

'Mark Twain' pokes fun at Morganton, WPCC

By JOHN McCURRY
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After more than two years of research and eight years of performing as Mark Twain, actor Ken Richters said he still carries a couple of his alter ego's books with him on the road.

A dedication to his character was

clearly evident Thursday night as Richter's one-man show delighted an overflow audience at Western Piedmont Community College's Moore Auditorium in Morganton.

Richter's portrayal comes almost entirely from Twain's works. Richter said he tries to localize his show whenever possible by poking fun at the town he is in. Thursday's show

was no exception.

"On my way into Morganton," he said, "I couldn't help but notice the Catawba River. It runs right by Morganton and doesn't stop. After seeing Morganton, I don't blame it."

Richter also took a few jibes at the college and its faculty.

"God knows there's enough idiots in the world. Just look at this col-

lege's faculty," he said.

About his drinking habit he said: "I only drink liquor for the reason God put it on this earth — as a toothache preventative."

The Simsbury, Conn., native began playing Twain as an extra credit high school project. He picked it up

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again several years later as he sought a new direction after working in television in California.

"I wanted to do more work on stage than I was doing," Richters said as he put on his makeup prior to Thursday's performance — an endeavor that takes nearly three hours. "I decided I could do it and it has worked out pretty well so far."

Richters, who said his age is "30ish," has about 5½ hours of Twain material "set in my head," and his typical show lasts about two

hours. He said he enjoys playing Twain because the author was topical and political.

"There's virtually no difference in what people are saying today about politicians and what they said 100 years ago," Richters said.

The actor becomes Twain 120 to 150 times during the fall and winter of each year. He is booked almost every night with only an occasional day off. In fact, Richters stays so busy he had to look at his schedule to see where he was playing next. The Morganton performance was a stop-over between Charleston, S.C., and

Charlotte.

"After Charlotte, I go to Atlanta and Miami and then back to Fayetteville and Buies Creek, which sounds like it is going to be a great deal of fun," Richters said facetiously.

Richters said about 40 percent of his shows are at colleges and the rest at theaters in large cities. He described his Connecticut base as "a nice quiet place, but not the theatrical Mecca of the world."

Richters has appeared in television shows such as "Happy Days" and "Magnum P.I." and he had a role in NBC-TV's movie "Johnny We

Hardly Knew Ye" about the early political life of John F. Kennedy. He has performed as Twain in Australia and Europe and recently did a show for the BBC in London.

With his show booked solid for the next 18 months, Richters said he sees no letup in sight. He said he might cut down on the number of his performances if he can land some movie roles.