

Balloon artist delights young and old

By Melyssa Gloude

Under a dim light, there's a flash of colour. The squeaking (almost unbearable) repeats as a form begins to become recognizable. The balloon shapes twist and bend until a familiar character appears and –

"It's a Ninja Turtle," he says, and cracking a childlike smile, he hands me the balloon creation. He begins to blow up another balloon, as I watch in amazement at his sheer ability to do it in one solid breath.

He goes by Christopher the Twistopher, Balloon Sculptor Extraordinaire. "...But you can call me Chris." He smiles again, still busy twisting his balloons into a variety of shapes.

The balloons are accumulating now, hovering around the room and giving it a magical quality.

Chris Bauer, 20, has been a Quinte community staple for almost 10 years—working festivals, private parties, elementary schools, trade shows and other events as a balloon artist. He was born and bred in Belleville, but his fame had spread all over eastern Ontario.

"It started out as work," he says. "but eventually... it just becomes fun. I don't even feel like I'm working, half the time." He has a friendly face, punctuating his sentences with soft laughter.

"I bring more than just great balloons: I tell jokes, I tap dance," and most importantly, he says "I talk and laugh with each child as I work." The floor is covered now, in a giant colour wheel of balloon figures from bears to cats to hats to dolphins. He assures me that he can make anything I want.

"I've created and perfected a few techniques over the years – I've invented so many ideas myself." He tells me how he loves a challenge, too. "The improvisation is the best part about my job. I get to make things on the spot,

and it's even better when the kids get really excited about it."

I'm watching in amazement, at this point. He flies through the motions, a flurry of twisting and folding. I understand now why he's so popular at events, drawing large crowds not only for the finished balloon sculpture but for the artistic process. He thinks of himself as an entertainer, above all things. Not just some clown, not just some guy with balloons, but an artist.

Although this isn't his full-time gig, it still remains a huge part of his life. "It's cool, though, instead of dreading getting up and going to work, I get to put on silly hats and make balloon sculptures for kids. Honestly, this has to be one of the better jobs out there."

"There was never really a starting point, either," He says. "My dad, he's a musician and an artist and he's sort of... 'out there'. I was sort of brought up expected have some sort of eccentricities. When I was younger, I had this keen interest for things that most kids didn't."

"I would spend hours learning magic tricks, or making balloon animals.... Learning how to play instruments and reading."

Chris also plays a variety of instruments – piano, guitar, drums. Anybody who's ever spoken in person with him would also be quick to notice his extremely deep voice (which matches his towering stature). He's a very gifted singer, on top of his list of hobbies.

His undeniable charisma paired with undying creativity and ingenuity makes him a wonderful asset of the Quinte community and beyond. Whether you know him as Chris Bauer or Christopher the Twistopher, he's sure to bring artistry into your life like he brought a million balloons into my house.



Photo by Melyssa Gloude

Kristopher the Twistopher, a 'Balloon Sculptor Extraordinaire' Chris Bauer, 20, has been a Quinte community staple for almost 10 years— working festivals, private parties, elementary schools, trade shows and other events.

Merry Christmas or Happy Holidays?

By Nam Phi Dang

With the winter break arriving soon, debate over saying Christmas versus Happy Holidays stirs up.

The holidays are coming up and just about everyone is getting hyped up to enjoy it. One thing for sure is that people do plan to take a break from their regular lives and relax. What is becoming more confusing, however, is what they will be celebrating.

Every year, Canada becomes a more and more multicultural country with folks and families bringing their respective cultures and religion along too. While all forms of Christianity and visibly white individuals still make up for a majority of Canada's population, about 23 per cent of Canada's religion is other religion or non-religious, according to a 2001 Statistics Canada census and about 20 per cent of Canada's population are visible minorities, including non-whites and aboriginal, according to the 2006 Stats Can census.

With the number of immigrants only growing more and more, the face of Canada's identity changes with it and with the holiday break coming up, individuals are either celebrating or saying to each other "Merry Christmas" or "Happy Holidays."



Amelia Rutter



Kenny Wells



Megan Mattice



Sam Hope



Vishal Patel

Does the change to celebrate one or the other take away from it? Do individuals feel the Christmas spirit is being taken away by Canada's multiculturalism and diversity? Or, is it possibly because Christmas is becoming less about the spirit of it and more about the consumerism?

Five individuals were asked about their opinion on wishing someone "Merry Christmas" versus "Happy Holidays" and their personal reason why they may say or the other.

