

# BJ Hickman

## MAGICIAN OF MANY TALENTS

BY BOBBY WARREN

**D**iversification. Integration. Collaboration. Those three words might sound similar to an advertising slogan for a Fortune 500 company, but they are descriptive of BJ Hickman's approach to succeeding at the business of performing magic, and speaking publicly.

When one pokes into Hickman's history, it begins like most magicians: His father showed him a trick with a string, and the magic bug bit. "I thought it was pretty neat," Hickman said. "I went to the library, read every book, and learned everything I could." When he worked his way through the library's offerings, his father, Jaquett Hickman, introduced him to some magicians in the Manchester, New Hampshire, area.

One of those magicians, I.B.M. member Dr. Dwight Damon, had a television show on Saturday mornings, the *Ring-A-Ding the Clown Show*. Damon let the younger Hickman tag along with him on show days. He would stop by the Hickman home, pick up the budding magician, and head to the studio for the live television show, which was broadcast in black-and-white. Hickman would help assemble the set in a studio shared by the news department and other shows, invite in a few kids waiting in the lobby to be the live studio audience, and help on the show "on camera" and behind the scenes working puppets.

The *Ring-A-Ding the Clown Show* was not the only television experience the young Hickman gained. His grandfather introduced him to Austin "Ace" Gorham (an I.B.M. Past International President, 1971-1972), who performed magic on the iconic *Uncle Gus Show*, which also originated from WMUR TV-9 in Manchester, New Hampshire. Eventually, Hickman would get his chance to fill in for Ace performing magic on the show.

Hickman would perform little shows on occasion when he was eleven and twelve years old; but when he was older and was able to attend Ring 166 meetings, Hickman said he really blossomed as a performer. Through his study and participation at I.B.M. Ring meetings, Hickman says he learned not only effects but presentation techniques, as well. To return the favor, he has held every office for his Ring and has now been a member for more than forty years.

Hickman performed shows in high school and college, mostly for children. The paid performances helped him fund his classes at Keene (N.H.) State College, as did shows at school assemblies, fairs, and festivals. "I never gave it up," Hickman said. While at college, he started working at the radio station on campus, which eventually led to a career in radio broadcasting.



*Left: Levitating a city hall employee in 1977. Top Left: B.J. on live television with Dwight Damon (Ring-A-Ding the Clown). Top Right: B.J. Hickman, shown here in the 1960s, credits his local I.B.M. Ring with helping him develop material and presentation skills.*

For the next twenty years, Hickman worked in radio in Dover, New Hampshire. He started on-air, and then he moved into sales before being named General Sales Manager for two radio stations. In his forties, he decided to make a leap of faith and become a full-time professional magician, which was more than twelve years ago. The goal was to change careers, while continuing to increase his income. He met those objectives, but it took a lot of hard work, effort, and attention to marketing.

“I often wondered, since I was young, could I make a living doing shows? I did not know many who were,” he said. Understandably, Hickman was a little apprehensive. He thought he might get burned out doing the same show over and over again. He was not sure how he would handle all of the traveling. “I haven’t looked back,” Hickman said.

So, how does he keep himself from getting burned out? Simple: Diversification. “I branched out in enough directions, doing children shows, adult shows, and public speaking, so there’s enough variety that every day is different,” Hickman said. Additionally, he has produced several instructional videos and written a book, *Magic Speaks Louder than Words,* and he conducts lectures for fellow magicians. Hickman’s book, which is more like a workbook, complements his talks to pediatricians and other groups about how to interact with children and put them at ease. He has given this presentation to physicians, nurses, physician assistants, dentists, and others.

To make a go at being a pro, Hickman integrated all of his skills to present a well-rounded package to clients. He offers regular magic shows and specialty shows, ones geared toward promoting recycling,

reading, teaching conflict resolution, and motivation.

