

# BAYSIDE GAZETTE



NOVEMBER 19, 2015

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JOSH DAVIS/BAYSIDE GAZETTE

Carlos Mir, an operations manager at Apple Discount Drugs in Berlin, demonstrates his alter ego, "Cascading Carlos," a prolific juggler who could soon have multiple Guinness World Records.

## 'Cascading Carlos' goes for Guinness

By Josh Davis  
Staff Writer

(Nov. 19, 2015) By day 50-year-old Carlos Mir is a mild-mannered operations manager at Apple Discount Drugs in Berlin.

By night, however, he is Cascading Carlos, a professional juggler with more than 1,000 performances during a decade-plus career, as well as – potentially – multiple Guinness World Records.

Mir was born in Bogota, Columbia. His mother was from the United States and his father was Cuban.

The family moved frequently, and Mir said he struggled in school because of what he later learned was dyslexia. Reading could be almost impossible, but sports – and eventually juggling – were second nature.

"It was very difficult for me to read and write in school and I always found myself in the slower classes," he said.

"I had good dialog and good conversations, so a lot of the teachers couldn't understand what was going on. In the early '80s, they didn't really know what dyslexia was."

Mir was 10 years old when he learned he had an aptitude for juggling during a Circus World performance in Florida. One of the performers pulled several people out of the audience and asked each to attempt to juggle. Mir went last, but was the first to grasp the concept.

"I actually did the pattern of the cascading juggle," he said. "The excitement of me successfully doing it and then the crowd cheering was just an empowering feeling."

Mir said he practiced at home often, mostly teaching himself through trial and error.

"That was before YouTube," he said with a laugh. "I noticed it gave me confidence and it gave me self-esteem be-

cause when I could juggle front of people they were very receptive. It gave me a sense of satisfaction and filled this void, when other times I was being told I was dumb or that I wasn't smart."

He didn't know it at the time, but the hand-eye coordination he learned from juggling helped to strengthen certain visual weaknesses that may have contributed to his dyslexia.

"The struggle with reading with dyslexia is the words move a lot – the words spin off the paper, they shift a lot, and a lot of that has to do with the weakening of the eye," he said.

Mir spent his high school days in New Jersey, still struggling with his studies, but excelling at football, basketball and lacrosse.

To his surprise, he was recruited to play lacrosse for then Salisbury State College, where he started all four years. As a senior, Mir played under leg-

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## Berlin officials took careful steps while guiding turnaround

By Josh Davis  
Staff Writer

(Nov. 19, 2015) Berlin suffered like many other small towns across the United States during the Great Depression and its turnaround took the better part of a century.

Now that the town is thriving again, its mayor wants the citizens to help plan for a future that's focused on growth and sustainability, without losing its trademark charm.

For Mayor Gee Williams, a resident of Berlin, it's a discussion that he's been waiting to have for most of his life.

"When I used to talk about growth years ago people just laughed," he said.

Williams remembers a time during the 1970s, when he was covering town politics for what was then the Eastern Shore Times, the paper in Berlin at the time.

"In the old days, the meetings would go on till past midnight and very little would get decided. You talk about the ultimate frustration," he said. "Maybe, along with what I honestly believe is caring for the town, I have a few psychological scars from those days. I don't ever want to see that happen again. Most of it was because everything was being decided one piece at a time."

He said the town took an unusual approach to governing during the "Great Recession" that occurred during the first decade of the 21st century, by investing in infrastructure, starting with wastewater.

"We had no growth potential," Williams said. "We might have been able to add a few single-family homes. That's it. But I think all of us who were involved in decision-making knew that we were making decisions that would allow us opportunities and options when the economy came back."

"It was a perfect time to be investing, because we didn't have any demand," Williams added. "I think we had a year or so there with no applications for new housing at all."

Clearly, things have changed. During a council meeting earlier this month, the town approved a measure to allow for more units in a large, new townhouse complex and voted to go to the bond market to pay for a \$3 million former industrial property that will even-

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# Juggler endured 'huge struggle' with dyslexia

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endary coach Jim Berkman when the team first reached the NCAA tournament, finishing fourth overall.

He also earned a degree in marketing and promotions, an astonishing achievement given the fact that he almost didn't make it through the first month of the first year of college.

