

Motivational Magic

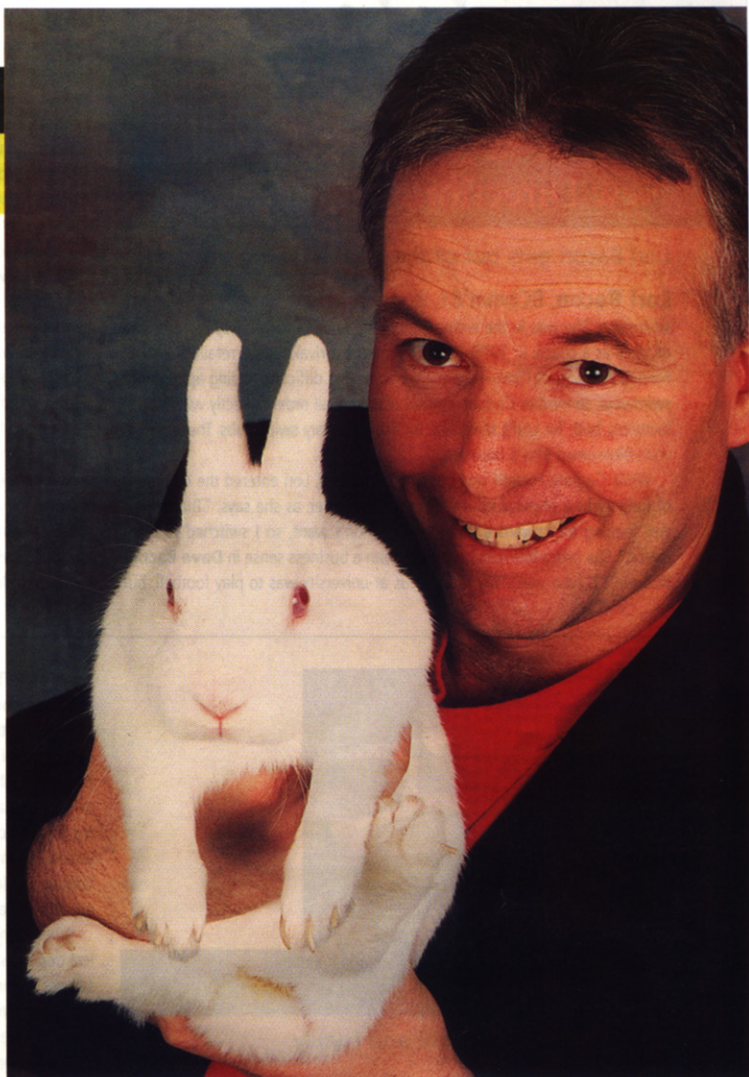
It's more than just hocus-pocus

How do you make a bully disappear? Magic. At least that's how **Steve Harmer**, DipEd'96, does it, and it appears his method is catching on. After working 21 years as a counsellor, teacher, and principal, Harmer decided to combine his understanding of child education with his passion for performance to help combat escalating behavioral problems in schools.

Inspiration for the program struck in 1995, during a year sabbatical at the U of C. While earning a diploma in computer applications, Harmer arranged to conduct an independent study. He wanted to design an educational presentation that combined magical illusions with a meaningful message. By incorporating entertainment into a lesson plan, Harmer believed he could produce magical results in the students' ability to retain the message.

A seasoned magician with 16 summers entertaining at Calaway Park and more than 1,000 performances to his credit, Harmer already knew the excitement and interest magic could generate. To test his theory, he came up with "Decisions, Deceptions, and Drugs," an hour-long presentation for elementary school students that used colorful props, music, and a whole bag of tricks to deliver a message about drug abuse and prevention. It was a smashing success, and Harmer saw the potential to deliver other messages under a program he would call Motivational Magic.

In September 2000, Harmer left his position as a principal to pursue Motivational Magic full-time for one year. Program topics have since expanded to include "Be Aware and Care," a bully prevention presentation that teaches kids how to recognize bullying, how to deal with it, and how to help others who are victims. "Courage, Character, and Caring" is a violence prevention presentation that teaches respect and responsibility. "The programs are very timely," says Harmer. "These kinds of issues are on the rise, and the effects worsen as the kids get older. If we get a prevention message in early and make it fun to listen to, we can really make a positive impact."



Harmer's programs are garnering rave reviews, but he stresses the shows are more than just an entertaining break from classes. "Each program is comprehensive," he says. "After every show, I leave a package of exercises so teachers and parents can become involved. The program becomes part of the school and the lesson becomes action." When asked whether he will be able to shed his colorful costumes and revert back to the role of Principal Harmer, it's clear that Steve loves his new job. "I can see rolling this program out past the city of Calgary," he admits with a gleam in his eye.

— NATASHA EVDOKIMOFF