

# Firms hire magician to work trade shows

Alchemist's fact-filled monologues, sleight-of-hand turn bystanders into sales leads



## Comedian finds friends can be tough to entertain

By ERIK UNGER  
Staff Writer

YORK - Coming home can be hard.

Just seeing old friends and family can be traumatic.

But Gayle Becwar, professional comedian and magician, has even a greater challenge, trying to make family and friends laugh.

Becwar, 28, of Davenport, will perform at the U.S. Mint tonight and Saturday night. The show starts at 9 p.m. both nights.

He said the show in York will be harder than doing a show in Cancun, Mexico in front of an audience that didn't speak English.

"It (Cancun) was easier than entertaining at my 10-year reunion in Davenport, he said. "Crowds are easier to entertain when they are strangers."

Becwar has been entertaining crowds in Texas, on both coasts and college campuses nationwide since his freshman year at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 1978.

Magic was, at one time, all Becwar knew. He grew up in a family of magicians and routinely

performed with his parents and three sisters statewide.

He said his first show with his family was a free production on the steps of the Capitol in Lincoln. He was eight years old.

He said he also remembers an early performance in York at a Fourth of July picnic.

But now he has added comedy to his act — comedy he describes as having a Chevy Chase, Dennis Miller sarcasm, which comes in handy with hecklers. This sarcasm, he said, he mixes with a vulnerable, gullible, Barney Fife kind of humor.

He said this combination came from the influence of his parents.

"My dad is gullible and vulnerable and my mom is coy and sarcastic," he said.

However, Becwar said his style also reflects his favorite comedians: Bob Newhart, Jerry Seinfeld, Jay Leno, Gary Shandling and Johnny Carson, another native Nebraskan.

Becwar said he has much in common with Carson. Both are from small towns in Nebraska, both went to UNL, pledged the same fraternity and both used magic in their comedy acts.



## Performer prepares for magic at welcome

By JASON HARDY  
Senior staff writer

Jerry Seinfeld once said he hated magicians because they take your quarter, make it disappear and leave you there, broke and feeling stupid.

Luckily for Gayle Becwar, self-proclaimed magician, humorist and mind reader, feeling stupid is just part of the act.

"It's kind of a high energy magic act that's sort of like Barney Fife, Clark Griswold or Tim Allen with magic," said Becwar. "In that regard, I kind of make fun of magic."

This Sunday, Becwar will bring his zany comedy and magic routine to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln as the headlining act for this year's Big Red Welcome.

Becwar is no stranger to UNL. In 1984, he graduated with a degree in broadcasting and speech. And though the Big Red Welcome has previously been headlined by better-known musi-

cal acts who draw thousands of students, Becwar feels his brand of slapstick, magical humor will be right at home.

Becwar's off-kilter comedic approach is blatantly apparent at first sight of his attire — the typically classy top hat, tux and wand have been replaced by plain clothes, a shower cap and a paper towel roll.

"It's kind of stupid humor, like Steve Martin or Jim Carrey, guys who can take a joke themselves," Becwar said. "I'm just taking that philosophy and adding magic."

Aside from Becwar's onstage antics, this year's Big Red Welcome also offers a wide array of offstage information and activities. The festivities start at 6 p.m. in front of the Union, with a free picnic followed by performances by the UNL Yell Squad, Herbie Husker and Lil' Red.

Before Becwar begins his act at 8:30 p.m., both the Scarlet and Cream Singers and the Scarlet dancers will perform. As always there will be almost

250 booths full of free stuff, information for campus groups and departments and other things every UNL student should know.

Becwar said the carnival-esque style of the Big Red Welcome is perfect for his shtick.

"My act is kind of like being a street performer. You start off usually with maybe 10 or 12 people around you, and hopefully you'll have around 300 by the end," Becwar said. "Except for this one, I won't have to pass the hat."

Becwar said his performance relies heavily on crowd participation and spontaneity, two things that can backfire if an audience feels its being made fun of. For that reason, Becwar always makes it clear he is not afraid to laugh at himself.

"I tell people 'I don't want to make fun of you. I want to have fun with you.' I make it kind of like a big party on stage."



## Magician performs at LCC

### Performer cracks jokes, amazes crowd with magic tricks

LABETTE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

NEWS  
Jonathan  
Larson

During last night's one hour show, he used magic tricks, illusions, and feats of mind reading to start and climax jokes on himself and various members of the audience he had acting as his assistants.

Gayle says his solo act has been evolving towards more of a comedy routine than a magic and illusion show.

Gayle has been involved with magic all his life as a part of the family act with his parents and three sisters at shows and magic conventions around the country.

He and one of his sisters entered a talent contest as a team while attending the University of Nebraska at Lincoln and performed throughout their college years. Their team split-up after college when his sister got married after graduation and quit performing.

Gayle has been working full time as a stage magician since 1985 when his first solo appearance was at the Nebraska State Penitentiary.

He will be appearing on HBO's "Comic Relief" this fall and has

also had a brief appearance on a Showtime special.

This was his second time performing here at Labette in two years and says that he enjoys performing for college students as they seem more responsive to his jokes and slapstick routines that he uses with his magic and illusions.

Gayle says although the college circuit is more profitable than people think, he performs more for the enjoyment of working with more intimate audiences than for any monetary gain.

<http://www.uwsuper.edu/prometh/index.htm>

University of Wisconsin-Superior

# Promethean

## Becwar brings a good show

by Frank Haataja  
Editor-in-Chief

When my best friend invited me up north for the evening to see a comedian perform, I was a bit skeptical. Think about it: 61 miles at \$1.73 per gallon for one evening with a performer you'd never heard of is about as big a risk as you can take without either jumping off of something or having something shoot at you.

I learned the performer's name when I got there: Gayle Becwar. Becwar's father was a magician as well, and began performing with him as a child in 1967. He went solo in 1985, and has been featured in HBO's "Comic Relief" and for Showtime's "Funniest Man in America Contest." Becwar has shared the stage with Damon Wayans and toured with legendary funny woman Phyllis Diller.

