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Performer Profile

Jeff Rinehart – Leaving a Lasting Impression

Jeff Rinehart has loved the theater since his youth. He appeared in every school play at his high school in Collinsville, Ill., and learned that he was especially good at imitating others. He can do more than 30 voice doubles, but his favorites are Clark Gable, Rod Sterling, John Wayne and Mark Twain.

This 55-year-old Army veteran now resides in Woodson Terrace, Mo., a suburb of St. Louis. He served in Stuttgart, Germany with the 7th Core Signal Battalion under the command of General George Blanchard from 1973-1975 as a photographic lab technician. Eventually, Rinehart was promoted to chief clerk and his final rank was Corporal, in charge of scheduling photo shoots, developing pictures and making sure all deadlines were met.

Upon his return to the states, Rinehart was diagnosed with manic depression and prescribed a variety of anti-depressant drugs. He says, "In those days, each day was a struggle." Later, the diagnosis changed to bipolar disorder and, with new medications, describes his life as "much easier now." He has kept his disorder under control for more than 20 years and attributes this to these three things, "Taking my medication religiously, keeping all appointments and following doctors' orders." Rinehart says that his military service and his care from the Department of Veterans Affairs have been good for him and wants others to know how important it is. "Never give up hope," Rinehart says. "Our country was founded on it."

Through the G.I. Bill, Rinehart attended two years of college at Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville, where he was asked to teach courses about make-up to drama students because of his expertise in this area. It can take Rinehart more than four hours to don the make-up for his Mark Twain impression, but for his performance during this year's National Veterans Creative Arts Festival in St. Louis, he will be using a prosthetic mask and a wig that he made himself. This will not be the first time he has performed at the hotel where the participants are staying. When it opened as the Breckenridge Hotel in 1983, Rinehart answered an ad in the paper looking for a Mark Twain impressionist to perform at their grand opening. He auditioned for the position and was selected.

This will be Rinehart's second trip to the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival. In 1994, he won first place and attended the Festival in Iowa that year. This time though, he will not have to travel very far to perform and is glad the other veterans will have a chance to see what St. Louis has to offer. This year, Rinehart performed a piece entitled "Interpretations," winning high honors in the national drama competition in the solo comedy category. He is honored to have the opportunity to perform in his home town.