

Professor Steve makes science fun, exciting for kids



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STAFF WRITER

DECATUR — Every time Steve Walden begins a show for children, he starts off by asking the same question: “Do you kids like science?” And as far as “Professor Steve” is concerned, there’s no reason why the answer shouldn’t always come back as “yes.”

“Most of the kids say ‘yes,’ but every once in a while there are kids who say they don’t

like science,” said Walden, a Decatur native who will return to town Saturday afternoon to bring his “Professor Steve” science show to the Lincoln Square Theatre. “And if all you do is read about science, you’ll think it’s boring. Science is fun when you do it hands-on. Most of the programs I do are filled with activities the kids can do at home — that’s what makes science memorable.”

Growing up on Decatur’s northwest side and graduating from Warrensburg-Latham High School, Walden knew from a young age that he wanted to work with children. After graduating from Lincoln Christian College, he became a youth minister for several churches in Indiana before beginning to develop his children’s educational performance series. He performs educational shows as “Waldo the Clown” and Professor Steve, applying what he has learned about education through active participation.

“I’ve learned that the more senses you can involve, the more gets through to kids,” he said. “I’ve been a clown for 30 years, and the more levels of the mind I can involve in my show, the better it works. Professor Steve, on the other hand, works by illustrating his lessons through big, fun, exciting science.”

The performance at the Lincoln Square Theatre is called Professor Steve’s “Outta Sight Light Show,” and focuses on the science of light energy, prisms, rainbows, lasers and backlights. It will culminate in a laser light show combining all the principles taught by Professor Steve.

“Every program that I do focuses on one aspect of science, from air to sound to optical illusions,” he said. “This time, the kids will be learning about how light travels and how the eye works. And then we’ll take everything we learned and turn it into a full-blown laser light show set to music, and they’ll be able to understand exactly how it all works.”

Professor Steve owes much to the long history of televised science entertainers who came before him, from the 1950s series “Watch Mr. Wizard” to “Bill Nye the Science Guy.” His favorite, though, was “Beakman’s World,” which he felt was best able to blend entertainment with education.

“That guy was basically an actor portraying a scientist, and he had the entertainment factor to capture a kid’s attention,” he said. “I’ve always felt that I can learn all the necessary science and lessons, but entertaining is the more challenging part of the equation. That part has always come naturally to me.”

Ultimately, Walden continues his programs in the hope that all the children he speaks to will be able to develop a scientific mindset, one that they are able to apply throughout the rest of their life. He hopes that if he can pique their interest in learning scientific principles, they will continue seeking out more education in the years that follow.

“Science is something that they will use in anything they do in the future,” he said. “And beyond that, it gives you an appreciation for the world around us and how it works. The world tends to become a more wondrous place when you learn about it.”

jvorel@herald-review.com|(217) 421-7973

IF YOU GO

WHO: Professor Steve’s Outta Sight Light Show

WHEN: 3 p.m. Saturday, March 9, 2013

WHERE: Lincoln Square Theatre, Decatur

TICKETS: kids free, \$5 adults

ON THE WEB: www.waldothec clown.com