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## A lesson in twists and pops

Balloon artist teaches children how to craft his 'delicate toys'

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Dave Thomen was a teenager when he learned to "twist" balloons, so he wasn't sure Thursday night whether the middle-schoolers in front of him would be able to do it or not.

Thomen, 38, of Hampstead, is a professional magician and balloon artist. Willing to share his talents, Thomen has taught several magic classes through the Carroll County Bureau of Recreation, but this was his first time trying to teach balloon sculpture.

"I was a little nervous starting the class," Thomen said. "But I was pretty pleased with how they did."

After handing out the balloons, balloon pumps and instruction guides, Thomen gave a quick overview of how to blow up the balloons, how to tie them and what kind of balloons to use. And then the twisting started.

Several students made wincing faces as screeches and squeals came from the long, tubular balloons they twisted into three bubbles at a time, then twisted the bubbles together to lock them into place.

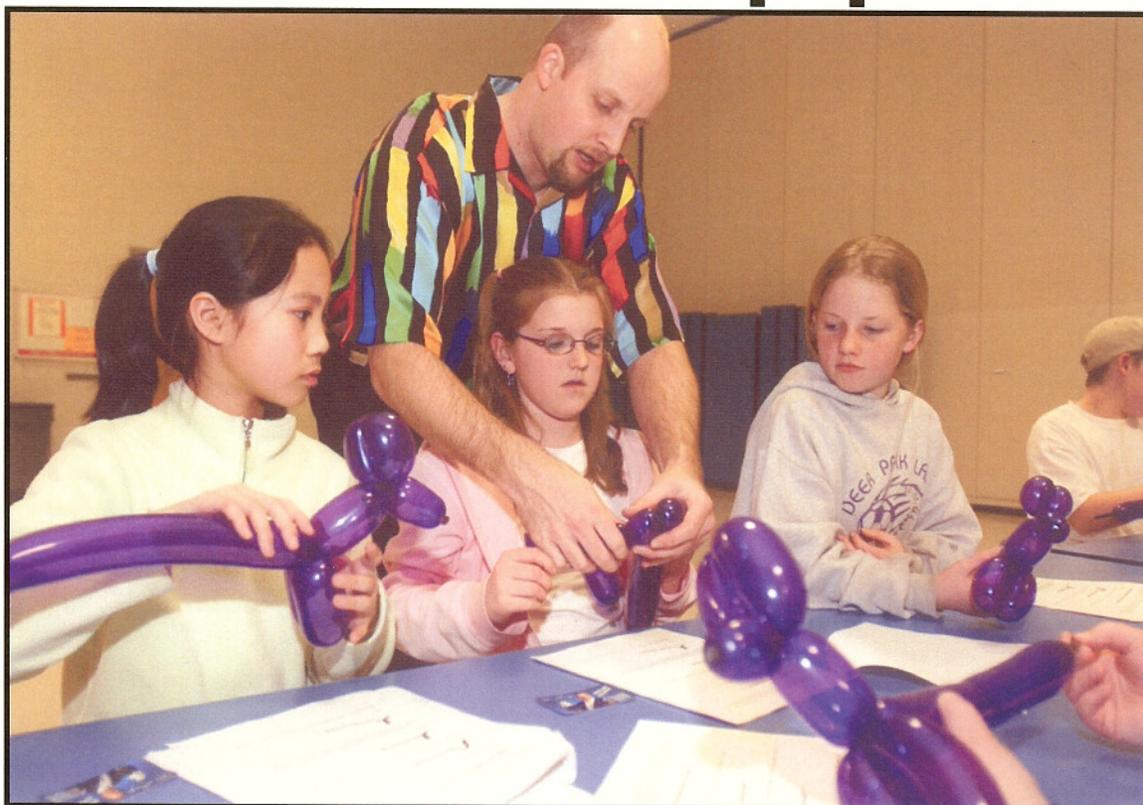
Tommy Mazzone, 13, practiced twisting a bubble and accidentally let it go, making a popping sound but without bursting the balloon. He smiled and twisted again.

"It doesn't matter how much you twist it, it isn't going to pop," Thomen told his students. "Don't get frustrated if it's not working for you yet."

Twisting might not make it pop, but defaults in the balloon may cause a pop now and then. Tommy and two other students both lost their first creation—a balloon dog—before it was completed. Luckily, balloons are sold in bulk.

Kimmy Hunter, 12, realized as she was making the back legs of her dog that she hadn't made them both quite the same size, and made a face of disappointment.

"It's going to be lopsided," she said. "That's OK, it's your first one,"



CHRIS AMMANN/STAFF PHOTOS

Magician Dave Thomen helps Megan Lin, left, Kelly Aumiller and Kimmy Hunter with their balloon dogs during a class at Friendship Valley Elementary School on Thursday evening.

Thomen reassured her. Once the class finished their first dogs, Thomen had them create another one, just to practice the same skills and gain more confidence. The second round of dogs was finished much quicker, and this time no one's popped. Thomen has quite a catalog of balloon sculptures he can make, including a parrot, moose, frog, bear, pig, rattlesnake, alien, flowers, hats and swords, to name a few. Thomen had a dozen of these creations on display at Friendship Valley Elementary School Thursday night to give his students an idea of what is possible.

"They're not only fun to make, they're fun to give out," Thomen told his class. "It's kind of an irresistible, delicate toy."

After the two dogs, the class learned to make a giraffe and a rabbit with the same steps but different proportions. Next week, the class promised to learn more steps, including the bird twist, which allows them to make a parrot, a swan and other animals.



Balloons of a red puppet, a dog and a crab, sit on a table of examples for the balloon art class to observe.

J.T. Cummings, 13, had raised his hand when Thomen asked the class if anyone would ever be interested in making balloon animals at parties as a part-time job. J.T. said he has a lot of younger cousins, and could see himself making these animals for them at some of their parties.

The Bureau of Recreation offers numerous classes of different topics for both children and adults. For a copy of their class schedule, visit the Carroll County Department of Recreation and parks or check your local library.

Reach Dave Thomen at 410-374-5346 or on the web at [www.d-smagic.com](http://www.d-smagic.com). This article reprinted with permission from Carroll County Times.