

## Magical business

Brothers prepare to perform their larger-than-life tricks of the trade.

By Sandy Alexander, Sun Staff



Many college students wait tables, work in libraries or tutor to make some money. Peter Wood turns a small hamster into a giant one.

As owner of Shazam Magic, the 21-year-old University of Maryland, Baltimore County senior also makes sponge balls disappear, multiplies scarves and does "mind-reading" tricks with cards.

"It's a great weekend job for a student," said Wood, who got his first paid job as a magician when he was 10 years old and will appear at the Howard County Fair four times daily, tomorrow through Aug. 13.

Since Wood and now 15-year-old brother, Matt, filled in last-minute at the 2000 fair, the duo, who live in Monrovia, have been a fixture at the West Friendship event.

At his first fair, Peter "had a tremendous amount of enthusiasm, and he had the place packed," said Carol Chaney, a fair board member in charge of booking entertainment.

Now, she says, hiring him is "an automatic. ... He puts so much effort [into his shows]."

This year, the Wood brothers' theme is "larger than life." Hence the hamster trick - which does not use live animals.

In addition, they will re-create a traditional cup-and-ball, sleight-of-hand trick with garbage cans and do card tricks with a foot-tall deck.

The Woods also have built what they say is a mind-reading machine out of boxes, tubes, plumbing pipes and two metal colanders.

"I really like a trick that can entertain a wide variety of audiences," Peter said.



Peter received his first magic kit when he was 5 years old and, he said, "It just kind of stuck."

An adult friend at church who performed magic gave Peter some advice and pointed him to more sophisticated magic supplies.

His fledgling business got a boost when he was 12, and his father - who was also the Shazam Magic chauffeur until Peter turned 16 - bought several professional magic devices at an estate sale.



Word of mouth and a Web site led to more birthday parties and church performances.

Now Peter has expanded his services to include strolling magic where he interacts with people, corporate parties and larger public events.

Matt, a rising junior at Urbana High School, works regularly as assistant, rabbit wrangler and balloon animal expert.

The brothers said they brainstorm year-round to develop new tricks and variations on old ones.



"It has got to be fun for us, too," Peter said. "I get tired of the same old tricks."



Once they think of something, "then we figure out how it's going to look and how to make it happen," Matt said.

"That is where a lot of the tricks die," Peter added.

As the fair approaches, the brothers shop for some props and build others in the workshop of the home they share with their parents.

Finally, there are rehearsals to practice the moves that make the magic look effortless and the humor that makes the whole performance entertaining.

Rather than telling jokes, Peter said, he does magic tricks with funny elements.

"The crowd is so diverse, somebody is going to laugh [at the punch lines]," Matt said.

"You can see how much he enjoys it," Chaney said. "Kids love him, parents love him, and without question, we do."

*Originally published in the Baltimore Sun on August 5, 2005*