

# Rusty Dewees

—The man behind *The Logger*—

by Michelle Arnosky Sherburne  
BRADFORD—There wasn't a dry eye in the Bradford Academy auditorium Friday and Saturday nights when *The Logger* came to town. The Logger walks on stage, weaves his magic and the laughter doesn't stop.

"I laughed so hard it brought tears to my eyes." "I've never laughed so hard in my life!" "He's my hero!" "He's hysterical, unbelievable!"

Who said New Englanders were reserved? You hear him on the radio and see him on TV commercials. Rusty Dewees is Vermont's native son. He has fine-tuned his performances and works hard so that everyone knows who he is.

That is what is so appealing about the man behind the stage persona. He makes connections with people.

"It's that constant connection that keeps people knowing who you are," Dewees said in an interview prior to his show on Friday. "I am out there promoting myself, producing the show and that's what sells the show ... me!"

His focus is Vermont communities like Bradford, St. Johnsbury, Richford, North Hero, Arlington, Barton, Bellows Falls, and Barre. The Logger venues are town halls, auditoriums, fairs, community centers and opera houses.

"It is a community show I do," he said. In one weekend, he'll perform two shows in front of over 500 people.

Behind the scenes, it's all Dewees. There is no support staff or entourage. He has long-time friend Don Como play fiddle in the show and Como's wife, Peaches, handles the ticket sales at the door. He does have a graphic artist and a bookkeeper who help him in those areas. But he handles everything else himself.

He rents the hall, sets up his own equipment, handles all the promotion and public relations, prepares the stage, and arranges his meals.

When *The Logger* comes to town, Rusty really canvasses the area.

"I schedule a day months ahead and travel up and down the river here—Orford, Fairlee, Piermont, Bradford, Wells River—hanging posters myself."

He's out shaking hands, hanging posters, stopping in at local businesses about ticket sales. It's about getting your face out there and that is exactly what Dewees does.

"I produce the shows myself," Dewees said. "I promote them and have found that I can put more energy into it than having a nonprofit organization present me."

Dewees has designed his performance schedule to encompass venues around Vermont and parts of New York, such as Plattsburgh or Elizabethtown, and New Hampshire, like Enfield or Lebanon.

He doesn't want to go nationwide because it's harder to control when everything falls onto Dewees' shoulders.

"Like Maine, it's too far to do it the way I do it," he said. "If I wanted a bigger arena, I could do it but haven't decided I want to. I don't want to be like Larry the Cable Guy."

He is organized and has a full calendar. He schedules approximately 100 performances a year, 70 shows and 30 appearances. The Logger appears at graduation ceremonies, high school motivational talks, retreats, conferences and private company parties.

To keep the demand and allure of *The Logger*, Dewees knows that

he can't have back-to-back performances year after year.

"Absence makes the heart grow fonder," he said. "It's been four years since I was at the Bradford Academy. Yes, that works. And follow through is another part of it," Dewees said.

Four years ago, Oxbow High School baseball coach Shawn French approached Dewees about doing something for a baseball team fund-raiser. Dewees noted that and when he had booked Bradford for 2011, he called French and made arrangements. So the Oxbow baseball team held 50/50 raffles at both shows and raised over \$500.

Even with a bad economy, Dewees hasn't seen a decline in ticket sales. Shows are sold out. Everywhere.

There is no set demographic for Logger fans. He is a people person and connects with everyone, from native Vermonters, children, senior citizens, doctors, lawyers and farmers. Yes, even flatlanders, or out-of-staters.

"My humor is just being honest and connecting with people," he said.

His focus is on Vermont.

"I spend a lot of my time walking around Vermont and meeting people. I make it clear that I'm *The Logger* on stage, but a real guy." He has a huge fan base and he sells not only tickets for shows, but also a large assortment of Logger merchandise, including DVDs and a book. He is currently working on

his second book.

The Logger success and strategy didn't happen by accident.

"I designed *The Logger* shows this way," he said. "When I worked as an actor in New York, I dealt with agents, managers, and the constant search for work and thought that I could really promote myself and do this on a different scale."

Dewees trained in New York City and began his acting career there. He spent 11 years working in film, television, theater and commercials. He appeared with the late Patrick Swayze in *Black Dog* and Liam Neeson in *Ethan Frome* as well as 11 other movies. He also worked on television series like "All My Children," "Law & Order," "The Guiding Light," "Saturday Night Live," and others.

After growing up in Stowe, he decided to return to his home state. Dewees designed a marketing show plan and developed the character *The Logger*. He debuted *The Logger* show in 1997 and the rest is history.

"I have a blessed thing here that is very unique," he said. "I focus on communities and it all works."

Just like any other success, much of it is based on word-of-mouth, which draws people in. It's the quality of his showmanship that keeps them coming back.

The Logger shows reach people because they relate to the stories and jokes. His focus is on living in Vermont and humor about flatlanders, health nuts and the



A YOUNG FAN GETS AN AUTOGRAPH—Four-year-old Natalie Perry, daughter of Troy and Erin Perry of Bradford, got a free Logger tank top at the Saturday performance. The Logger talked to Natalie and her younger sister, Emma during the show and gave them free tanks which they had autographed after the show. (see more pictures on page 7.)

JO PHOTO BY MICHELLE SHERBURNE

faint-at-heart who try to live where it's more rugged than down country. School closings, government intervention and stupid road signs are fodder in the Logger's repertoire.

This year's shows have about 35 minutes of music featuring Dewees on guitar and Como on fiddle. Dewees shares anecdotes that lead into a song. He adds new material all the time, writing all his own stuff, and added more 50-something humor.

His first book *Scrawlings*, a compilation of essays and columns, has been successful. Dewees published it himself—no publisher, agent or promotional

staff. Just Dewees.

"Yes, people seem to like the book. I did take a risk because it's not a "Logger" book, it's more essays about my dad and shows a different side of me," he said. Dewees wants people to know that he's a real person not *The Logger* all the time. He is working on his second book now.

Relating that's the key. New Englanders relate to one of their own telling stories and jokes about things they understand and have experienced. That's why *The Logger* has become so popular.

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