

Clown prince: West Boylston entertainer follows his dream

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Rettig, from West Boylston, has appeared as Flippo on television networks such as Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network and ABC Family. Traveling throughout southern New England and New Hampshire, he has appeared at locations including Harvard Square and Mohegan Sun Casino, and considers his performance at the Block Island 350th anniversary last Memorial Day the

highlight of his career. His versatility ranges from sword-swallowing and balancing stunts, to card tricks and ukulele songs, and he teaches clowning arts classes at local schools and community centers, including the Worcester Jewish Community Center's Camp Habonim, and Assabet Valley Regional Technical High School in Marlboro.

"I haven't had a weekend off in 19 years," said Rettig, whose schedule is filled with appearances at birthday parties, employee appreciation days and grand openings; he even does benefit work for hospitals. However, Rettig's road to success was long and gradual. In his early days of clowning around, he never expected to be where he is today.

Even as a young boy, Rettig was fascinated by the performing arts. "I saw the Beatles (live) in 1966. I was 11," he said with a smile. Rettig took up an interest in juggling when he was 16 years old, but kept it as merely a hobby for decades, being content with his full-time position at the Postal Service.

At age 34, Rettig was juggling in his backyard when a 55-year-old Jaguar salesman named Jack Court walked by and was impressed by Rettig's skill. Court was interested in forming a partnership, but Rettig originally believed there was no money to be made in juggling. Around 1989, the two created an act called "The Jack and Larry Show," which mostly featured juggling. It was only a part-time job, but their shows were popular, and someone from an entertainment agency eventually suggested they become clowns.

"To make a long story short, we took a chance," said Rettig.

Court became Robo the Clown, while Rettig became Flippo, and the two ended their partnership.

Rettig sighed: "We had to separate, because nobody wants to hire two clowns."

Even for a clown who can balance a baton on a bit between his teeth, balancing two careers proved to be difficult. Rettig said that the best decision he made in his life was eventually quitting his job with the Postal Service, devoting his time to his clowning career.

“When they say take chances, take chances,” explained Rettig, who took another chance when he also became Flippo the Juggling Magician a couple of years ago. This new persona is separate from his clown act, and does not require the hours of work he usually spends putting on makeup.

Both acts have found success. “Even with this economy, it’s the most prosperous year since 2002,” Rettig said. He explained that his grandmother used to tell him that even during the Great Depression, people would find 10 cents to be entertained by a Shirley Temple film. Rettig believes that people need to be amused when they are surviving difficult times, and children’s interests are consistent regardless of the economy:

“As long as there’s children, I’ll always have a job.”

Rettig entertains children throughout Central Massachusetts, not only every Thursday at Moe’s, but also every Wednesday at Buffalo Wild Wings in Fitchburg. He’ll also be appearing Saturday and Sunday at Davis Farmland, 145 Redstone Hill Road, Sterling.

At Moe’s, in between offering high fives to small children and cracking jokes, Rettig talked about self-belief and determination. “Go for what your dream is,” he said with a nod. “That’s what I’ll tell anybody.”