That all impressed me, but the fact he was performing in Virginia, Minn. didn't. I expected to get bored into drinking, and spend the

night heaving my disappointment into the porcelain pond.

Boy, was I wrong.

The show was worth every drop of that gas. Three acts performed in all; two of them were funny, and one of them was starting to make me laugh with his lameness.

Becwar was the last performer, of course; the first act was a Minnesota comedian whose name I couldn't pronounce before, can't remember now. What I do remember is he tours with Becwar often.

He had the rare talent of blending quick wit and slow speech to create jokes with clockwork timing. His jokes took you to the Aerial Lift Bridge, through rooms with breasts painted on walls, and showed us some of his lower-level magic before handing the mic over.

Another thing he did, that I didn't like quite so much, was a brief "Name that show tune" where people won free drinks. Half of them I had never heard of; the other half were probably off the air before my parents were born.

The other undercard was B-105 radio personality Jim Dandy. Dandy represents what seems to be a growing trend of local radio personalities trying stand-up comedy. I know the Bear's Crazy Ray does it too, but I have to say; if all radio personalities do comedy as well as Dandy, they should all quit. The only thing I found funny about Dandy's act was the silence that followed all of his jokes. Dandy, you need to go back to the studio—and when you get there, my little sister wants to hear Kenny Chesney.

After the first comedian appeared again briefly, Becwar took the stage. I don't see how these two ever got to know each other, frankly. Becwar was the complete opposite, bringing an onrush of humor and magic with a level of speed and dynamism I haven't seen since Gallagher.

Becwar did all the typical magician slapstick; he did the poke a sign and turn it around trick, and made cards change color and appear in places halfway on the oth-

er side of the room. He even tore a newspaper apart and made it one again, right in front of about 200 wide-eyed spectators. And he did it with gut-busting style.

His big finish was the sword through the throat trick. I've seen that before, but I had never seen the magician put fake antlers and 3-D glasses on him and have him hold a toilet plunger and a sign reading "I sure am dumb." Becwar did—and he did it all while blaring Christmas music.

Becwar brought it to the crowd in spectacular fashion, and even stuck around long after the show ended to chat with patrons at the hotel bar, bringing some of his shuffled slyness as well. Becwar isn't scheduled to come around here anytime soon, but don't miss him if he does come around. Although, his booking information is available on [www.gaylebecwar.com](http://www.gaylebecwar.com).

Who knows, maybe someone from SAB might be reading this...



## Magical time set Friday

The "Magic, Mind Reading and Humor" of Gayle Becwar will be presented Friday at 8 p.m. in the French Chapel at Hastings College.

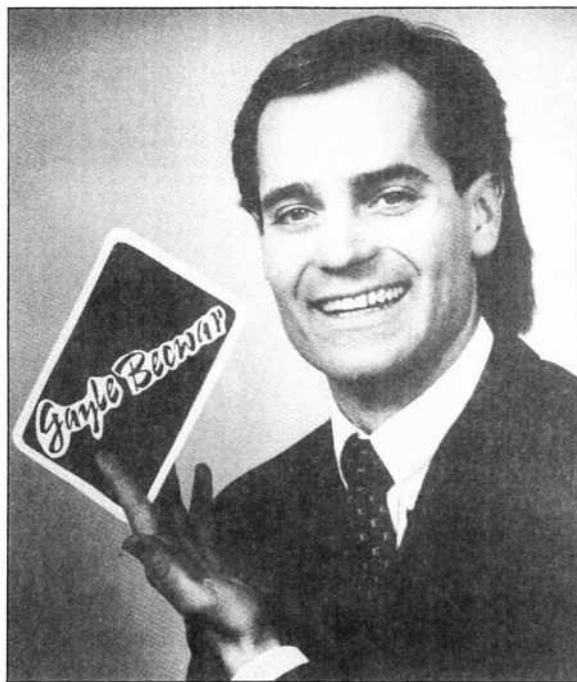
The free public presentation, a Hastings College Week event, is sponsored by the college's Student Association.

Becwar began performing as a child with his family's traveling magic show. A solo professional for the past six years, he has performed coast-to-coast at comedy clubs, colleges, state fairs, conventions and trade shows.

The opening act for Dan Seals and Holly Dunn, Becwar also worked a series of shows with comedienne Phyllis Diller. He was recently taped for Home Box Office's "Comic Relief" and Showtime's "Funniest Man in America Contest."



Gayle Becwar



## It's magic!

Magician Gayle Becwar will make a return performance on campus Thursday, April 12, at noon in the Spanish Den.

The performance will mark the second straight year that Becwar has performed at Northwest. His visit is sponsored by Campus Activity Programmers, and there is no admission charge.

Becwar is on his own now after traveling throughout the Midwest as part of the Magical Becwars with his family. He combines comedy, mind-reading,

music and magic in his act.

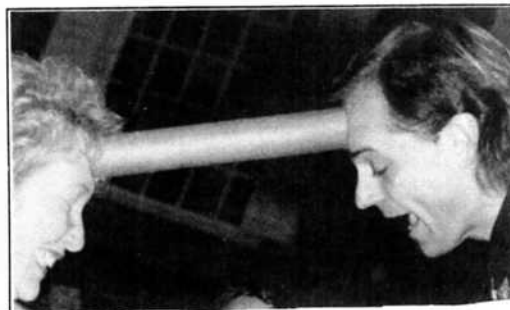
He has been performing since he got his first engagement with his father back in 1967 at the age of eight. The pair performed magic tricks on the steps of the state capital in Lincoln during Nebraska's centennial celebration. From there it was solo tricks as a Cub Scout and then performances when he was a student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.



MAGICIAN-COMEDIAN Gayle Becwar displays a card as part of his act. Becwar entertained approximately 40 people in the Student Center last night with cards and rope tricks and his stand-up comedy routine. The event was sponsored by the Campus Activities Board. (photo by Roger Thompson)

### The brain drain

Magician/comedian Gayle Becwar performed magic tricks while mixing in his own brand of comedy Friday night in the Chapel. Becwar's appearance was one of many activities during Hastings College Week. Photo by Cristi Thaut



LCC Campus Activities Board & LCC Student Senate present...

