



**Brandon Kroeger, 18, began twisting balloons semi-professionally five years ago. Two years later, his mom Joan joined the business, which keeps their schedules full each weekend.**

BOAZ JOSEPH PHOTOS / THE LEADER

# A twisted (balloon) tale

**A Surrey mom and her teenaged son make up the Go Bonkers team**

by Boaz Joseph

**R**ule number one of the Go Bonkers team: No wiener dogs.

When Brandon Kroeger and his mother Joan entertain at parties with their twisted balloons, they need to be challenged, to wow their audiences.

Swords are also frowned upon.

At their weekend gigs, ranging from birthday parties to corporate events, adults often turn into babbling children as they watch elaborate detailed Pink Panthers, men on skateboards or multi-coloured flowers spawn from sections of hollow rubber.

It takes about five minutes, amid a melody of creaks, pops and squeaks, for a complex motorcycle to be fabricated in the fast-moving hands of Brandon, a 18-year-old graduate of North Surrey Secondary School.

An octopus, a fish, a ladybug... he can make seemingly anything in a couple of minutes. An elephant takes a bit longer. A more complex piece will take eight or nine balloons.

"Once you get the basic twists down, nothing

is complex," says Brandon. "It's (just) more time-consuming"

His first balloon-making gig was at age 13, for an employee of the YMCA. Business picked up quickly, mainly by word of mouth.

At first, Joan was just his driver and promoter, but within a year or so, she was a balloon-twisting member of the Go Bonkers Team – she became Mama B to his Bonkers the Clown.

Their suitcase comes replete with hundreds of Qualatex balloons in 20 different colours: 2"x60"s (inflated) for basics, 1"x60"s for details, 3"x50"s for flying (to have kids chase them), 6" hearts and

5" rounds.

The two collaborate on balloon-making styles, sometimes feeding off each other, sometimes poking fun as one outdoes the other.

Occasionally, Joan comes home to



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see a living room full of balloon entrails, mutated experiments and hordes of successful specimens that Brandon has worked on.

They always support each other on the job.

"I hate making horses, so I make her do them," Brandon chuckles. "She hates making Tweety Bird and penguins, so I make those ones."

Joan credits her son with spontaneous creativity, using an example of a vacuum cleaner that came from party request.

Dream on, buddy, she told the man.

Brandon took on the job after thinking about it for 10 seconds.

He soon had an upright Hoover for the client, complete

with a long balloon not blown up that would be "used" as a plug for a wall socket.

Some of their ideas come from online from places such as [www.balloonhq.com](http://www.balloonhq.com), where unlike the world of magic, there are no secrets between balloon-makers.

"The balloon world is very friendly," says Brandon.

"In fact, when Brandon first started, we joined an entertainers' club and there were probably 12 other clients who were all my age," explains his mother. "They told us right from the beginning that it's not competitive. There's so much business out there, and they're actually the ones that encouraged us... and (advised us) to raise our rates."

They still get referrals when the club's members are over-booked.

Bonkers the Clown and Mama

B arrive at gigs dressed as either clowns, pirates, cowboys or in formal attire – the latter more conducive to events such as weddings. Once, the mom-son team received four more spin-off gigs from a particular wedding.

In recent years, they've been hired by BC Hydro and Terasen Gas for Christmas parties, and saw hour-long line-ups for their balloons at Holland Park during the 2010 Olympic Games.

Brandon says that adults are more appreciative than kids of the balloon art, since they realize how complex the creations are.

How does a teenager feel about having a balloon business with his mother?

"Mom's a clown and so am I."

For more information, visit [www.gobonkers.ca](http://www.gobonkers.ca)

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