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## Abracadabra: Coney Island seniors learn magic in city arts program

LORE CROGHAN

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Ken Eng likes to saw his wife in half — in front of an audience.

The Coney Island retiree is learning the art of magic at an offbeat city program for seniors, and he and his classmates have taken to it like real pros.

“Everybody wants to cut their wife in half. I get the privilege,” joked Eng, 62, a retired MTA superintendent, who milked the buzz-saw routine for laughs at a recent class by telling his wife, “I can reduce your weight in half.”



Kenneth Eng, 62, pretends to cut his wife, Wanda in half during magic class....

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Magician and artist-in-residence Gary Dreifus at the Surf

Solomon Senior Center has been prepping his students for a June 19 performance at the Surf Ave. center to mark their graduation from the course.

“I didn’t realize how good these students were going to be,” said Dreifus,57, who

beefed up the syllabus for their six-month course, adding tricks he teaches in professional magicians’ classes. Using a realistic-looking buzz-saw to seemingly slice an assistant in two is one of them.

The free class at the center - which is run by the Jewish Community Council of Greater Coney Island - is part of Seniors Partnering with Artists Citywide (SPARC), which aims to make New York a more livable place for the over-60 set.

Even the oldest student found he could do some of the hocus-pocus though he uses a walker to get around and carpal tunnel syndrome limits the movement in his left hand.

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"It's very entertaining; that's the best part of it," said Al Guber, 90, a retired typesetter from Brighton Beach.

Learning magic is a form of brain calisthenics for older people; it also gives their hand-eye coordination a workout and pushes them to socialize, said Dreifus, who lives in Midwood and produces magic shows at Coney Island USA's Sideshows by the Seashore theater.

"It's different and it's special," said William Lu, 63, a retired Coney Island audio-visual technician, who performed a tidy trick while his wrists and thighs were bound with double-knotted rope.

Fellow students all carried off routines with nary an error, from a complicated maneuver with cups and balls to making a red hankie disappear from a clenched fist.

Dreifus doesn't want the June 19 performance to be his students' last time in the limelight. In the fall, he plans to put together an "intergenerational" show with them and kids he's taught magic to at community centers, which he'll stage at Sideshows by the Seashore.

"How often do our elders crawl into a shell and become a hermit?" said Dreifus. "Magic forces you to be social; it's a performing art."

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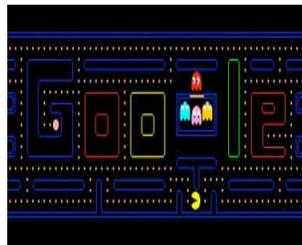
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