"It was a huge struggle as a freshman," he said. "I wasn't doing well and I was actually going to flunk out."

Elizabeth Bellavance, an English teacher and wife of former Salisbury University president Thomas Bella-

vance, pulled Mir out of class during that first month and asked him to take an oral exam.

"She was trained in dyslexia and developmental reading, and she was able to diagnose me dyslexic," Mir said. "From that day on I was able to get all my books that I had to read for class on cassette."

He also bought a tape recorder for in-class lectures, and learned that by changing the tint of the paper, using colored transparencies, he could focus better on reading.

"Mrs. Bellavance taught me some

tools and gave me advice on how to manage my reading," Mir said. "I found out then that I learned differently than the average person."

After college, Mir put his degree to good use, working for several nonprofit groups. In 1996, he founded the Children's Theater of Delmarva, which led to a job as a fundraising director for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. Mir also spent a decade with the National Diabetes Association and three years with local nonprofit Women Supporting Women.

Working in nonprofits was not es-

pecially lucrative, but it did give him the flexibility of schedule to reinvigorate his interest in an old hobby – juggling.

In 1997, Mir started doing regular demonstrations in front of his daughter's daycare class. When a local librarian caught his act, she booked him as a guest performer and Cascading Carlos was born.

Today, Mir said he averages 140 performances a year, ranging from workshops in Worcester and Wicomico County libraries to outdoor

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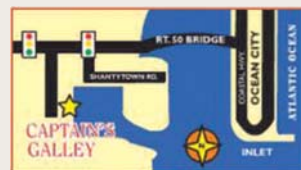
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## Mir waiting to hear about several world records for juggling

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festivals, including the recent Octoberfest celebration in Berlin.

His act, he said, is geared towards improving the self-esteem of audience members, from children to senior citizens. In fact, Mir said he recently learned that juggling can help fend off later-in-life diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's.

"It's focusing your brain and motor skills, and when you can juggle you're going to [put off] diseases if you're genetically at risk," he said.

Mir said juggling helped him build confidence, something that he did not have in abundance when struggling with dyslexia as a child.

"I know that if I don't do well it's probably because I didn't try hard enough or I didn't make the effort to learn more efficiently," he said. "With reading, I wasn't reading so I wasn't building my strength. I wasn't taking the time to work at reading because it was so hard."

Computers have also made Mir's life easier, allowing him to change the tint of the screen with a mere key-stroke. With hard work and determination – and a little help on the technology front – he has written 25 grants on behalf of the Children's Theater of Delmarva, 23 of which have been accepted.

"I had such a struggle reading and writing as a child, but later in life it didn't hold me back because I made efforts and the technology improved," he said. "The success of computers and my wife – who proofreads a lot of stuff for me – have definitely helped."

In July, Mir attempted to set several world records using the diabolo, or Chinese yo-yo, while at the Holiday Inn on 66th Street. After measuring the building, Mir estimates he was able to successfully throw and



Cascading Carlos Mir teaches 6-year-old Ace Hobbs of Baltimore how to use the diabolo, a spool which is whirled and tossed on a string tied to two sticks, during the Ocean City Life-Saving Station Museum's annual Children's Day on the Bay at Sunset Park in August.

catch seven different sizes on diabolo, three times consecutively, each between 97 and 105 feet into the air.

He set up two cameras and recruited an audience of witnesses, then submitted his application to Guinness World Records that month. He expects to receive confirmation by the end of November.

"I'll be 51 in December," Mir said. "To be 50 or 51 and break a Guinness World Record, I thought, would be a neat accomplishment."

If all goes well, Mir should soon receive word that he has set seven.

More than setting records, however, Mir said he loves hearing from people who have been inspired by his act. During one of the signature com-

ponents of his show, he recruits people from the audience – much like he was more than four decades ago – and teaches them how to spin plates simply by holding a rod in place.

"To this day I still have parents and grandparents come to me with their phones and show me pictures that they had taken four, five, six years ago of their children and grandchildren with the plates on them," he said. "I think that's a really neat thing that they're remembering and they're having memories."

"The idea is to inspire young people – or anyone – to be active," Mir added. "You may not think it's tiresome, but juggle an hour and your arms will be Jell-O."

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