



AUDIENCE PLEASERS

Entertainment Division of Special Event Associates, Inc.

Fire-eaters? Impersonators? Sure no problem

Clifton business looking to please.

By Helen Walters
Staff Writer

CLIFTON -Dennis Telischak's business is bustling. There are staffers working out of cubicles, but something – the model carnival on the table, maybe says this is not a typical business. A client is on the phone – they want a Madonna impersonator, but they have not made up their mind about Elvis.

This is the office of Audience Pleasers, an event planning company whose business is theme parties and entertainment. Their clients include large companies, nonprofit organizations, and private parties. Founded in 1970 as a one-man enterprise, the company has grown into a full-scale production company that represents 1,400 entertainers.

Dennis Telischak said, "A lot of entertainment companies have a cookie cutter approach. What sets Audience Pleasers apart is our ability to tailor events to the clients." One of their most popular events is Casino Nights, but it can be a roaring 20's party or a Las Vegas themed night. If a client wants a magician, they can have a parlor magician, a strolling magician or a grand-stage illusionist.

One sweet 16 party, held two Octobers ago at



Trump National Golf Club in Bedminster, had 22 different entertainers. The theme was Arabian Nights, and Audience Pleasers brought stilt walkers, magicians' fortunetellers, henna artists, two different musical acts, belly dancers and a fire-eater. In addition to the entertainment, they provided food and décor – custom airbrush artwork; cake styled to look like Arabian pillows, special lighting and lanterns, and an 8-foot Aladdin's lamp. The birthday girl wanted everything to match her dress, so they dyed the furniture tangerine. According to scale event sometimes means getting creative." The building where the party was supposed to take place had been bulldozed, so they substituted seven 10-foot tents. The tents had to be lit, lined, decorated, comfortably heated, and weighted down to deal with wind conditions.

According to Dennis "we are almost 50-50 private party versus corporate party." Any event with more than five entertainers is a corporate event. The company also has a long list of corporate clients. A successful casino night for Johnson & Johnson in Princeton led the

pharmaceutical company to request two more – Antwerp, Belgium and Shanghai China. In December Audience Pleasers provides Santa Clauses for Lord & Taylor department stores. Dennis said "you can not have a regular Santa Claus at Lord & Taylor." Their Santa's pride themselves on real beards and plush suits. For those two crucial weekends before Christmas, 34 different Santa's needed to walk through the doors of the different stores at 10 a.m. on the dot.

Audience Pleasers also works with a number of nonprofit organizations, where they donate props and scenery. When Telischak purchased the company from founder Ron Owens in 2004, it was a single desk. Dennis said "what I bought was two disks: one of clients, and one was entertainers."

Now Dennis employs a small core staff, with additional production crew depending on the size of the event. They have a toll-free number, a Web site and a warehouse full of scenery and props. Telischak said the challenge now is letting the company grow, but not too quickly.



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In 2006 the company held 520 events, up from 168 in 2004.

While Telischak's previous career was as a marketing consultant- a field he says prepared him well for running a company like Audience Pleasers. He has a performing background as well.

production of Barnum, where he learned to "juggle, stilt walk, eat-fire and all kinds of other stuff" He has performed off-Broadway, at NYC Fringe Fest, and has been a part of Audience pleasers for 15 years. Lewis' magic act is a favorite at one law firm, but says he performs for all ages. Lewis said "you

Audience Pleasers, Owens used the money to go to graduate school, and is now a therapist for New Jersey Hospice. Owens has toured the country speaking on humor as it applies to people in their last stage of life. Owens said, "Laughter, really is the best medicine." He was amazed at how Audience Pleasers has expanded over 37 years. Owens said, "I really want to be hear for its 50th anniversary."



While stationed as a medic on a helicopter in Vietnam, his crew chief taught him how to be a magician. Now, he teaches magic in Clifton's adult evening school and occasionally performs at parties. Telischak said, "Being an entertainer yourself, you understand all the anxiety, apprehension and tension that goes along with performing."

Earlier this year the staff and entertainers gathered to celebrate the company's 37th anniversary. Some of the entertainers who worked with Audience Pleasers are known for their versatility. Like performer R.J. Lewis, a magician who also performs as an actor, stilt walker and fire-eater. Starting out as a street performer in the 70's, Lewis was hired for a Broadway

can do the same tricks for adults and kids. Its about the presentation."

Richard Stillman, a Montclair based actor, works primarily as a bandleader and singer for Audience Pleasers. He can play banjo, mandolin, guitar, bagpipes, ukulele, lute balalaika, and didgeridoo Stillman said "were always saying we need an actor who plays banjo, or can tap dance, so I learned the skills." He also works as a storyteller and a juggler, and often performs in schools.

Ron Owens, the founder of Audience Pleasers, also started out as a performer. While working as a teacher, he was a magician on the side using skills he picked up from his father, a vaudeville performer. When he sold

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