**An Evening with...  
Gayle Becwar**

April 9, 1990, 7:30pm  
LCC Thiebaud Theater  
LCC Students-\$1.00 General Public-\$3.00  
No Refunds

NOVEMBER 1989



'Around Campus' is published by the Student Activities/Intramural Office.

STUDENT ACTIVITIES BOARD is organized to select, co-ordinate, promote and sponsor student activities and entertainment. The activities at Wayne State College are determined and put on by WSC students. Meetings are held on Sunday nights at 6:30 p.m. in the Student Center, and are open to all WSC students. COME, JOIN US IN MAKING THIS YEAR'S ACTIVITIES THE BEST EVER. The choice is up to YOU!

### FREE PR WORKSHOP

SAB will be sponsoring a public relations and promotions workshop on Wednesday, November 15, at 3:30 p.m. in the Student Center. This workshop will be conducted by Marilea Thiem, promotions director at the Lincoln Journal and Star, and is free and open to ALL campus organizations. Watch for upcoming details.



**UPCOMING EVENTS . . .**  
WSC annual Christmas Tree Lighting in the Willow Bowl, complete with refreshments and a movie in Berry Hall. Get your group or organization in tune for singing carols.

### PARENT'S DAY COMEDIAN

Gayle Becwar, professional comedian and magician, spent his childhood weekends entertaining audiences with his family's magic show. Becwar performed with his father, LeRoy the Great, his mother and three sisters around their hometown of Davenport, Nebraska.

Becwar now uses magic to supplement his comedy routines in Lincoln night clubs, college campuses throughout the Midwest and clubs on both coasts. Becwar's solo career began while he was a freshman at UN-L when he was paid \$150 to perform for a church group. After six years of college, and degrees in advertising, broadcasting, and theatre from UN-L, Becwar became a professional entertainer.

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### PARENT'S DAY FEATURES FULL SLATE OF ACTIVITIES

Parents and families of WSC students will have the opportunity to take part in a number of specially planned activities during the annual Parent's Day on Saturday, November 4. Residence hall receptions, HPER special events, planetarium shows, and a delicious Parent's Day brunch, highlighted by magician Gayle Becwar, are but a few of the activities planned for the day.

# Davenport native makes 'em laugh

By PAMELA S. THOMPSON  
Tribune Staff Writer

LINCOLN — Making a 65-year-old woman, a 30 year-old yuppie and a five year-old boy laugh is freelance comedian/magician Gayle Becwar's performance goal.

Becwar, a native of Davenport, said that unlike other stand-up performers he is a "well-rounded entertainer" and is proud of his wide and varied audience appeal.

Becwar, who performs his original act at comedy clubs, conventions, state fairs and banquets across Nebraska, grew up in a family of entertainers. He made his stage debut — and suffered his first bout of stage fright — at a Centennial celebration show with his family in 1967.

One of the secrets behind Becwar's steady success may lie in the example set by his close-knit family. After his terrifying experience at the centennial show when his fake beard fell off on the steps of the state capitol, his father, Leroy Becwar — a Davenport TV repair shop owner and magician — told his only son "entertain an audience first and try to fool them second."

Even now that it appears Becwar is on his way to celebrity, he often thinks of his father's advice and has now added his own. "It's not the trick, but the presentation that is important, and it's not the joke itself but how the joke is presented that will have a greater impact on the audience," he said.

Prior to his solo act, the comedian performed with his younger sister, Janis, during their college years at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The brother-sister duo was a natural extension of the act the pair participated in with older sisters Janene and Joyce in their parent's act, which was billed as "Leroy the Great and the Magical Becwars."

Since setting out on his own five years ago and forming the Lincoln-based Becwar & Associates agency,



Photo by Pam Thompson

## Davenport native Gayle Becwar performs his combination comedy and magic act recently in a Lincoln nightclub.

the "thirtysomething"-year-old entertainer has done a lot more analysis of his craft, personal strengths and ambitions.

Becwar has now expanded his act to include a combination of comedy, mindreading, music and magic. Even though he acknowledges that magic spices comedy, Becwar said while growing up he never wanted to emulate the stereotypical magician who relied more heavily on props than performance. "I've never cared for the kind of magician who wears a tuxedo, pulls rabbits out of hats and uses big boxes and linking rings. Instead, I use simple props that folks can relate to," he said. "My bread-and-butter trick is a ripped newspaper. I use things people have at home. It keeps an act fresh."

Becwar's trick at keeping an act forever fresh is to use the audience. He tries to tailor the show to fit the

audience, whether it is a group of insurance salesmen or a room full of college students.

A major part of Becwar's stage charm is his vulnerability and his non-threatening demeanor. "About 75 percent of my act is interaction with the audience," he said. "Performing brings out my high-energy wit and sarcastic personality which they warm up to. Maybe it's my apple pie look."

Becwar admits that much of his gregarious stage personality is a personal defense against fright. "Like Tom Hanks in the movie 'Punchline,' I have no self-confidence. It's scary, much like a first date or a job interview. Entertainers are like gypsies because they're always looking for jobs."

Becwar recalls that his 10-year high school reunion in Davenport was truly one of the most frightening performances experience he can

remember. "I was more scared performing on the school gym stage than I was doing a cable TV show or doing stand-up in Los Angeles," he said. "Even though I was always the jokester in school, I wasn't the only class clown. I played off the other guys a lot."

What Becwar lacks in self-confidence, however, he makes up for with his humor. During a slack time when his act isn't booked solid, Becwar moonlights from the stage to the tour bus working as a tour guide. Although he said that escorting bus tours or group cruises doesn't really excite him, Becwar credits the experience for helping to develop and fine-tune his business, marketing and self-promotional skills.

Calling himself "the perfect game show host," Becwar said he has occasionally tried out humorous material on tour members, although finding time to write out new material is often difficult. "I'm not good at other people's jokes so I always write my own lines."

Even though Becwar's stage career actually began when he was eight years old, he still practices his timing, facial gestures, hand gestures and voice fluctuations — sometimes in front of a mirror or on video tape.

