

# BJ Hickman: Dover's man of magic entertains from coast to coast

**By Ryan Alan**  
Contributing Writer

Wherever BJ Hickman goes, a sense of wonder seems to follow.

The reason isn't only that the longtime Dover resident and Manchester native has been a magician most of his 57 years.

It's also in the spirit and enthusiasm he conveys for life and its surprises, the manner in which he embraces and shares the lightheartedness and joy to be found in any given day if we really look for it, and the effort that he makes along the way, via his personality and talent, to ease the journey of even strangers who find comfort in what he does.

## Fans rave

As one fan (Susan Kominz of Thornton) raves, "We all need more people like him in our lives. He's one of those rare human beings of quality who actually deserves all this praise."

At neighborhood schools, libraries, fairs, clubs, family events and other gatherings on the Seacoast and beyond, and on stages as far as California that place him in a regional and national spotlight, Hickman has the same goal — to make a connection with people, to be a catalyst for a smile dancing across their faces, to awaken or reawaken, in children and adults alike, a sense of wonder and awe.

It's that reaction, that connection that never grows old, Hickman assured. It's that response that continues to keep what he does fresh for him, even after all these years.

It's probably why he also acknowledged, "I'm the same little kid as when I first became interested in magic 48 years ago. But now I'm making a living at it, have a wonderful family, including a granddaughter."

Through the centuries, magic has remained a timeless art form, he suggested, because "people generally like to be entertained, to laugh and also, with magic, to wonder. It makes them forget the day-to-day for a short while."

Hickman does that with a facility that elicits its own wonder say those who book or watch his shows.

"BJ Hickman is a favorite here at the Magic Castle," said Jack Goldfinger, director of entertainment for the private Hollywood club that is one of the holy grails for magicians nationally, and where Hickman will give his 300th performance later this year.

"Our audiences are from around the world. They expect only the best magical entertainment. BJ also has shared his expertise several times in our lecture series for the Magic Castle magician members," Goldfinger said.

New Jersey-based magician Dennis Michael Dowhy (CORRECT), a children's entertainer who performs under the stage name of Dennis Michael, bought Hickman's magic instructional tape in 2001 and loved it, then met Hickman at KIDabra International, the Association of Family and Kid Show Performers.

"I liked how BJ had fun with kids, kind of like I do, so there



**BJ Hickman's success** comes from more than just pulling a rabbit out of a hat. Hickman is able to connect with these audiences, both young and not so young.

was an immediate attachment between us," he recalled. "BJ has traveled all over the USA and is well known for his comedy and sincerity for helping children laugh. He knows the power of laughter. It can be seen in full force especially when BJ performs for children with special needs. His strength and

ability can easily be seen when there are kids around. The smiles on the little ones are priceless. He is truly a caring person."

## WELL LIKED BY AUDIENCES

Dowhy is quick to add that Hickman is very good at entertaining adults as well with his

clean and witty sense of humor. "Not only is BJ amazing. He is well liked by his audience too," he said.

He also describes Hickman as a very giving person who shares his wealth of knowledge with his peers in magic clubs throughout the country. He's been hired to perform at the KIDabra International Conference, which, Dowhy said, would not have survived the past 20 years if it didn't book the best in the business. "His peers love him," he said.

Magicians are friendly people who have a common interest in the joy of sharing the craft, said Hickman, who is treasurer of the local New Hampshire chapter of the 12,000-member International Brotherhood of Magicians and advertising manager for the International's monthly magazine, *The Linking Ring*, and Web portal ([www.magician.org](http://www.magician.org)).

Samuel Patrick Smith, *The Linking Ring* executive editor, lauds Hickman as "first-class in every respect." "He's done a terrific job, advertisers appreciate not only his professionalism but his sense of humor and creativity," Smith told Bobby Warren in a cover story ("Magician of Many Talents") Warren penned on Hickman for the magazine last year.

Hickman has been a professional magician since he was a teen, making the move in his 40s to full-time after he decided to transition from his career in Dover radio, which followed graduation from Keene State College in 1975, where he majored in psychology and communications.

## DOVER RADIO VETERAN

He was with WTSN for 21 years, moving from DJ to general sales manager for the station and its then new WBYY-FM. He found it being a Top 40 DJ exciting and also enjoyed working with people in the sales department.

"I took all the skills I learned in radio, including sales, marketing, communication etc., and Hickman, PAGE 6



**This mid-1970's** black-and-white photo shows BJ Hickman levitating an unidentified City Hall employee on the front lawn of Dover City Hall.



# Hickman

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in radio, including sales, marketing, communication etc., and went to work for myself,” he explained. The on-air announcing, writing radio advertisements, writing and sending press releases, sales, marketing and communications all are a solid foundation for what he does now as an entertainer, public speaker, and presenter of educational theme programs, using magic as a teaching tool, in schools and for organizations.

The subjects include recycling, reading, conflict resolution and motivation. “I took some of my passions and created motivational programs to present in the schools (and elsewhere),” he said.

