

Juggler brings Science Circus to elementary school

JAMES HAWVER staff writer

WEBSTER – Nels Cremean claims he doesn't know what he wants to be when he grows up.

At 34, he says he's having too much fun as the Chief Executive Oddball of his one-man circus act, In Jest.

For the 10th consecutive year, Cremean clowned around with the students at Plank Road South Elementary School, holding juggling workshops this week in physical education classes.

But at the beginning of his large-group performance in the cafeteria Thursday morning, Cremean threw a curveball when he announced that all of his juggling and acrobatic tricks would demonstrate scientific properties.

Moans swept through his young audience – but not for long.

Using a portable fan, Cremean suspended an oversized red balloon the size of a large pumpkin 5 feet over his head. The students squealed as he tilted the fan a few degrees to his right, causing the balloon to float over a couple of feet but not fall to the ground.

"Is it magic? No, it's science!" Cremean announced. "If you want to know more about this you can talk with the scientist Daniel Bernoulli – oh, wait – he's been dead for over 300 years."

Cremean scurried over to his prop trunk, threw on a bushy mustache, a poof of gray hair, a white laboratory coat and black thick-rimmed glasses – and transformed into the Professor.

By assigning numbers to correspond with different heights and trajectories, the Professor explained how to create different juggling patterns as he tossed around spherical neon green beanbags.

When one dropped to the floor, Cremean quickly invoked Isaac Newton's principal of gravity to his blunder.

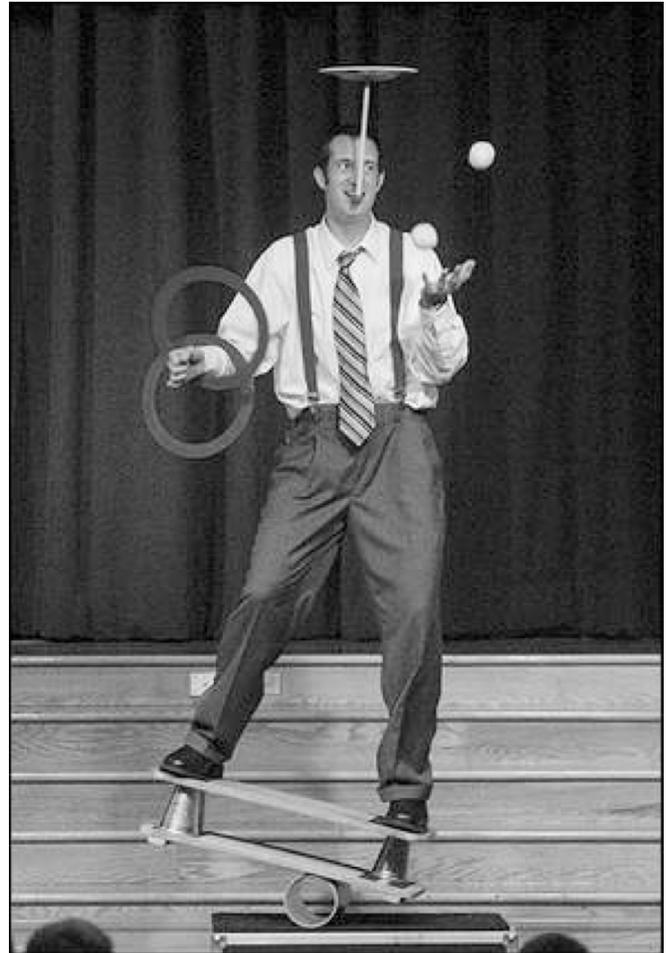
"You might have met his brother – Fig Newton," he joked.

Physics is about energy, motion and forces, the Professor instructed his audience as he tossed around neon green shoe-box-sized blocks.

For his grand finale, Cremean balanced a spinning plate on a stick in his mouth, twirled Frisbee-sized rings in opposite directions around his right arm and juggled two beanbags with his left hand, all while keeping his balance on a wooden board that rocked back and forth over a metal tube.

This time, his audience howled.

"I know you're excited, but we can't have you bouncing off the walls," Cremean instructed. "These walls aren't padded like in the gym – or my room at home."



JAMIE GERMANO staff photographer

Nels Cremean of Buffalo performs – and instructs – at Plank Road South Elementary School in Webster.

A few minutes after the assembly, Cremean had changed out of his red suspenders and into a maroon T-shirt and windbreaker pants, then headed over to the gym. There, he showed a group of about two dozen fourth-graders how to spin plates on wooden sticks, toss a Chinese yo-yo and juggle beanbags, rings and clubs.

Ally Nasello and Evan Powell, both 9, said Cremean puts on one of the best assemblies each year. Their favorite part? The grand finale.

"Every year they ask when he's coming back," said physical education teacher Jen Sullivan.