The first Hickman lecture was for a group of Montreal magicians, and it was a memorable experience, he said. Half of the audience spoke French only, and they had an interpreter. So, Hickman had to find a rhythm to his presentation, making sure to pause after every paragraph so the French side could catch up through the interpreter. The English-speaking group would laugh at his material, and a few beats later, the French side would laugh, too. "My wife was in the audience," he said, "and was impressed enough at the proceedings to give me the encouragement to keep lecturing."

About twelve years ago, Hickman was scheduled for his first lecture at the famed Magic Castle in Hollywood, California. In a roundabout way, the gig came through a magic video tape he produced. The late Billy McComb was reviewing videos for *Genii* magazine, and something stood out about the video. "He reviewed the videotape, and he had some nice things to say," Hickman said.

McComb would later write the foreword to Hickman's book. In it, McComb stated: "In my [mind], everything on the video was sensible, absolutely correct, and all the advice given showed that he'd gained his experience by actually going out and doing

*Working fairs, festivals, and school assemblies, the BJ Hickman Show covers several New England states. 1990 photo*



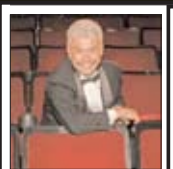
*A job as a radio station DJ led to a twenty-year position in advertising sales. 1982 photo.*

the presentations in the *real* world. So, I gave it a very enthusiastic review. Many of our big names in magic make videos which sell well to fellow magicians. When viewers try the stuff on colleagues in their local magic club, they find that it goes wonderfully well, but when they get to the paying customers they get one big yawn. Not the case for BJ's presentation."

McComb and several other magicians based on the West Coast were on a tour, which brought them to the Portsmouth (N.H.) Music Hall. The group got to town a day early, and McComb looked up Hickman, and they spent the day together. In the group were Jack Goldfinger and Peter Pit. At the end of the day, McComb and Pit went to Hickman's home, and they talked about magic late into the night. Pit said he would try to help him out at the Magic Castle, and McComb later introduced Hickman to the one who scheduled lectures at the Castle.

When Hickman finally lectured there, McComb showed him around the legendary home of legerdemain. "I had lectured before, and I knew what I was talking about," he said. However, he still found the experience to be intimidating.

Later, Hickman was invited to perform at the Castle, and he wondered what he would bring out there that audiences hadn't seen before that would still wow magicians. This is where Hickman became collaborative. To prepare for his debut performance at the Magic Castle, Hickman scheduled a series of free shows. He sent out press releases inviting people to the free shows, but with one



**B.J. HICKMAN**  
Magician

### Local magician will attempt to foretell morning's headlines

DOVER — B.J. Hickman, a nationally known magician, is making a new take on Foster's Daily Democrat's conversion from an afternoon to a morning newspaper. He can predict, a week in advance, the Nov. 26 conversion date front page headlines that will be in Foster's on that date.

Executive Editor Rod Duda is skeptical of Hickman's prediction ability and the editorial staff will do everything they can to ensure Hickman's curate with his headlines. "The magician said the lines he predicts will be about new stories and will not related to the conversion itself ensure the validity of his powers."

This Monday morning, just 8:30 a.m., Hickman on live broadcasts on WTSN (1270 AM & 87.7 THE BAY) will seal in an envelope his predicted headlines he claims will be in Foster's a week later on Nov. 26.

The sealed envelope will then be mailed to Kathleen Murphy, executive vice president of Lacoia Savings Bank, who will place the envelope in the Dover branch vault.

On the 6th, Murphy will bring the envelope to the radio stations for an 8:30 a.m. broadcast where she will unseal the envelope and disclose the predicted headlines, which will then be compared to the headlines on Foster's historic morning edition. Witnesses will watch the envelope being mailed Monday to obtain an official postmark with the Nov. 19 date.

Hickman refers to this as an exercise in mentalism and mind reading, something he often includes in his magic shows around the country. He is perhaps best known locally for his many performances before educational assemblies, corporate entertainment and family shows at festivals and special events.