Becwar has big plans for the future. He would like to make a name for himself nationally. Many of his comedic role models started off using magic, including Bob Newhart, Don Rickles and fellow small-town Nebraska native Johnny Carson. While he admires such magicians as Harry Anderson, Doug Hennley and David Copperfield, Becwar said he believes that his act works because of the artful combination of both comedy and magic.

"Sure my personality and the interaction with the audience works," he said. "But magic appeals to everyone of all levels so I use it in a humorous way."



**DONNING THEIR 'THINKING' CAPS** magician Gayle Becwar (left) and TC Livestock Feeder director Larry Lange perform a magic act in which Lange attempted to move a playing card from one end of the room to the other using a magic 'tube'.

Photo by L.Burd



**A CARDBOARD TUBE WAS USED** in this thought-transference magic act. At left is Maggie (Mrs. Alan) Wiedel with comedian-magician Gayle Becwar.

Photo by L.Burd



Gale Becwar performs his magic trade.

AP WIREPHOTO

## *Becwars carry on 40-year career*

# Magic a family business

DAVENPORT (AP) — In the Becwar home, one never quite knows what is going to happen. Things disappear and then reappear, sometimes in different places from where they were before.

Money seems to multiply, or in other instances, diminish right before the eyes.

By putting on a black top hat, Leroy Becwar transforms himself from the owner of Davenport's TV repair shop to Leroy the Great, a magician.

Becwar's fascination with magic began in 1944 when he was in eighth grade and saw Geneva resident Paul W. Curtis performing pocket tricks. "I was so fascinated by what he could do that I was inspired to try my hand at magic."

Magic did create problems at one time, according to his wife, Irene, who is his assistant on stage. "When we started seeing each other, a neighbor lady kept telling my mother she shouldn't let us date. She was afraid he would hypnotize me."

An assistant is instrumental in keeping the show running smoothly, Becwar said, adding that his wife does a superb job. "I think she should get more credit than she does. She has always been there, ready with any help or encouragement that is needed."

In fact, it was Mrs. Becwar who encouraged her husband to let their four

**"We all voted to go to the convention, and we went every year after that. Any money we made from magic during the year paid our way to the conventions."**

children, Joyce, Janene, Gayle and Janis, get involved in the act. "It had to be Mom who convinced Dad to let us do magic tricks," Gayle Becwar of Lincoln said. "Dad was always afraid we would ruin the trick because we were too young to know better."

But Mrs. Becwar and the children persisted and soon the act became known as Leroy the Great and the Magical Becwars.

Janene Harris of Central City, who assisted her father when she was 4 years old, said it was a big step for her when she was allowed to do her own tricks. "When we were old enough to do our own tricks, Dad would pay us to do them on stage. It was kind of like an allowance. I remember once getting the mumps or measles and I cried and cried because I couldn't go to the show with everyone else."

The more the children performed magic on stage, the more interested

they got in it, Becwar said. They eventually began attending magic conventions with their dad, who is a member of the Society of American Magicians.

Mrs. Harris remembers the first time her father gave the family a choice of camping or attending a magic convention. "We all voted to go to the convention, and we went every year after that. Any money we made from magic during the year paid our way to the conventions. It was really interesting to go around to the booths and see the different magicians showing their magic tricks. Sometimes we could figure out how they were doing the tricks, but if we couldn't, we had to buy the trick to find out how it worked."

In addition to the booths, there were lectures on various aspects of performing magic and an evening show that featured amateur and professional magicians alike.

The Magical Becwars performed for a variety of groups and events as they continue to do today. At each show, the Becwars follow one important guideline.

"I've always tried to emphasize that I'm just here to entertain and apologize if I've embarrassed anyone during the course of the show," Becwar said. "My main interest is to entertain people with my magic, make them forget their problems for awhile."

# Father's interest rubs off like magic

By SUSAN HARMS  
Tribune Correspondent

DAVENPORT — One Davenport television repairman said he always wanted his son to follow in his footsteps. LeRoy Becwar never imagined, however, that his son would follow his path of magic and entertainment rather than TV repair.

Becwar, owner of LeRoy's TV & Radio Sales & Service in Davenport, has done his share of entertaining, and he and his wife, Irene, have raised four children who still show an interest in entertainment.

Their son, Gayle, now of Lincoln, is the family's serious artist, making his living with comedy and magic.

Both Becwar men got their starts in magic at an early age.

The older Becwar said he got hooked on magic when, at age 10, he saw a Geneva band leader performing tricks. He said he started with small pocket tricks and about a year later, was asked to perform for a local women's group.

His career took off and he became known as "LeRoy the Great."

After he got married, "LeRoy the Great" added his wife and children to the act. The couple have worked side-by-side on stage and in the television repair shop for the 37 years of their marriage.

They started adding children to the act about 31 years ago, first with their oldest daughter, Joyce.

Gayle started performing with the family at age 5 and became more involved when he performed on the steps of Nebraska's capitol at 8. His younger days included Boy Scout troop shows and card tricks in high school.

"Mom and Dad saw another magician at one of the magician's conventions and sort of got us (the children) involved in magic," Gayle Becwar said. "I never really cared for magic. I just cared for the \$1 he (Dad) would pay us for each trick. Later I found out how much Dad was making as we performed.

"We really had a lot of fun growing up doing magic. My three sisters and myself would always do tricks in every show throughout the area."

Money the family earned was used to finance trips to conventions. While there, the children often used their own money to buy new tricks, Becwar said.

The Becwar daughters, Joyce, Janene and Janis, all are married and have moved away from Davenport. They still are involved in magic performances, however.

Gayle Becwar made his mark in college by winning a dorm talent show contest, he said.

"That's where I learned I could perform alone," he said.

Gayle Becwar said he had aspired to be a sports announcer and teacher, until he found out what teachers got paid.



Photo by Denise Andersen

**LeRoy Becwar (left) of Davenport and his son, Gayle, work on rope tricks recently at the Thayer County Livestock Feeders Association Feeders Day and Banquet in Hebron. Gayle Becwar performed at the banquet.**

"I like making kids laugh, not learn," he said. "The best teachers I think are often ones that combine comedy with their learning."

