

*Democracy Dies in Darkness*

## 'PIED PIPER' OF COLUMBIA IS A CLASSIC

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By Marie Westhaver

In Columbia, he's known just as "Mr. B." Children and adults alike are drawn to Tom Brzezinski, a schoolteacher who devotes much of his free time to young people in the community. His most popular work is a movie series that he has run for years.

Since 1972, when the Columbia Association organized the summer Lakefront Festival, Brzezinski has been showing area residents free movie classics, James Bond features and cartoons.

Even before the annual festival was established, Brzezinski's summer cinema for local children consisted of a bedsheet hung up by clothespins and a long extension cord set up on Rain Dream Hill and a park in Bryant Woods.

"I would go to a nearby parent's house and borrow a cup of electricity," the Columbia resident said said jokingly. His outdoor theater has since progressed to real screens and schedules, and many repeat customers.

"One couple came last year who were expecting their first child," Brzezinski said. "They had come to the movies at the lakefront when they were dating, and they are now planning to share the movies with their children. That's what makes showing the movies fun -- they bring out

nice crowds."

The logistics of managing a temporary outdoor theater can be

complicated. Brzezinski, 47, remembers holding the screen still during

windy evenings and holding an umbrella over the projector for

"watercolor" versions of "National Velvet." And while Disney movies

cannot be expressly advertised, word of mouth brings in the crowds.

"Because of their licensing agreements," Brzezinski said, "I can't

come right out and advertise that I'm showing a Disney movie. So, if I'm

going to show 'Bambi,' I tell everyone I'm showing a stag film, and

everyone knows what I mean."

Brzezinski is also familiar to children who attend his summer camp,

which he began eight years ago in Columbia. "It's a wonderful day in

Camp Sherwood," he offers as a greeting on phone calls, and he means it.

"He's considered the Pied Piper of Howard County," said Leslie

Fabian, who sent her child to Brzezinski's camp. "Anything involved with

kids and he's there." Fabian was so impressed with Brzezinski's camp

that she volunteered to work as a counselor.

Working during the summer with children ages 4 to 11 is not much

different from his job as media specialist at Bryant Woods Elementary

School. Along with camp activities such as swimming, fishing, kickball,

tennis and field trips, Brzezinski has a story hour, sometimes in

costume.

"When I'm 'Count B,' I fly in on Trans-Transylvania Airlines," he

said, in explaining his costumes and exploits. "But sometimes I'm 'Darth

B' for an outer space theme, or 'Swami B' for the Arabian Nights, or a six-foot bunny."

Brzezinski's example has prompted others to follow him. Two former students at Bryant Woods are counselors at Camp Sherwood, and two others are now teachers at the elementary school. Brzezinski has even had a child of a former student in his story hour. "Sometimes," he said, "my students come back to haunt me in very nice ways."

His public school expertise comes in handy in December when Brzezinski has been "Santa B" for the past 15 years. "I ask the kids what school they go to, and then I'm able to talk with them about their art project with Mrs. X or their music teacher, Mr. Y," he said.

"Every fourth-grade girl reads Judy Blume or Beverly Cleary, so I can tell her that I saw one of those books on her nightstand when I brought presents last Christmas. I like to help kids believe for one more year."

One of Brzezinski's favorite authors is Bill Peet, best known for the screenplays he wrote for Walt Disney of such classics as "Peter Pan," "101 Dalmatians" and "The Jungle Book."

Each year Brzezinski gives away autographed posters of the films of Peet's screenplays to the pupils at Bryant Woods Elementary. He also shows the fourth- and fifth-graders two 3-D movies: "The Creature from the Black Lagoon" and "It Came from Outer Space."

The young and the young at heart can enjoy Brzezinski's free movies at dusk Monday and Friday nights until Sept. 2 at the Columbia Lakefront Festival.