

# Voices

## Ventriloquist and troupe visit Belmont Central

By BOB ROBERTS  
Of the Reporter staff

BELMONT — Remember, as a child, the advertisement that promised to allow you an opportunity to "amaze your friends" by throwing your voice? All it cost was one thin dime, and the age-old secrets of ventriloquism were yours.

Well, Bruce Weaver learned ventriloquism the hard way, through practice and study, and the price far exceeded 10 cents. After 24 years of having a wooden figure perched on his right knee and producing jokes at his expense, Weaver has become very good at throwing his voice, as Belmont Central School elementary students found out Wednesday.

Weaver, with his wooden friends Jerry Mahoney, Rhode Island Red rooster Horton the Mindreader, and Lenny the Troublemaker, and his 10-year old son Bradley with pal Mortimer, cavorted about the Belmont school stage while giving two performances for delighted schoolchildren. It's the second trip to Allegany County for Weaver and his son, who performed in Bolivar last Monday.

Weaver, a sixth-grade teacher at Westfield (Pa.) Elementary School who lives in Knoxville, travels with Bradley and their "dummies" to churches, schools and clubs around the area, blending what Weaver calls "sight gags" with near-perfect ventriloquism and a lively dialogue.

Weaver says he became involved in ventriloquism, which dates back to ancient Egypt, when his parents gave him a Jerry Mahoney doll for Christmas; he still has that original dummy and uses it in his act. Though he performed often while in high school, Weaver gradually left ventriloquism until he entered teaching.

Likewise, son Bradley got interested after watching his father perform, and soon received a Danny O'Day dummy.

"It's really picking up again," Weaver says of his craft. "There's a lot of ventriloquists



Photo by Bob Roberts

Belmont Central School elementary students were entertained by the antics of Bruce Weaver and Friends, a father-and-son ventriloquism act from Pennsylvania. At left, Weaver poses with friends Lenny and Horton, while son Bradley holds his dummy Mortimer.

around." He belongs to two organizations, the North American Association of Ventriloquists and the Society of American Ventriloquists.

But does Weaver the performer ever use his act to help Weaver the teacher?

Not really. "As soon as I get the dummy out (in the classroom), it's showtime. I put it away, and it's still showtime. Everybody's doing their own thing," he says.

In Belmont, Weaver introduced each of his characters, explained how the dummies worked, and introduced a pinch of would-be magic into the performance. One step toward success in ventriloquism, he ex-

plained later as he was cleaning up from the last show, is to provide the lifeless dummy with a character, a personality that the audience will feel.

"It's part of the illusion — they have to appear real, although you have to realize it's just a tool, you have to treat them as a person," he explained.

"Anytime I pick (the dummies) up, they're alive like you and I," added Weaver.

Another element which pleased his Belmont audience was his frequent use of "volunteers" from the audience, including sixth-grade teacher Robert Jones and elementary principal James Leone.