Cindy Schilling, Youth Services librarian at Wells Public Library, Wells, Maine, said Hickman’s performances are “fantastic.”

“I’m often reluctant to hire the same magician year after

year, because the material is the same, but BJ never fails to amaze and entertain with new material every year,” she added.

## LOUDER THAN WORDS

He self-published “Magic Speaks Louder than Words” as a workbook for his speaking presentations. He also has made several DVDs which he markets to magicians, along with lecture notes, tricks and props.

He recently traveled to Utah to record several videos to be used with a new website for teachers: [www.TeachbyMagic.com](http://www.TeachbyMagic.com). He also has authored a booklet and is working on a DVD in conjunction with a new presentation he offers to magicians he calls, “50 Ideas in 50 Minutes.”

He speaks to teachers, pediatricians and other groups about how to interact with children and put them at ease. “I teach them several easy to learn magic tricks and other diversions and curiosities,” Hickman explained.

His favorite audience is a family crowd attended by peo-

ple of all ages. “I try to do the show on several levels all at the same time so everyone has a good time. The adults wonder how the magic is done, the children laugh and react and the adults also enjoy the reactions of the children,” he explained.

Are children or adults a more challenging audience? Is it easier to convince a child or an adult to suspend their disbelief?

Hickman: “Children don’t mind saying what they are thinking, while they are thinking it. So it’s a challenge to be fast paced and anticipate their reactions, have responses ready and have fun with it. Adults are harder to read. Many of their reactions come later. They express how they enjoyed the show after the show with comments and questions.”

Like the “greatest hits” for a magician, there are some tricks and gags audiences request each time he visits — “mostly the silly content, a magic mouse, ‘The Yes game,’ many of the audience participation tricks I do,” he said.

While he finds everything

that he does satisfying, it is gratifying to him when another magician asks about a trick he has come up with on his own.

## ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN

Hickman likes the “anything can happen” aspect of live performance and enjoys having his reaction skills tested. “He’s truly unflappable,” said Wells Library’s Cindy Schilling.

Performing recently for a group of magicians in New Jersey, a woman helper proved to be more outgoing, flamboyant, loud and anxious to try to assist his presentation. “It turned out funny. I got to use my reaction skills and make the best of it,” he said.

Once, during a family show for the Berwick Academy Alumni Reunion in Maine, he had just presented his one-handed knot in rope trick.

Hickman: “I always try to get children to challenge me when I say, ‘If I wanted to, I could make a knot in this rope with one hand without looking!’ Usually a child will shout out, ‘Do it!’” On this occasion, however, a four or five year old in the front row shouted, ‘Do it naked!’ That’s not the kind of exposure I need.”

Those moments that seem to take a performance above the ordinary, that make it especially memorable for him, come from audience response and sensing they are especially in tune with what he is doing.

“Last week, at an assisted living facility in Dover, there were a few children in the audience, also, and one little boy kept laughing much louder than everybody else,” he recalled. “It was contagious.”

So too is Hickman’s good nature, said Susan Kominz of Thornton, who first met him at a function at Strawberry Banke Museum in Portsmouth.

She and her husband have attended many of his performances. “His shows bring joy and laughter into my life every single time,” she said. “I have never observed a single moment when B.J. was not gracious and kind before, during and after

his performances, even when his busy schedule made him pressed for time.”

## HE’S FOR REAL

She finds him completely genuine. “His tricks may be all ‘an act,’ but he, himself, is not,” she assured. “One of his greatest strengths is a dedication to using his talent for the happiness of others and the betterment of society.”

Hickman said his approach on stage is “to be a nice guy, sharing some laughs, having some fun, entertaining an audience.”

He does not want to come across as “a smart aleck showing something with an attitude like, ‘Look what I can do, and you can’t,’” he explained. “I prefer for the ‘trick’ to happen in the hands of the spectator, or a child being the star of the show, with the child doing the magic, and the audience knowing that I was the facilitator.”

That’s part of the appeal of BJ Hickman, said Aaron Wensley, marketing director of Greater Dover Chamber of Commerce, who calls him “the consummate professional.” “He has the ability to adapt his performances to virtually any audience,” Wensley said.

Hickman has performed at the chamber’s Cochecho Arts Festival since its inception in 1986 and will again this summer for its 25th anniversary.

*(A longer and more detailed version of this story can be found on the web at [www.fosters.com](http://www.fosters.com).*

*For more information on BJ Hickman, including his performance dates, log on to: [www.bjhickman.com](http://www.bjhickman.com). He can be reached at 1-888-262-4425 or 1-603-742-4010, or via email: [bj@bjhickman.com](mailto:bj@bjhickman.com). Hickman was scheduled to give a “Local Experts” luncheon talk yesterday (Feb. 23) for the Dover Chamber. He is auctioneer at the annual magic auction for magicians March 20 in Portsmouth, and will be a judge in the Greater New England Magic Contest in April.)*

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