Becwar graduated from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 1983 with a bachelor's degree in broadcasting and advertising.

After college, he worked at advertising and food sales.

"I hated those jobs," he said. "I was real quiet."

After donating a performance at a company function, however, Becwar said he was surprised at the positive reaction he received.

"I guess the magic really brought out my outgoing personality because deep down I'm kind of moody and shy," he said. "You wouldn't believe it now, but I am."

For the last seven years, Becwar has worked full time following a circuit throughout the country.

He now works in Lincoln under his company Becwar and Associates. His parents or sister, Janene, fill in when his bookings are more than time and travel allow.

Becwar performs for comedy clubs, colleges, cruise ships, banquets, conventions and state fairs.

"I don't limit myself to comedy clubs, even though I consider myself more of a comedian than a magician," Becwar said. "The magic spices my comedy. The two of them together, coupled with the interaction with the audience, makes my show."

Becwar has worked with comedienne Phyllis Diller and others.

And, he said he hopes a segment he taped for HBO's Comic Relief will air soon.

"Most of my stuff is generic, and my act really entertains kids that are 4 and kids that are 104," he said.

Becwar said he writes all his own material and critiques himself by watching a mirror and viewing videotapes of his performances.

His father said he enjoys making the tapes and helping analyze the performances.

The younger Becwar said he thinks every magician should throw away all the directions for a new trick and adopt his own unique style of performing it. He and his father have each created a few tricks of their own, he said.

## The Becwar family truly believes in magic



The Magical Becwars, kneeling, from left, Mark and Janene Harris, standing, from left, Gale, Janis, Irene and LeRoy as they end their show.

By Deb Reeves

Independent Correspondent

CENTRAL CITY — What if your father was a magician?

Or what if each of your four children was a magician?

Or what if your husband and your four children were all magicians?

In the case of the LeRoy Becwar family of Davenport, all of the above are true.

And having a magical family keeps life from being dull.

LeRoy started the show. He was doing magic before he and his wife, Irene, were married. She will tell you with a chuckle — that she married him to find out how he did the tricks.

They eventually added Joyce, Gale, Janene, and Janis to the troupe.

By day, LeRoy operates a television repair shop in Davenport, and even there, the magic show goes on.

"I like to do a trick now and again for the customers who come in," he said. "Sometimes, when I go to a home to repair a TV, I might take a few cards along."

His customers in the Davenport area will attest to the fact that a little magic makes the TV repairs go down a little easier. And being a repairman who's also a magician makes you pretty popular with the kids.

"I've had parents tell me that their kids say they hope the TV breaks so LeRoy can come over," Irene said. "He would do magic all day if he could."

LeRoy almost always has a pocket full of surprises and he's more than willing to use them. In fact, the trick he finds most difficult is ending the show. Those who wander behind the stage find that the magic goes on even after the curtain is down.

Janene said her dad was a big hit during her dating days. "He used to keep my dates past their curfew showing them magic tricks," she said.

As their family grew, it seemed natural for LeRoy and Irene to include the children in the act.

The first time the kids performed, they stole the show, he said.

LeRoy used to pay them a dollar for being in the shows, but eventually they did them just because they developed a love of entertaining people, said the young Becwars.

Janene's husband, Mark Harris, and Joyce's husband, Jeff Chleboun, are even getting into the act. Both women perform magic shows in and around their communities, and their husbands are willing assistants. And the Becwar children are getting their own children involved in the act.

When magic is a family passion, magic conventions become a regular ritual. At the conventions (held several times a year throughout the United States) magicians and aspiring magicians can learn new tricks as well as share some of their own — all for a price.

Janene said that the family fre-

quently buys new tricks at the shows, and that she remembers spending her baby-sitting money to buy tricks of her own.

As a result of the tricks purchased and others that the family has created, LeRoy has started listing each trick, and he set aside one room of his business to store the paraphernalia essential to magic.

"We have duplicates of some of our favorites, but we share others," said Janene. "Since dad started the list, we can call if we need kids' tricks, for example, and he can tell us who has them."

Each member of the family eventually moved toward a particular area of magic.

Janene and Janis love doing shows for children. Janene teaches at Southward Elementary School in Central City, and Janis is a student at UNL majoring in elementary education, so their vocations fit well with their hobby.

Gale loves making people laugh, and is perhaps the most serious about magic. He does shows several times a week, and travels over a wide area.

"Dad motivated us originally, but now we all just love it," said Gale.

"There's just an incredible high you get from performing. Everybody likes magic, from age 6 to 60. There is a misconception that magic is just for kids. I do a lot of adult shows — banquets, conventions — they enjoy magic as much as the kids."

The Becwars are a close-knit family, and are quick to cite the positive attributes of their siblings and parents.

"Janice is by far the most creative, she never stops thinking or refining a show," says Gale. "She is the one we call when we need help with dialogue."

"Gale has always been the shy one," countered Janice. "He uses magic to meet girls. Instead of asking them to dance, he asks them to pick a card."

"Mom is the glue that holds us all together," added Gale. "She gets the show ready. Most people don't realize that for each hour long show, there is an hour of preparation time."

Irene also handles much of the scheduling for the family, particularly when more than one Becwar is to be in the show.

While most families get together for a week-end visit, the Becwars get together to practice magic or to do a show together. They call on each other when they need an assistant for a performance, and they brainstorm for new ideas whenever they meet.

"We practice actions as well as going through the words," explained Janene. "Coming up with the idea or the dialogue and routine to go with an idea are sometimes the hardest part of a trick. The actual practicing is just fun."

The amount of time spent in practice depends on the result desired.

"To be good at it takes less time than to be great at it," she said.

Irene doesn't exactly mind family getting together to do magic, but...

"It would be nice to talk about something besides magic once awhile when we get together," said with a laugh.

Doing a show as a family only compounds the problem. "We talk about the show on the way and then about how it can be improved all way home."

She can't say too much, though says her family. After all, she is the one who got the kids involved in magic in the first place.

