

Attorney uses magic touch as he amazes and amuses

By Rebecca Jacobson

Of the Emerald

Richard Levin is one lawyer with a few tricks up his sleeve.

He is not only a bona fide man of the American Bar Association, but he's also a professional magician.

In the past five years, Levin has displayed tricks as far away as Africa, and he now performs at parties and restaurants around Eugene. He also does television spots for The Good Guys Stereo Discounters.

He says he gave his most exciting performance when he only knew one card trick, showing the trick in New Guinea, Africa, to "some old men sitting on the ground."

Although they didn't show much enthusiasm, a little boy later came up to Levin in a bar and begged him to see the trick. When Levin went outside to show the boy, he saw about 40 natives waiting. He performed the same card trick four different ways, and the villagers showed their appreciation by bringing Levin wood carvings. "That was my first paid performance," he says.

Levin took up magic in Chicago, his hometown, to relieve some of the pressure of his law career. "I really needed to lighten up," he says.

Levin says he left Chicago to travel through the United States with his wife, Janice, after three months of training with "a fantastic teacher." In Los Angeles he decided to try out for an opening at the Magic Castle, a famous magic club, where he was hired to perform for a week.

Levin says that when he found out he was hired, he was a bit nervous as to how the audience would react. "When they called my name I thought... Are they really going to stay for the entire show?"

But with repeated practice sessions for his first performance and with his experience in front of juries as a criminal lawyer, Levin says he had what he needed to pull off a fantastic show.

In 1980, Levin and his wife were taking a trip to Alaska when they stopped in Eugene. After a couple of burritos at the Saturday Market, they decided to stay, he says.

Levin says he hadn't been in town long when he was performing tricks at a party and was spotted by a local man who said he'd like to be Levin's agent. "It was really a quirk of fate," Levin says.

This led to a long stint at the former Harrys on the Canal restaurant (now called Harrys and under new management), where he did "close-up magic" for more than three years. He would walk from table to table and perform magic — usually card tricks.

"I really enjoy walking up to a table of somebody that's not expecting you... and just have them sit back and be amazed," he says.

Levin recalls performing a trick once for a man in a bad mood. But Levin says the man told him his mood had improved after he saw the trick.

"Of all the things that I do, that is the most significant — changing people's attitudes.

"I'm the first magician that's really done table-to-table magic

work for any sustained period of time in Eugene," he says.

"It's a really good community. It's an open community for different ideas," he says.

"They've really blown me away," Levin says of the Eugene crowd. "Every time I leave a place, within a very short period of time I have another place to perform."

Levin, 38, says he performs about 40 to 60 hours of magic each week. He says he only puts about 15 or 20 hours a week into his law practice now, a career which has been de-emphasized because of his magic.

Although Levin has practiced law in three states — Illinois, Iowa and Oregon — and also has pursued accounting and banking careers, he says magic is where it's at.

Card tricks are his favorite, he says, and the one he likes best is called "Reagan economics," in which he changes a \$5 bill into a \$100 bill and then back to \$5. Some of his other tricks involve coins, silks, ropes and balloons. He also eats fire, which he says is especially dangerous with his beard. "But it's really, spectacular," he says. "The beard emphasizes the fire."

As far as major calamities go, Levin says so far so good. But, he says, "It's coming — that's what they tell me."

Tricks don't always work, though, and every once in a while Levin makes a little gaffe when he inaccurately guesses the cards that people are holding. "It hasn't happened often, thank goodness. But when it does happen, it's dead silence, and a great deal of sympathy... If you can come back with something good, then you've really won their hearts," he says.

Levin admits he is always a little nervous before a show starts. But, he adds, "It makes a good performance if you're slightly on edge."

Some illusions he does not do are those involving animals or



Photo by James Marks

Eugene lawyer and magician Richard Levin eats fire in addition to performing card tricks, and he says he has yet to inflame his beard.

women. "I don't like to abuse women like they do in magic," he says. "I don't like to cut 'em up or tear 'em in pieces or make 'em zigzag or anything like that."

As for animals: "When animals are produced (like pulling a rabbit out of a hat), they're pulled out of small spaces," which constitutes abuse, Levin says.

Levin's wife choreographs and directs his shows, planning the layout of on-stage props and the order in which he performs his tricks. She also helps write the scripts, he says.

Sometimes she is the "silent magician," out in the audience, who solicits information from audience members and transmits it to Levin, who uses it in his act. "She just takes a tremendous load off my shoulders," he says.

Levin says his minimum fee is \$75, and the range goes up to \$1,500, depending on the event and how many assistants he needs.

Levin estimates that 40 to 50 magicians practice in the Eugene area, but even with all the competition he's never had to struggle, he says. "A lot of artists are starving, and I understand that."

His advice to hopeful magicians is to "just go up to

Continued on Page 8

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