

Balloon artist's career is always expanding

◆ Candia professional:

Sean McDaniel started slow, but has developed a successful enterprise.

By KATHLEEN D. BAILEY

Special to the Union Leader

CANDIA — Sean McDaniel held his story book high.

"Then Bob came to a frog, and he asked the frog how to crow," he said. "The frog said . . ."

McDaniel turned to preschooler Matthew Ferrarone, who was wearing a complicated frog head-dress made of balloons.

"Ribbett," Matthew bellowed to the roomful of friends and their parents at Smyth Library.

McDaniel has put a new twist

on the art of balloon sculpture: He doesn't just make balloon animals for children, he makes children into balloon animals, at least for one evening.

Candia children and their parents got a taste of his craft Friday night at the monthly Family Friday event, hosted by children's librarian Christina Stockin.

McDaniel, a Candia resident, already knew a lot of the children and their parents.

"I'm stocking the audience with people I know," he said jokingly as he began pulling balloons out of large trash bags.

For Friday night, McDaniel had a story, "Bob," by Tracey Campbell Pearson. Bob is a rooster who didn't know how to crow, and



Matthew Ferrarone is a frog and his sister Alyssa is a cow in the Balloon Story Time led by Sean McDaniel Friday night at Smyth Library, Candia.

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McDaniel picked the first 10 children who volunteered to create his balloon barnyard.

Aidan Stockin was the beleaguered Bob; Quinn Reed, a cat; Matthew Ferrone, the frog; Alissa Ferrone, a cow; Emily Desrosiers, a dog; Laurel Thyng, a fox; Abigail King and Noelle Thyng, Bob's chicken comrades; Sarah Limoges, the rooster who teaches Bob how to crow; and Addison Thyng, a tree.

"I'm going to tell a story, and you guys are going to act out the parts," McDaniel told the children. Their "parts" consisted of animal sounds, produced loudly and enthusiastically.

The story: Bob hangs out with chickens all the time and doesn't know how to crow. He takes to the road to learn, but picks up a lot of other animals' sounds instead before a tutorial with a fellow rooster. He gets back to his own barn and wakes the farm with his crowing.

But a shifty fox has eyed the henhouse and one night tries to invade it. Bob bellows back with every sound he learned, from "ribbett" to "moo," and scares the fox away for good.

After the performance, the actors got to keep their costumes. But everyone walked away with something: McDaniel also showed the children how to make a simple dachshund from one long balloon, and stayed with them until they'd mastered it. When one child's balloon popped, there were no tears: McDaniel simply produced another from the dozens he'd blown up.

McDaniel had always liked juggling and magic, so his wife bought him a balloon kit about 10 years ago. He made one simple dog and "got bored fast."

A year ago, his daughter's preschool had a show booked with a clown, but the clown canceled.

"My wife said, 'Sean can do

it,'" despite the fact that he had one dog in his repertoire.

But McDaniel went on the Internet, learned about 40 tricks and displayed them at the preschool party. He went professional shortly after that, attending birthday parties, a plumbing contractor's Customer Appreciation Day, and the 100th anniversary of the Manchester Boys and Girls Club. For that, he was still making animals when the event closed at 3 p.m.

"I was there till 5," he said.

McDaniel has a standard repertoire, but also makes balloon sculptures to order. His most complicated one was a balloon electric fan. He was booked to work a birthday party for a boy who "loved electric fans," and McDaniel went to an electronics store and bought a tiny motor.

"You pushed a balloon button, and the balloon blades turned on," he said.