Figuring out how a trick is done is the goal of some people who do magic, and that's fine, said LeRoy.

"There is an explanation to magic, but that takes away the fun," said LeRoy. "The worst insult I could get would be if someone came to me and said I made a fool out of the Magic is fun. Our attitude is that you don't set out to fool people, you try to entertain them."

Magic can help people get away from some of the problems in their everyday life, to escape for awhile, added Janene.

"Magic has played a big part in keeping our family close," said Janene. "No matter how old we get, how much our lives change, we still have that common interest. It keeps us close together."



The Magical Becwars consist of (back row, left to right) Joyce and Jennifer Lynn Chleboun of Clarkson, Gayle Becwar of Lincoln, Irene and Leroy Becwar of Davenport and (front row) Janis Becwar of Lincoln and Janene Harris of Central City.

## Common interest in magic strengthens family bonds

DAVENPORT — In the Becwar home, one never quite knows what's going to happen. Things disappear and then reappear, sometimes in entirely different places. Money seems to multiply, or in other instances, diminish right before the eyes.

By putting on a black top hat, Leroy Becwar transforms himself from the owner of Davenport's TV repair shop to Leroy the Great, a magician.

Becwar's fascination with magic began in 1944 when he was in eighth grade and saw Geneva resident Paul W. Curtis performing pocket tricks. "I was so fascinated by what he could do that I was inspired to try my hand at magic."

Magic did create its problems at one time, according to his wife, Irene, who is his assistant on stage. "When we started seeing each other, a neighbor lady kept telling my mother she shouldn't let us date. She was afraid he would hypnotize me."

An assistant is instrumental in keeping the show running smoothly, Becwar said, adding that his wife does a superb job. "I think she should get more credit than she does. She has always been there, ready with any help or encouragement that is needed."

In fact, it was Mrs. Becwar who encouraged her husband to let their four children — Joyce, Janene, Gayle and Janis — get involved in the act. "It had to be mom who convinced dad to let us do magic tricks," Gayle Becwar of Lincoln said. "Dad was always afraid we would ruin the trick because we were too young to know better."

But Mrs. Becwar and the children persisted and soon the act became known as Leroy the Great and the Magical Becwars.

Janene Harris of Central City, who assisted her father from the time she was 4 years old, said it was a big step for her when she was allowed to do her own tricks. "When we were old enough to do our own tricks, dad would pay us to do them on stage. It was kind of like an allowance. I remember once getting the mumps or measles and I cried and cried because I couldn't go to the show with everyone else."

The more the children performed magic on stage, the more interested they became, Becwar said. They eventually began attending magic conventions with their dad, who is a member of the Society of American Magicians.

Mrs. Harris remembers the first time her father gave the family a choice of camping or attending a magic convention. "We all voted to go to the convention, and we went every year after that. Any money we made from

magic during the year paid our way to the conventions. It was really interesting to go around to the booths and see the different magicians showing their magic tricks. Sometimes we could figure out how they were doing the tricks, but if we couldn't, we had to buy the trick to find out how it worked."

"Dad would always let us pick out a trick for ourselves," Janis Becwar of Lincoln said. "Of course, he would check to make sure we were capable of doing it before he bought it."

In addition to the booths, there were lectures on various aspects of performing magic and an evening show that featured amateur and professional magicians alike.

The Magical Becwars performed for a variety of groups and events as they continue to do today. At each show, the Becwars follow one important guideline. "I've always tried to emphasize that I'm just here to entertain and apologize if I've embarrassed anyone during the course of the show," Becwar said. "My main interest is to entertain people with my magic, make them forget their problems for a while."

Although the four children have grown up and moved away from home, they all remain actively involved in magic. Even Miss Becwar, a junior at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, finds time for magic. "Right now, I'm working at a day care center so sometimes I'll dress up as a clown and do some magic for the kids there," she said.

Miss Becwar believes magic has helped her learn how to communicate with people. "Even when I get out of school, I'll continue to perform magic wherever I am. If I ever have children, I'll pass the magic tricks onto them because I know it has helped me and that it will help them."

One of the Becwar children is already continuing the family tradition of passing on magic tricks. Joyce Chleboun of Clarkson became a part of her dad's act when she was in first or second grade. Her daughter, however, had a much earlier debut. Mrs. Chleboun was making her daughter magically appear before astonished eyes when Jennifer Lynn was only 3 months old. Now, at age 4, Jennifer is becoming more actively involved in her mom's shows.

"I think what I enjoyed the most about magic is that it was something the whole family did together and it was something that has kept us together, even now, when we have gone our separate ways," Mrs. Chleboun said. "For me, personally, magic has helped me be more outgoing. It didn't bother me to get up in front of people in 4-H or public speaking. It doesn't bother me now when I'm

working in sales. I'm more poised and relaxed, and I think my daughter can get the same benefits out of it."

Even Mrs. Chleboun's husband, Jeff, has learned magic tricks, which he sometimes performs at a bar he owns with his father.

Mrs. Harris also is excited about teaching magic to her five-month-old daughter, Emmylou, when she's a little older. "Magic was such a neat thing because it kept our family real close and I want my family to have that same closeness. My husband, Mark, is learning some of the tricks and has been assisting me."

For Mrs. Harris, the biggest reward of performing magic is making people happy. "I often dress up as a clown for birthday parties, and when my brother and I were students at UNL, we would often wear tuxes to do our shows. I think when you successfully entertain people, they forget about their problems for a while. When people get excited about what you're doing, that's what makes me happy."

Mrs. Harris believes magic helped her develop self-confidence as a youngster and has continued to be a valuable experience in her career as a teacher.

Although the three sisters perform from time to time, the serious magician in the family is Gayle. He has been so influenced by his father's interest in magic that he wants to become a professional entertainer himself, combining comedy, mind-reading, music and magic in his act.

One of his first times he worked with his father was in 1967, Nebraska's centennial, at the age of 8. They performed tricks on the steps of the state capitol in Lincoln. He did his first solo tricks as a Cub Scout.

