Phipps

Oxford's Steven Craig has turned a childhood fascination with magic into a career.

BY JOYCE KELLY
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OXFORD — Master Magician Steven Craig is adept at many forms of his art: sleight of hand, mind-reading tricks, and rope tricks.

He can twist balloons into the shape of hat, fairy wings, crowns and jewelry.

But the greatest magic he performs, he said, is putting a smile on the face of a child.

And that's exactly what he's been doing for the last 20-odd years.

For the 12th consecutive year now, Craig spent July 4 delighting children at the Museum of Science in Boston.

Magic is a great form of entertainment, Craig said, but it can also be used in education and instruction, to reinforce messages and increase self-esteem in a fun way.

This May, for example, Craig's magic show was the reward for over 100 kindergarten through third-grade students who completed the

was about the age of the children he now entertains.

At 8, Craig became fascinated with the art. But Craig really got on his way when, at 12, his father, a college professor, brought home a student of his who knew magic.

Much to the young Craig's delight, the student spoke with him about magic, and showed him a few tricks.

"I was hooked," said Craig. More than 25 years later, he is still doing magic and learning new skills.

Among his first lessons was a rope, where the apprentice would take three short, medium, and long-length ropes, say the magic words, swirl his hand, and — Behold! — The same three ropes — now all of the same length!

Today, Craig performs tricks such as this not only for his own enjoyment, but also for the entertainment and education of both children and adults in corporate settings.

He uses the rope length trick, for example, to teach kids about safety.

Just like the three ropes, which are of different sizes, but become equal in length, all three aspects of kidnap prevention — "No," "Go," and "Tell" — are equally important in a child's safety.

The ropes reinforce the message that though there are several pieces to a plan or problem, each is necessary to achieve the goal, Craig said.

Additionally, he said, "It combines the message with the magic."

Craig also uses his magic skills to help kids develop self-esteem.

When a child becomes interested in how magic works, learns a trick, and executes it, Craig said, that child feels good about him or herself.

became more interested in entertaining his audiences, creating stories around the tricks, for example, rather than the mechanics of magic.

Craig added that the best part of his job is really the entertainment aspect, being able to evoke responses from his audiences.

Children between the ages of 3-7, for example, still believe he's performing magic — "That's the fun part," said Craig.

"They're interested in being silly and telling you what you know," he said. "They get excited about telling me what's going on."

Craig will give the kids a balloon, for instance, and it will deflate only

when they hold it, and they'll think it's hysterical.

Kids that age also love fairy tales, Craig said.

So he'll have them act out a story, such as one about a wizard and a princess, dressing them up with wings and crowns made of balloons.

Older kids, from about 8-15, he said, want to know how tricks are done, so Craig will split his time between doing the show and giving a workshop.

Craig suggested that kids with a strong interest in learning magic can learn more by reading books, watching videos, and especially by joining a magician

group such as the one he belongs to, The International Brotherhood of Magicians.

The IBM is a network of magicians, where both new and experienced magicians can ask questions, share tips, use its website and take part in conventions.

At their annual convention, he said, "You'll find magicians talking till the wee hours of the morning, sharing tips and talking about the lectures and shows."

When an IBM magician has reached a certain level of mastery, Craig said, they can apply for the elite group to which he belongs — The Order of Merlins.

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