

A Summer of Yo — the 1997 tour

On July 27, Dennis Grzesiak will start off the day with a performance at the Rochester Hills Historical Museum and then race over to the Waterford Founders Festival in Waterford Township.

In August, Grzesiak will be a featured performer at the Independence Oaks County Park.

And in September, he will be performing at the Orion Public Library.

Grzesiak is firming up other performances in Shelby Township, the City of Troy, Clarkston and Lake Orion throughout the summer as well. In addition to regular performances, Grzesiak also performs for charity fund-raisers.

A typical yo-yo exhibition lasts from 40 to 50 minutes and includes the basic and classic tricks to the more complicated elaborate tricks.

Yo-yo expert shows locals his tricks

BY GERALD FRAWLEY
STAFF WRITER

Don't call it child's play. For Dennis Grzesiak, the yo-yo is more than a kid's toy. It's gravity and centrifugal force, it's craftsmanship and history, its competition and practice for the sake of self-improvement.

And it's a lot of fun, too. In fact, after nearly 40 years of competition, performing and collecting, it's probably the fun that keeps him yo-yoing, er, going.

"I always carry an arsenal of yo-yos with me," says the Oxford man, one of the most accomplished (if not the most accomplished) yo-yo masters in Michigan. "You never know when people are going to ask you to do a trick."

Over the years, yo-yos and public opinion have had an up and down relationship but when you reach the level of skill that Grzesiak has reached, even in down years people are spellbound at what the simple yo-yo is capable of in the hands of a master.

The way things are going, Grzesiak expects to be quite popular.

"We're on an upswing now," he said. "Sometimes in the near future, maybe even further, some kid is going to take a yo-yo to school and then suddenly everyone will want one, he predicted.

After about a year, the appeal will wear, he knows, but some kids who had never even thought about a yo-yo before will be hooked for life. "For parents and grandparents, it is a nostalgic thing. For boys and girls, it's about fun."

A yo-yo master is born

Grzesiak's passion for yo-yos reaches back to 1967 when he first picked up a yo-yo after watching his cousin do a few — elaborate tricks. "I saw him working his yo-yo and I asked him if he could teach me."

Four months later, he attended his first competition at the Northwest Detroit Regional Yo-Yo Championship.

He won. He has had a string of victories ever since, but rarely competes today because the thrill of competition isn't what it once was. The other reason is that his reputation precedes him.

With 167 victories over the

past 40 years, Grzesiak is well known in yo-yo competition circles; and if the name isn't enough, a closer look at the rope around his neck reveals that they are indeed yo-yo strings.

Grzesiak explains it is customary for yo-yo champions to wear a string around their neck for each competition they win. And while he doesn't like to brag, he admits that there aren't too many people walking around with 167 strings around their neck.

In all his years of competition, in fact, he has only lost once — to the cousin who first taught him those few tricks. Grzesiak, in 1969 and I took second place. It was the first and only time we ever competed and it was an honor to lose to him," he said. "I wouldn't say that about anyone else."

Of course, it's easier to say that, he admits, because he did beat his cousin in the same competition, but in a different event. Yo-yo competitions are often split into separate events.

In this case, his cousin won the competition with a plastic, high-tech yo-yo, Grzesiak won in the wood.

With competition less important Grzesiak says he takes a great deal of pleasure out of collecting all things yo-yo. He has yo-yos from the 1920s, yo-yo books, trophies, patches — if it has to do with yo-yos, odds are Grzesiak is well schooled in it.

The future of yo-yos

While he likes to consider himself more of a purist, Grzesiak admits to a fascination with the newer, high-tech yo-yos on the market.

No one will ever convince him to trade in his old tried-and-true, kiln-dried, smooth maple wood yo-yos for polyurethane, but darn those things can be neat, he says.

With centrifugal clutches that



Yo-yoing: Yo-yo expert Dennis Grzesiak of Oxford will be showing his tricks in various locations throughout Oakland County.

Staff Photo By Tom Hoffmeyer

The Basics of Yo-yoing

automatically return the yo-yo to your hand, strobe lights and finely-turned axles that make the enable of 1,000 revolutions per minute, there is indeed something to be said for technology.

He even uses some of them in his show, he said. "The faster the spin, the longer the trick."

A typical yo-yo is capable of up to 6,500 revolutions per minute.

Even that is a far cry above the yo-yo of more than 76 years ago.

For hundreds of years, the yo-yo was a block of wood and a string; it went down and came back up. In the 1920s, the modern yo-yo with a slip knot over a free spinning axle was born and for more than 76 years people have been trying to out-do each other with the newest trick.

But it's also about learning. Yo-yo practitioners may be competitive, but they are also tremendously helpful.

The best part about a yo-yo, Grzesiak says, is doing a trick for the first time, showing it to someone else, seeing them attempt it, and then helping the person do the trick.

After all, it's only after someone accomplishes the trick that he or she truly fully appreciate its intricacies and beauty.

The Spinner is also called the Sleeper. Hold your palm upward and make sure the string leads off the top of the yo-yo. Flick your wrist downward. When the yo-yo reaches the end of the string, don't tug up until the yo-yo has slept for as long as it can. If you follow all these instructions and it still doesn't sleep, you might need to untwist the string.

The Forward Pass can be used as a core step in many yo-yo tricks. Hold your yo-yo at your side with your palm down, and the string running clockwise from your finger. Swing your arm slightly back and then swing it in front and up. Let the yo-yo go at the same time, and throw it out in front of you. Catch the yo-yo with your palm up.

The Breakaway is also used as a core step to many tricks. Hold the yo-yo with the string running clockwise from your finger. Make a muscle as shown in the illustration. Now quickly swing your yo-yo down and across your body. While swinging, rotate your wrist so that it is up when the yo-yo reaches the end of the string and snaps back into your hand.

The Creeper is a fun trick much like walking the dog. Throw a fast sleeper. Extend your arm and bend down, letting the yo-yo creep along the floor. When it has reached the end of the string, the yo-yo will jump back to your hand.

Yo-yo history

The first yo-yos originated in ancient Greece. In ancient Greece, they were more than likely a children's toy, made of wood, metal, and terra cotta.

The two halves of the yo-yo were decorated with pictures of gods.

Upon reaching adolescence, young Greeks would offer up ceramic discs, exact replicas of their real childhood toy, to their favorite gods.

On a vase dated back to 500 B.C., a child is seen using a yo-yo.

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