Gayle said he did very little magic during his freshman year at UNL. Toward the end of the year, however, he gave a demonstration of his abilities to a friend and once word got around that he was a magician, he was in demand for a variety of events.

"What I like the most about magic is the interaction with the audience. My father always emphasizes in his shows that he wants to entertain, not embarrass, the audience. I feel that way, too. I love the closeness you can get through magic. People like to dream, they like to believe in things like "Bewitched" or magic wands," Gayle said.

Becwar agrees with his son. "Because magic has something for everyone, it knows no age limits. People can find a sense of wonder in it, but I always make it a point to tell them that the magic isn't just in me, but that it's within each and every one of them."



## Prestidigitation A Tradition



THE MAGIC BECWARS - Janene and Gayle (l-r) Becwar.

### Awards-Prestidigitation On Tap for Chamber Fete

The hand will be quicker than the eye at the '83 Wahoo Chamber of Commerce awards banquet October 15. The brother-sister act, The Magic Becwars, will be on the chamber's schedule at the Eagle's Club.

The magical duo has impressed audiences with their prestidigitation in most parts of the state, and in many other areas as well. Along with card tricks and other

slight of hand magic, two awards will appear Saturday. These will go to Lucille Svoboda and Irma Copperstone. Irma owned the Wigwam Cafe, 146 East Fifth, for many years. Lucille and her late husband Milo owned the Svoboda Hardware, 427 N. Broadway, for 40 years.

The public is invited to attend the banquet. A cocktail hour will start at 6 that night and dinner an hour later.

Gayle and Janis Becwar were continuing a family tradition when displaying feats of prestidigitation at the Chamber banquet Saturday night. The brother-sister magic act duo pulled cards from thin air and read minds during a show at the Eagles Club.

Their father, Leroy, started the family magic tradition when he was ten years old. This interest continued after meeting and marrying Irene.

Slight of hand escapades helped boost business at their Davenport, Ne., TV sales and service shop.

With both mom and dad following the amateur prestidigitation trade, it's small wonder their children did the same. Gayle took up the magician's amateur trade when eight years old. Janis did when she was four.

Other family magicians are sisters Janene and Joyce, Joyce's husband Jeff, and, of course, mom and dad.

Gayle and Janis agreed the

appeal of magic is near universal. They've performed before audiences not speaking English and blind persons.

"We used sponge balls for the blind students," Gayle explained. He said they were "going nuts" on feeling the balls mysteriously multiply in their own hands.

Malasian students were equally responsive. Dialogue was kept to a minimum and the tricks allowed to speak for themselves.

Janis is contemplating using magic in a teaching career. Gayle hopes to add it to a possible future in sales.

Other uses mentioned were entertaining customers waiting in line, shopping center promotions, and in table top (person to person) magic shows in cafes or restaurants.

Magic, it seems, can be used almost anywhere. It appeals to everyone. "It's something like a dream," Gayle said. "Everyone wants to escape. When they're holding a card, they're a kid again."

### Lincoln Youth Symphony

## Music and magic entertainment



The magical Becwar tried pushing a sword through the neck of Lincoln Youth Symphony player Greg Tubach to show that tubas take a strong neck to blow all that air. Comforting the poor tuba player were two fourth graders from the audience. The symphony played music and the Magic Becwars performed tricks for all fourth graders in Lincoln on April 5. Their performance was entitled Music Through Magic.

Before graduating from the University of Nebraska with degrees in Broadcasting, Speech, and Theatre, Gayle Becwar entertained regularly with his two sisters Janene and Janis. From banquets, schools, and county fairs, the Magical Becwars (as they were called) toured the country delighting audiences everywhere. Here are just a few of the newspaper and newsletter clippings that they appeared in.



HARPER SMITH SCHRAMM  
Spring Thing Talent Show  
April 27, 1979

## Student brings magic from home

By Cheryl Kising

Don't be alarmed if you see white doves coming out of Schramm Hall. It's probably 10th floor's local magician, Gayle Becwar, at work.

Becwar, a UNL sophomore, started working with magic when he was about seven years old, he said.

"My dad was always interested in it and pushed me into it also," he said. "Now it is a family thing. Everyone is involved in one way or another."

Every year his family attends a magicians' convention and the Becwars are members in both the Society of American Magicians and the International Brotherhood of Magicians. Becwar said these organizations help magicians get the "recognition they deserve."

While in high school, Becwar took speech and drama classes that have helped him in his magical act.

"Half of a magic is presentation," Becwar said. "I have to relate to the audience because if I don't, I'm not believable and could get booed off the stage."

During the past four years he usually has worked alone but said he often has his sister Janene, who is a UNL freshman, assist him. She gets a chance to perform magic occasionally.

Becwar started doing stage magic but has gradually changed to close-up and seldom turns down a chance to perform. He said he changed his style mainly because it was awkward to constantly run after his dove appearing-box every time someone asked him to do something.

"I used to get nervous about a show, but I finally got to the point where I didn't care if I made a fool of myself," Becwar said. "Sometimes you make mistakes and you just have to expect it, not let it ruin your whole act."

His father used to arrange for professional magicians to stay at his house if they were doing shows in nearby towns. According to Becwar, they would exchange tricks and could add new ones to their family act.

Although he mainly does close-up magic, he says one of his favorite acts is one the famous magician Doug Henning performs—the illusion of the torj and restored newspaper.

"After a performance, people always ask how I did it," Becwar said. "I ask if they can keep a secret and then tell them 'so can I.'"



Photo by Jerry McBride

Gayle Becwar

### Youth orchestra, magicians perform at Arbor Lodge

NEBRASKA CITY — The Lincoln Youth Symphony will play a concert in Arbor Lodge State Park at 1:30 p.m. today.

A Nebraska City committee chaired by Mimi Steinheider and the Nebraska City branch of the American Association of University Women planned the concert. The Lincoln Youth Symphony, conducted by June Moore, is sponsored by the Kropp Charitable Foundation.

Magicians as well as musicians will perform during the concert at the park. Of the program, conductor Moore noted that "all young (and old as well) people will have an opportunity to watch the magicians build a pyramid with the jugglers, ride a stick horse with William Tell or direct the orchestra playing 'Stars and Stripes Forever.'"

