

# Many are those behind koala's spiritual mission



**Kevin Riordan**  
*The Jersey Side*

Algernon Hall wants you to know there's more to Jubilee the Spirit-Filled Koala Bear than "dancing around and singing."

There's prayer, for one thing.

"That's how the image of Jubilee came to me," Hall says. "It came into my heart while I was praying one morning. God laid this out."

The 35-year-old Newark, N.J., native explains Jubilee's genesis as he gets into the fuzzy-wuzzy regalia of the educational/inspirational character he created. "I wanted to do something different," Hall says just before he slips Jubilee's enormous happy head over his head. See **JUBILEE** on B12



AKIRA SUWA / Staff Photographer

**J is for Jubilee**, the Spirit-Filled Koala Bear. Played by Algernon Hall, Jubilee greets children at BPUM Daycare in Blackwood.

**Commentary** By Kevin Riordan

## A spirit-filled bear named Jubilee

**JUBILEE** from B1

own.

This is different, all right. As a veteran of the Howdy Doody era, I've no idea whether a seven-foot-tall marsupial in neon-yellow galoshes goes over with today's media-savvy youngsters. They've probably been immersed in *Avatar*'s 3-D wonders; back in my day, we were enthralled by those barely one-dimensional *Clutch Cargo* cartoons.

Jubilee debuted in 2008 and so far has brought his tightly choreographed, light-hearted and loving message — secular or spiritual, depending on the venue — to day-care centers, elementary schools, hospitals, and churches throughout South Jersey and Philadelphia.

Literacy, good nutrition, and good manners are among "Jubi's" many themes; Hall says he provides kids the sort of "positive reinforcement" he yearned for while growing up in a tough urban neighborhood.

Now a resident of Burlington Township, where he shares a home with his wife and young son, Hall works in security for a package delivery company. He hopes to take his Jubilee Children's Entertainment company "international" via TV.

On this particular morning, he's about to meet a restive



AKIRA SUWA / Staff Photographer

**Algernon Hall is Jubilee.** Fellow members of Living Faith Christian Center in Pennsauken contribute to the program.

crowd of about 30 preschoolers at the BPUM Child Development Center in Blackwood.

But first, let's introduce his supporting cast.

Turns out Jubilee's tale is a story about faith — in particular, how members of the Living Faith Christian Center in Pennsauken are helping Hall realize his dream of being "the next Barney or Elmo."

Hall teaches in the children's ministry at the non-denominational church, where the character of Jubilee "certainly catches the children's attention," says Minister Marsha Washington. Professionals in the congregation, meanwhile, have discounted or donated their services to refine and promote Jubilee.

"I helped him because I value our friendship more than I value money," says Vincent Abanyie, owner of Masterpiece Design, a graphics and Web design firm in Ewing Township.

"When I saw Jubilee for the first time, I was fascinated. Al's vision is so strong and so vivid, I couldn't help but spread the word," says Lavinia Awosanya, whose marketing firm, Eventmood, is in Lumberton.

Even Jubilee's theme song, produced by Derrick Hannah's Rugged Cross studios in Philadelphia, was a gift.

An actress and educator who lives in Westampton, Marcia Myers works alongside Hall during live shows.

She met him through the theater ministry at Living Faith, and says being Jubilee's on-stage assistant/foil is fun.

It's also work, as the performance at BPUM quickly makes clear.

Myers warms up the crowd for Jubilee's big entrance; the audience shrieks with delight and begins dancing to the Jubi song en masse.

"Who are these wonderful kids?" Jubilee asks.

"They're our friends," Marcia answers.

Some of the kids look a bit, shall we say, wary of this enormous dancing creature. Others seem bewildered.

But before long, the whole group is dancing and singing. The place is rocking.

And that's before the kids learn a little about teamwork and following directions as they set out on safari to help Jubi find his lost treasure (to the musical accompaniment of *Flight of the Bumblebee*).

"The most rewarding piece of all of this," Hall says afterward, "is when the kids line up, even the ones who didn't look like they were into it, and hug your leg or give you a high-five and ask, 'When are you coming back?'"

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