Amelia Rutter, culinary management – "I prefer happy holidays just cause I usually find it disrespectful for those who do not celebrate it. However, I do say Merry Christmas because my parents and family used to do it. I do try to say happy holi-

days not to let anyone feel left out though. I think people care a little a bit more and are sensitive about their beliefs and about the holidays they are expressing more."

Kenny Wells, architecture – "I believe it should be happy holidays. The only reason why we say Merry Christmas is because I feel people and society have worked their selves into a mould that we live by, especially into a more western society. It needs to be broken up to accommodate other individuals and their beliefs."

Megan Mattice, journalism – "I feel you should say whatever you want to say but should not discriminate on other people for saying what they choose to say. Why not just embrace the season, be cheerful and whatever you want to say. I

usually say happy holidays but I do celebrate Christmas so when it does get closer to Christmas, I will say Merry Christmas but generally I try to say happy holidays."

Sam Hope, television and media – "I am Christian so I do believe in celebrating Christmas but I am also open to all other religions and their traditions around the holiday. I will say happy holidays to anyone who doesn't celebrate Christmas."

Vishal Patel, biotechnology – "My opinion is that it should be called Christmas. It was made so that families and friends could unite in peace and I also like to celebrate other festivals and I feel that Christmas is North America's holiday."

Cancer...

Continued from Page 1

"Then, there was two weeks of solitary confinement at home after that, and then I was done. I didn't have a voice. It was super high-pitched and I didn't get it back until just before school started, so two months later."

Even though McBride was able to take her own diagnosis lightly, a few other people had a harder time with the news. She had a lot of people to confront about the news, including her large family as well as friends at school.

"The people at school were shocked. I heard a year later that there were people that didn't believe it, that people actually said that I was lying about having cancer."

Over two years later, after having completed her treatments and constantly taking pills to replace her missing thyroid, McBride has not been touched by cancer since. Despite that fact, however, she believes she will have cancer again, being aware of her family's history. McBride believes no matter what happens, she will be able to beat cancer.

"Other than my scar, nothing changed."

Oldest Belleville instructor shares his driving wisdom

By Vivek McCague

At 72 years of age, Everett Gow is one of the oldest driving instructors in Belleville and has been teaching at Young Drivers of Canada for over 10 years.

Gow was raised in Alberta and had been driving a tractor since he was six years old on the highways there. He started driving cars in 1957 and has driven in many major cities such as Calgary, Montreal and Toronto.

Gow has had quite a few students from Toronto coming to Belleville to take lessons and for the road test because they think it is easier.

However, Gow said that the only difference is, "Probably less volume in traffic. If they're coming out here (Belleville) to get their licence, maybe there's less pressure on them to get their licence because of the lesser amount of traffic. As far as the road test is concerned, it is exactly the same."

Gow further added that all traffic laws are the same. You still need to stop at stop signs and red lights, yield to pedestrians, and follow the speed limit. All traffic laws are the same and the tests are the same as well.

"The G1 exit exam is to see if the driver abides by all the traffic laws and drives safely. Volume of traffic has nothing to do with that," Gow said.

The failure rate for the driving test at the Downsview location in Toronto is 52 per cent and the passing rate in Belleville is 82 per cent, according to Pass the Wheel driving school. Gow said there are many more people taking their driving test every day in Toronto than there are in a week at Belleville. In Toronto, there are more people to fail.

Tanner Jorginson, 19, who lives in Orillia but drives regularly in Toronto, obtained his licence in Orillia and is studying police foundations at Loyalist College. He talked about the differences between taking your driver's test in Belleville and Toronto.

"The mechanics are all the same. You just need to be more aware of the drivers around you because there's way more drivers in Toronto than Belleville. That's the only difference."

Gow has found one major flaw with the system of licensing. He says when you get your G1, you can only go on the 400 series highway with a driving instructor



Photo by Vivek McCague

Everett Gow is a 72-year old-driving instructor at Young Drivers of Canada. Gow is the oldest driving instructor in Belleville and has taught at Young Drivers for 10 1/2 years.

and there is no 400 series highway portion on the G1 exit exam. Once you get your G2 licence, you can go on the highway by yourself, even though you have no experience or knowledge of how to drive on a 400 series highway.

"The one thing I would have to question about the G1 licensing is that a lot

of G1 drivers don't have anyone that can take them on the highway. The Ministry of Transportation (MTO) should be looking at having everyone go through an hour and a half of class time and then several minutes on the highway," said Gow.

Jorginson said he taught himself how to drive on the 400 series highways by

adapting the methods of other drivers.

Gow said he has a lot of students in his driving improvement courses who would tell him they learned to drive the 400-series highways.

"By watching other people, but how do they know they are doing it right? It's scary – it really is."