The magicians are the Magical Becwars, Gayle and Janene. The jugglers are from the Peter Nicolaus Juggling Group.

And the orchestra's program includes "American Salute" by Gould, "That's Entertainment" by Polster, "Fanfare No. 1" to introduce Dance of the Magicians, "Fanfare No. 2" to introduce Dance of the Tumbler, "America the Beautiful," arranged by Beadell, "The Great Pyramid of Nebraska City," adapted from Mussorgsky, "Overture to William Tell" by Rossini, and "Stars and Stripes Forever" by Sousa.

# Becwar proves there's magic in the heir

BY PEG SHELDRIK

Magician Gayle Becwar made his stage debut in 1967 at a Centennial celebration in the State Capitol in Lincoln, climbing out of a box as part of his father's magic act, masquerading as a "shrunk adult."

As the 6-year-old clambered out, his beard fell off, shattering the illusion. Older kids in the audience started making fun of the trick and young Becwar was in tears. His father gave him some advice that still guides his career: "Entertain an audience first and fool them second."

Nearly 30 years later, Becwar is still at it, as audiences will discover at the Star City Holiday Festival.

Becwar will appear (and perhaps disappear) at the Polar Bear Picnic, at various spots along the parade route and on stage at Pershing Auditorium, sponsored by Cook Family Foods Ltd.

After touring the region for many years with his parents and as a college act with sister Janine — "We wanted to be the next Donnie and Marie" — Becwar went solo and began blending comedy with his magic.

He takes familiar tricks and develops them into variations that include audience participation and "very visual type of humor."

Becwar explained: "I've always been a big fan of Barney Fife (the goofy deputy played by Don Knotts on the old 'Andy Griffith Show')." He loves "old facial reaction type comics."

He has developed a stage persona he calls "a likeable jerk," in the vein of Jim Carrey, Robin Williams, and Tim Allen.

Becwar spoofs magic even as he's performing. "My magic wand is a paper towel roll," he explained. "My magic hat is a shower cap."

Yet magicians give his act thumbs-up reviews.

"People compared me a lot when I started out to Harry Anderson," he said. "I play off the audience."

He'll bring an audience member up to help with a trick and "play off what he does. . . . He doesn't realize it, but he's getting all the laughs." The result might be 10 minutes of comedy leading to a legitimate magic trick. The audience usually believes Becwar's lines are ad libs, an illusion he manages not to shatter until they view a second show.

When audience members believe his jokes and reactions are spontaneous, Becwar considers that "the ultimate compliment."

As he interacts with audience members, Becwar says he strives for just the right amount of sarcasm in his humor. "I make sure I'm not arrogant," he said. "It's a fine line. Not all comics understand that line." Becwar said when he was 24, people would accept him as a young, sarcastic guy, but it wouldn't work now in his mid-30s. "The older (you) get, the more likeable you have to be," he said.

Becwar claims he doesn't like kids, but when he does play for young people they seem to respond well.

"I don't treat 'em like they're



▲ Gayle Becwar's been amazing the crowds since he was a 'shrunk adult' in his dad's magic act.

kids," he explained. For example, he'll ask them if they're married. He'll use tough talk like "shut up" — and the kids seem to love it.

Becwar credits his parents with shaping his personality on and offstage. "My dad is a complete nut," he said. "College kids love my dad. . . . He loves to play that idiot. He'll do card tricks for anybody — anybody."

Becwar said he was traveling with his parents a few years ago and came back to the motel only to discover his dad doing card tricks for the maid while his mom made the bed. His mother holds her own with a roll of the eye and a witty remark. Becwar finds he takes after her as well his dad.

Magic remains a family affair for the Becwars. His wife, Cindy, man-

ages Becwar and Associates and handles bookings for Gayle and his parents. Becwar offers the dreaded birthday party bookings to his sister, Janine Harris, a fourth-grade teacher at Lincoln Christian School, and their uncle leads a polka band. Becwar said he might recruit his nephew for a trick in his upcoming Pershing appearance.

In short, they are a family of entertainers.

As a boy growing up in Davenport, Becwar remembers his grandmother's insistence that they were Czechs, not Bohemians. Bohemians, in her mind, were "gypsies, traveling from town to town . . . (people) who don't have a job." He laughs to think of it now — considering his lifestyle.

Becwar earned his degree in broadcasting, advertising and speech and worked at public relations jobs, doing magic on weekends. A comedy club owner spotted his act at the Cornhusker Hotel and invited him to perform at a new club in Oklahoma. From that, he became a full-time entertainer, working comedy clubs as well as private events.

He earned a spot touring with Phyllis Diller and opened for Dan Seals. He has had national television exposure on Showtime's "Funniest Person in America Contest" and as a regional performer included in the Comic Aid section of HBO's "Comic Relief."

Becwar credits his wife with inspiring him to develop new material for his act. "I used to do the same show," he said. "Now I'm ready to learn and grow and do other things." For example, the Star City Holiday Festival show at Pershing will give

him the chance to do tricks that won't fit on a comedy club stage or in a bag.

Still, he won't be the next David Copperfield.

"I like comedy more than magic," he said. "It costs a lot of money to buy those big illusions." And the trappings have to be transported and set up hours before the show. "It's so nice to throw the bag in my Honda Prelude," he sighed.

Of course, even that can be a challenge.

He once had to negotiate an early November blizzard to make one performance. "You have to show up and realize those people don't know what you've been through," he said. So he rallied himself, and, despite a headcold, "I had one of my better shows."

Becwar has found most audiences respond to his act. "My act is so generic," he explained, adding that if they don't like the comedy, they'll probably like the magic. "Magic intrigues everyone."

Knowing that has helped him win over lawyers, truck drivers, sugar-powered unsupervised kids, unfocused car show crowds, and even a nightmare New Year's Eve audience of predominantly drunken Cancun vacationers who did not speak English.

Becwar has come a long way since he first climbed out of the box in the Rotunda, but he relies on that early lesson.

"It's not the trick, it's the presentation," he said. "It's the presentation in any job."