



Photo by Dale Stroud

Into the Spotlight

By Michele G. Hudson

After a career in engineering, Lake Mary's Jim McDonald took up acting and now has more than 100 film, print and voiceover credits to his name.

After overcoming shyness, **Jim McDonald** found a second career as an actor and encourages timid kids to discover their talents, too.

As a boy, **Jim McDonald** cringed at the thought of being in front of people. Now the **Lake Mary** resident never refuses an opportunity to be center stage. McDonald overcame his introversion, embarking upon a successful career as an actor, model, singer and voiceover talent. Today, he shares his story, hoping other shy kids might venture out of the shadows and into the spotlight.

Even though he had musical talents as a singer and violinist growing up, McDonald decided to stick with what felt safe and got a degree in engineering. "My first job out of college was designing submarines, and it didn't require a lot of social skills," he admits. But his personality took a life-changing turn when he was drafted into the Army during the Vietnam War at age 25.

"Because I was a few years older, I was given leadership roles," McDonald says. "I was pushed outside my comfort zone, but discovered it was fun being in front of people and getting out from behind a desk."

McDonald credits his time in the military as a turning point in his life that gave him the confidence to pursue more gregarious career paths. After his stint in the Army, he went into sales engineering and ultimately became an environmental

engineer with Orange County.

But McDonald was still drawn to creative pursuits. So he started to sing. Observing other "creative personalities," he found they had something he lacked: spontaneity and a comfort level with impromptu situations. Loving new challenges (a trait he developed from sales), he took up acting to strengthen his own creativity.

Not long after getting into acting, McDonald was asked to stand in as a runway model for a friend and added another talent to his résumé. Soon his venture into runway modeling expanded to include print modeling, film, TV commercials and voiceover work. When he retired from his engineering job in 2004, he realized his hobby had turned into a full-fledged career and that his creative calling had boosted both his right brain activity and his analytical side.

In 2005, McDonald conducted his own consumer survey to learn what roles he was most naturally suited for. His research showed that one of the many roles he was a fit for was a golfer. Not a golfer in real life, he developed a "camera swing" and has since been cast as a golfer several times. He has completed more than 100 film, print and voiceover projects, more singing gigs than he can count and is cur-

rently shooting a movie that will be released early next year.

According to **Erin Woods** and **Bill Eissele**, fine arts teachers and drama sponsors at Lake Mary High School, programs such as drama, acting and improvisation are a great way for children to boost their self-esteem. "A wide variety of students sign up for our classes, and many are shy or introverted," says Woods. "However, by creating a safe environment, students thrive and often discover sides of themselves they never knew existed." A child's school drama class or church choir may be a comfortable place to start.

A true testament to the rewards of conquering shyness, McDonald currently hosts the local TV program "Community Café," is chairman of the publicity committee of Messiah Choral Society and has served on the show selection committee for the Wayne Densch Performing Arts Center.

"Being persistent and not quitting is what will lead to your success," McDonald says. "Sales taught me that 'no' is often a challenge to find another way."

Not shy any longer but amazingly confident, McDonald has learned and is teaching others that "things can only intimidate you until you master them." ■

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