

Hard work puts the real magic in clowning around

By **BARBARA J. WOERNER**
Staff Writer

BAYSIDE — Shawn Ramey and Ricky Cunningham, both 11, couldn't take their eyes off the three balls. They spent several minutes tossing one up with one hand while catching another with the other hand. They juggled the balls in an oblong circular pattern. None hit the floor.

"Concentrating makes this work out," Ricky said. "And also lots of practice."

Juggling, they both said, was something they really wanted to learn. Both were participants in the first week of MerMan's Magic Circus Camp held at Pembroke Mall the last two weeks of July.

The two week-long sessions were offered by Merrill McCubbin, usually known as MerMan, a magician and entertainer from Norfolk.

Camp sessions included juggling, card and other magic tricks, learning sound set-up, advertising, clowning and makeup and other performing skills.

"This camp is an offshoot of the magic and illusion shows that I've been performing all over the country for years," he said.



STAFF PHOTO BY BARBARA J. WOERNER

MICHAEL GOMEZ, left, and Billy Larson practice with the help of Merrill McCubbin for their end of summer camp show.

When McCubbin's not traveling, he puts on magic shows in area schools and at corporate functions. He said that several years ago, parents, teachers and principals asked him to start a summer camp.

"I finally decided to go ahead and have the camp one time," McCubbin said. "It ended up being a sellout, and I've done it ever since."

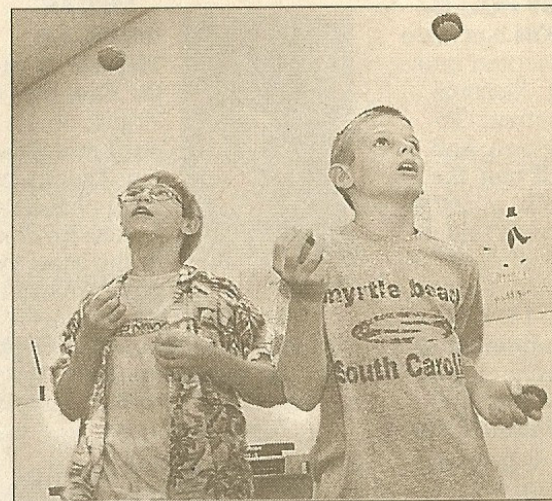
This year the camp, in its seventh year, had 16 participants in both sessions and was held for the first time in Pem-

broke Mall.

It's easy for McCubbin to relate to the campers' interest in magic. His mother gave him his first magic set as a gift when he was 6, he said.

"I was always intrigued by magic and puzzles, and back then, magic sets for kids were actually put out by magicians," he said. "I also used to go to libraries and bookstores and read everything about magic I could get my hands on."

In his late teens, McCubbin



RICKY CUNNINGHAM, left, and Shawn Ramey practice their juggling routines at MerMan's Magic Circus Camp in Pembroke Mall.

started working with local magician Charles Windley.

"I've been doing magic for 30 years and 20 of those have been as a professional," McCubbin said.

McCubbin's wife, Stacey, is his assistant and step-daughters Shannon and Kelly help out with both the camp and shows.

"It's all a family effort, and at least 80 percent of the time we're doing the shows for families," he said. "Magic shows can include a 2-year-old, a 10-year-old and a 50-year-old in the same audience."

Campers worked hard the last two days of each session rehearsing for the "The Big Show." The shows include clowns, magic tricks and other entertainment performed for friends and family each Sunday following the camps.

"The kids run the show and the sound," McCubbin said. "Good or bad, it's all run by the kids, and I get to sit back and watch."

For information on MerMan's Fantasy and Illusion Show and future Magic Circus Camps, call 587-4257.