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Genetics groundbreaker grew up in Severna Park

By MIKE UNGER, Staff Writer



Benjamin Feinblum is a 21st-century Renaissance man.

The 23-year-old from Severna Park prides himself on being, among other things, a magician, singer and dancer. He even has created dozens of character voices.



"I don't do anything I'm not passionate about," he said.

But it was in the scientific, and some would say unartistic, field of genetics that he made a startling breakthrough.



Mr. Feinblum, a senior at the University of Maryland, created a new way to mathematically map a gene. It's a problem-solving process that maps the size of the pieces of DNA in a gene.

One night, after struggling through genetics homework using a traditional gene mapping method, he decided to approach the process differently.

"I noticed a relationship between groups of numbers and created a shape around it," he said.



As Mr. Feinblum continued to work problems using his new method, the method continued working. He showed it to his professor, Paul Bottino, who was shocked to see such a discovery had been made by a theater major.

"No biology major has even done this," Mr. Bottino said. "Ben was successful because he actually looked at this problem from a different perspective."



It was a perspective the current social psychology major learned at Severn School, Severna Park High School and Anne Arundel Community College.

Mr. Feinblum credits much of his success to teachers he encountered while

growing up in Severna Park, where his family still lives in Belleview Estates.

"If you live (in Severna Park) and want to grow and expand what you're doing, you really can," he said.

An avid magician who performs for corporations and school children alike, Mr. Feinblum said the only reason he even took genetics was to boost his performance talent.

"I just assumed that because I was studying everything imaginable, something would cross over from each field."

After creating his method, Mr. Feinblum taught it to 200 students in one of Mr. Bottino's classes. It caught on and is now frequently used in College Park.

"The alternative method of a process to map genes made sense (and) was very helpful," Amanda Steeves wrote on a feedback sheet after hearing Mr. Feinblum explain his method during a lecture in November. "The thought process behind the method was explained well so you could follow along."

Mr. Feinblum is considering writing a workbook centered around the method, for which he obtained copyright protection under the name The Feinblum Method of Restriction Analysis.

"I want to inspire students to start looking for scientific things on their own and to help them build the foundation for strong character as a scientist."

His own career aspirations, however, do not include science. He is performing "The Magic Backpack," a magic show designed to inspire children to read, and studying acting at the Studio Theater Conservatory in Washington, D.C.

In addition, he's developing a children's television show that pairs magic and puppetry and would like to take a shot at performing on Broadway.

"If you choose, you can do anything and do it better than most," he said.

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