

By Mark Watson

## Val Hilliker 'Chillin' in Smoky Lake

Val Hilliker was 'Chillin' in Smoky Lake County February 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>. The Calgary-based Master Ventriloquist and World Laughter Leader presented her show "Chillin' with Val" to the elementary students at the schools in Waskatenau, Vilna and Smoky Lake. Ms. Hilliker is not a stranger to HAK, having presented a show here in 2006 for the elementary students.

This one hour show is based on the Virtues Project being used in our schools. The 'core' virtue being taught through this particular show is Assertiveness, using the 'Chill Skills', peaceful ideas for problem solving to be assertive. In Smoky Lake on February 10<sup>th</sup>, the 50 year young mother of three was hopping from point to point, with her fiancé (Kelly) and youngest daughter (Julie) helping her with music and props. Hilliker advised that she would be getting married on Saturday February 13<sup>th</sup>, after her Grande Prairie show and return to Calgary.

"When I was 18 years old, and I said to myself 'what am I going to do for the rest of my life?' and I read this book that taught me how to be a ventriloquist. I said 'OK, I'll do that' and three weeks later I did my first show," explained Hilliker during her show. "I have 50 guppies, 22 puppets, three children and one dog. They all walk my walk and talk my talk except the guppies. I just can't figure that out." She has been actively performing her shows as a way of teaching the Virtues Project, and has earned certification as a World Laugh Leader, International Master Ventriloquist and a Virtues Project Master Facilitator. Val has also studied under Joe Flaherty (of SCTV fame), and Comedy Bible author Judy Carter.

Once the elementary classes were seated in the small gym, the youth were introduced to Val's traveling companions. Mr. Richards was volunteered to help with the first demonstration, as Val placed a puppet mask on him and then proceeded to move its mouth. The next sketch involved a whiteboard-drawn face that 'came to life' after the student had finished it. This "Pickle Puppet", as Val named it, helped to explain the Chill Skills for the students

These are skills for dealing with others in an assertive (not aggressive) manner, and are represented by the acronym "CHILL", described by Val as a 'toolbox for your head'. First is to 'Chill out' by taking a deep breath or counting to 10. The next skill is to ask for Help from a parent, adult or other person. You can always use the 'Ignore' skill to take the bullying power away from another, but you need to truly ignore them and not react to what they may try to do to provoke a reaction. The next tool is 'Look Up', which means to make eye contact directly with the person bothering you, and this is followed by 'Leave', if you feel in danger or if the other skills haven't ended the situation.

Val reminded everyone that not all of the skills need to be used in every case. Sometimes, one of the skills will be all you need. At other times, you may need to use a combination of skills.

Throughout the performance, we met characters such as Winnie the Pooh (in rabbit ears and coming from a magician's hat), Lili (a frog in a duck costume), Crocker the Rocker, Pedro and Mr. C the Caterpillar. They helped to illustrate issues such as 'being different', choosing and using words wisely, and using courtesy. The children gasped in amazement at an illusion that Val performed that

made her head appear to shrink and expand, and they laughed uproariously when she directed this illusion at HAK principal Bruce Hinkley, showing how much they had learned from the show.

Val's performance wrapped up with encouragement for the students to practice their CHILL Skills, as she and her friends prepared to travel to Grande Prairie for their next performance, and her upcoming we