Nationally, he performs at venues that include Hollywood.



### Presto digito — Magician guesses Foster's headlines

By **REBECCA HAMM**  
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DOVER — Sleight-of-hand artist B.J. Hickman passed magical muster Monday in predicting the front page headlines of Foster's Daily Democrat debut morning newspaper.

The nationally known prestidigitator from Dover had his forecasts announced live at 12:00 AM WTSN and 8:7 PM. The live to morning delivery. After 125 years as an afternoon paper, Foster's is now on several promotions in the Seacoast area — including the well-publicized headline prediction.

"We got the morning paper out. It was a challenge to get the paper out without a glitch," said Patricia Foster, the newspaper's vice president of administrative affairs who was on-air Monday morning. "It was executed beautifully," she said as she complimented Foster's employees' hard work.

"There's a little magic in the air," WTSN News Director Paul LaBarge told the listening audience as Lacoia Savings Bank Senior Vice President Kathleen Murphy sliced open the sealed envelope containing the predictions with a razor.

Spurring a tie of white rabbits around the room, Hickman said he predicted a magic hat. Hickman said he

DOVER  
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**NATIONALLY RENOWNED MAGICIAN** B.J. Hickman pumps his fists in triumph after he successfully predicted a week ago several of the headlines that appeared Monday on the front page of Foster's Daily Democrat's inaugural morning edition. Astonished by his prediction ability behind the newspaper's decision to convert to a morning newspaper, Executive Editor Rod Duda is skeptical of Hickman's prediction ability and the editorial staff will do everything they can to ensure Hickman's curate with his headlines. "The magician said the lines he predicts will be about new stories and will not related to the conversion itself ensure the validity of his powers."

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Mike Ross/Chief photographer  
Mike Ross/Chief photographer  
For story and more photos.

requirement: Each attendee had to fill out a survey and rate the show. Hickman wanted feedback (and got quite a bit of publicity on the home front during the process). He introduced some new routines, material he believed would be a hit out West. However, he discovered that the crowds responded most favorably to the effects he had been performing for years. Other magicians gave him the advice not to do anything new. Instead, he should perform his show as if he were in front of a lay audience. Success! He's been invited back to the Castle once or twice a year for the last dozen years.

However, most of his work is in the East. It is not uncommon for Hickman to have shows in New Hampshire, Maine, and Massachusetts on the same day. His longest running gig is for an event organized by his local Chamber of Commerce. This summer will be his thirty-sixth consecutive year performing at the event.

His wife of thirty years, Donna, is a Registered Nurse and manager of a busy surgical ward at a hospital in the city of Dover, New Hampshire where they brought up their two children. Daughter Jennifer, who was featured in BJ's first video when she was seven, works in advertising and lives in the Denver area. She and husband Fran are responsible for BJ and Donna's

first grandchild, Lily. Son Daniel is in law enforcement in New Hampshire.

Last year, BJ Hickman's love for magic and background in advertising earned him the position of the enthusiastic Advertising Manager for the International Brotherhood of Magicians, including *The Linking Ring*, I.B.M. Web Portal ([www.magician.org](http://www.magician.org)), and Convention Program. His goals are to increase ad revenue for the I.B.M., create new advertising opportunities, and incorporate new technology to streamline billing and communication with advertisers.

Executive Editor Samuel Patrick Smith says Hickman has already demonstrated that he is more than equal to the task. "BJ is first-class in every respect. He's done a terrific job as Advertising Manager, and he is a pleasure to work with. Advertisers appreciate not only his professionalism but his sense of humor and creativity."

You can see BJ Hickman in person this summer at the I.B.M. Convention in San Diego, where he will be meeting and visiting with advertisers and potential advertisers.

*Hickman lectured last year at the I.B.M. Convention and returns this year where he will be meeting and visiting with advertisers and potential advertisers. His new lecture, "50 ideas in 50 Minutes," debuts at the KIDabra convention later this summer.*