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More than tricks

Snowmass magician receives national award

By Naomi Havlen

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One of Snowmass Village's most recognizable faces has been recognized on a national scale for his magical talents, wit and ability to work a crowd.

Bill "Doc" Eason, who spent almost three decades behind the magic bar at the Tower Restaurant in Snowmass, was given the first-ever Bar Magician of the Year award from the Hollywood Academy of Magical Arts this month.

The Academy of Magical Arts is housed in the Magic Castle, a private magic club in Los Angeles. The academy has been giving out awards to stage, parlor and close-up magicians for 37 years, but it wasn't until Eason turned the castle's bar area into a bona fide magic bar that it considered awarding a bar magician award each year.

And after turning an everyday bar into one where a magician makes cards or napkins appear and disappear while drinks are served, Eason received the first award.

"Being a bar magician is more than just tricks - it's a whole personality thing. It's 'What's your name and where are you from?'" Doc said. "People don't remember what you did, they'll remember how you made them feel."

Arguably thousands of people have watched Doc cut open a lemon and pull out a \$20 bill or throw a playing card through a ceiling fan and make it stick to the ceiling. He performed these tricks for years at the Tower Restaurant and Magic Bar before it closed in 2004.

It's easier to get a new audience than a new act, he says. But that didn't stop Snowmass' families and generations of visitors from watching Doc's performances year after year.

"When people knew that the end of the Tower was in sight, it was like a reunion every night," he said. "It's not unusual for me to perform for a grandfather, his son and a small boy and know that I performed for the grandfather when his son was young."

Abacadabra, a magic career is born

Doc's persona in the Roaring Fork Valley extends beyond his trademark bow tie, suspenders, round glasses and beard. He's known for incredible memory retention of names and playing cards - sometimes memorizing 20 names and corresponding cards at one time in his act.

"Your name is the most personal thing you own - when you remember someone's name, it touches them in the heart," he said. "Walking into the Tower was like walking into Cheers, where everybody knows your name."

Doc Eason wasn't one of those little kids who fell in love with magic at a friend's birthday party and picked up the craft at a young age. Instead, he was a salesman for years, which is how he developed his acute people skills.

Before moving to the Roaring Fork Valley he worked at a health food store and health food bar in California, where his customers gave him the name "Doc" for prescribing remedies for everything from "hemorrhoids to hangnails."

When he was 30, he took a motorcycle trip to Colorado to visit some friends who happened to co-own the Tower with musician John Denver.

Then-magician at the restaurant's magic bar Bob Sheets dazzled Doc with his magic skills. Doc had an epiphany about what he wanted to do with his life.

"It was a life-changing experience - I planned on being there a week, and I decided to stick around," he said.

Doc learned magic with a stack of books that Sheets loaned him, and he practiced relentlessly.

He kept his nickname as a stage name, and it stuck.

"I realized that magicians don't write the songs the whole world sings," he said. "People don't remember their names. It's easier to remember 'Doc' than to remember Bill Eason."

Twenty-eight years later, he still had Sheets' old job at the Tower.

When the restaurant and bar closed in 2004, Doc and magician Eric Mead were left to pursue other ventures in their field. Both travel the world performing magic at private parties and corporate events - Doc has been to Australia, Amsterdam and England, among other countries.

But he's still firmly rooted in the Roaring Fork Valley, where he raises a 13-year-old daughter and helps Snowmass Village plan the Snowmagical Family Fun Fest, this year from July 29 to 31. The weekend of magic, street performances and workshops brings out local and visiting families.

And Doc hasn't given up hope that a magic bar can still thrive in the village. This winter he performed one night a week at the Stonebridge Inn, drawing huge crowds of fans.

He is also conspiring with architect T. Michael Manchester and Snowmass' mayor to find a new location for a permanent magic bar. They're looking into getting a spot in the Base Village development, or into what could be a redeveloped Snowmass Village Mall.

"The heart and soul of magic in Snowmass didn't live in the walls of the Tower - it's in Eric, in me, and everyone who had ever come across that threshold," he said.

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