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Playing All the Right Cards-- IWU Student Dabbles in Magic

Laura Warren
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Contact: Laura Warren, (309)556-2753

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--At Charlie Newman's last party, he played all his cards and didn't impress any of the girls. In fact, he even managed to leave one crying.

Fortunately for Newman, that outcome was due less to his social skills than the fact the girls were four years old.

A freshman at Illinois Wesleyan University, Newman works as a part-time magician, performing at local restaurants, conventions, and in the case of the four-year-old girls, birthday parties.

This last party was a little more challenging than usual, Newman says.

"It was a rough show, I felt like I was talking to air," he laughs. "My volunteer finally stopped crying about halfway through the trick, so it turned out a little better than it started."

Lucky for Newman, other audiences have been more receptive to his charms. In fact, at Sonoma Cocina, a local restauraunt where he works once a week, Newman's sorcery is in high demand.

"More and more people come in on Thursday nights and ask, 'Is he here?'," says Sonoma hostess Angie Christianson. "People love his magic, and he really makes my customers happy."

For Newman, however, magic is not just a job.

"The beauty of magic is in its entertainment," he says. "It's so much fun to be fooled and to laugh about it."

As a youngster, Newman performed magic shows for his family. But it wasn't until two years ago that he became seriously interested in the activity, when he wandered into the only magic shop in his hometown, Rockford, Ill. Newman met the owner, who eventually taught him "everything he knows."

"He was the greatest guy, he had been in show business for 30 years, and he offered classes to the public," Newman explains. "I owe all of my

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interest and experience to him."

After learning basic tricks from his mentor, Newman continued to expand his knowledge of magic through books.

"For any trick, they usually give you a pattern, but you can modify it with jokes and humor," Newman explains. "You can use a newly invented trick, which often becomes the rage for several months after release, or a classic trick which has been around forever. You can even combine tricks."

Because of this variety, Newman insists magic always will excite him.

"It can't get old because I'm constantly changing my act, there's so much out there," he explains. "The more tricks you do, the more you figure out what really works and then you can perfect it."

For some audiences, though, perfection is not enough. Occasionally, Newman runs into stubborn fans who demand explanations of tricks.

"Everyone knows real magic doesn't exist, and sometimes you get someone who's going to waste their breath trying to prove you wrong," he says. "If they're really being a stickler, I try to involve them in the trick."

However, the majority of Newman's audiences welcome the mystery of his magic. Newman is particularly fond of younger audiences.

"I love working with kids because they're so enthusiastic, they just go crazy," he laughs. "At that age, they really believe in magic."

Even Newman believes in his powers of enchantment, or at least in their career possibilities.

"When I found out I could do this as steady work, I realized I'm really serious about it," he says. "I would love to go to Vegas and get a casino job with my own stage show."

Newman is moving his career toward stage magic, hoping to eventually perform with his own props and assistants in front of a thousand people.

"Stage magic is much more difficult because angles, lighting, and positioning play important roles," Newman explains. "But if you do it right, those big illusions are reputation-builders."

Stage illusions have built the reputations of many famous magicians, Newman says, including his favorite, Lance Burton. Newman's fans,

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however, might compare his wizardry to someone else.

"I asked him if he was going to be the next David Copperfield," Christianson said. "He just laughed and walked away."

Though Newman may not yet be famous, he certainly seems ready for public acclaim.

"My favorite part is the spotlight," he admits. "I love mesmerizing people and then watching them smile."

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 1,900 students in a College of Liberal Arts, College of Fine Arts, and a four-year professional School of Nursing. A \$15 million athletics and recreation center opened in the fall of 1994; and a \$25 million science building opened in the fall of 1995. The \$4.6 million Center for Liberal Arts--a facility housing 60 faculty offices, six classrooms, and other facilities for social science, humanities, business and economics, and interdisciplinary studies' faculty--is slated to open next August, as well as a new \$6.8 million residence hall. The Carnegie Commission for the Advancement of Teaching promoted Illinois Wesleyan to a "Baccalaureate I" institution in 1994, a classification that places it among 161 highly selective National Liberal Arts Colleges in the annual *U.S. News & World Report* rankings. *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*, another respected college guide, rated IWU "highly competitive (+)" in its latest edition.