



# ENGINEERING MAGIC

Elliott Hunter has been interested in magic since he saw a magician at his local library when he was 7. As a magician, he often uses his engineering skills to build props. Hunter has performed magic around the country, including the Magic Castle and multiple shows at Cal Poly.

## *IME graduate Elliott Hunter is leading a dual life as an engineer and a magician*

**S**tanding next to an applause sign he engineered himself, Elliott Hunter begins his virtual show with some of his most time-honored tricks, making cards magically appear from his hands and mouth. When his intro music ends, Hunter inches closer to his screen and addresses his audience, roughly 30 people who are benefitting a community theater in Hunter's hometown.

"I'm so excited to share with you the show I've been working on for most of my life," says Hunter, whose real name is Elliott Hunter Hofferth. "And I've had the opportunity recently to transition to the virtual format so that now we can connect with everyone in a front-row seat, and we can share magic all over the world."

Hunter, from Anacortes, Washington, normally performs in-person to much larger crowds at venues that include The Magic Castle in Los Angeles, casinos, corporate events, fundraisers around the country and Cal Poly events. But, just as he was lining up

cruise ship shows and a tour in China — poof! — months' worth of gigs vanished due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

"To have 12 to 18 months of work just disappear in 24 hours — that's not awesome," he said a few days after the virtual benefit show.

Of course, as an engineering student, Hunter was trained to adapt. And engineering and magic have called out to him since he was in elementary school.

"When I was a senior in high school, we received letters that we wrote to ourselves in the fifth grade," said Hunter, who completed his manufacturing engineering degree last spring. "And mine said, 'I want to



be successful as a stage magician, and I will go to college to become an engineer."

The engineering influence was easy to pinpoint — both his grandfather and father had worked as engineers. His grandfather, Dean Hofferth, was director of propulsion for the Apollo program, which sent humans

to the moon, and his father graduated from Cal Poly with a mechanical engineering degree in 1980.

Meanwhile, Hunter embraced magic at age 7, when he saw a magician perform at a public library in Anacortes.

While his Cal Poly days were still a few years away, Hunter began studying with accomplished magicians when he was 12. As he learned about the history of magic at McBride's Magic & Mystery School in Las Vegas, he began honing his earliest tricks — the appearing cards — practicing without even thinking about it as he sat on his couch watching TV or while talking with friends.

“The point of practice and rehearsal is to get to the point where you can do it without

thinking about it,” he said.

Eventually, his tricks became more sophisticated, involving larger props. Luckily, he liked building things and was a lab tech for his high school shop class, where he worked with welders and CNC cutters.

“If there was a magic prop I couldn't af-

ford, I could build it or watch my dad build it for me,” he remembered.

While still in high school, Hunter began arranging tours to raise funds for nonprofits, starting with his high school and the Boy Scouts of America.

“One summer, in my small hometown we made close to \$4,000 in one night for the Seattle Children's Hospital's Urgent Care program,” he said.

With travel made easier by his father, a pilot, he also did benefits in other states, including Montana and Wyoming. Meanwhile, the analytical side of engineering also appealed to him, leading him to attend Cal Poly, where he worked as a lab tech in the Material Removal Lab.



Hunter, whose real name is Elliott Hunter Hofferth, demonstrates machining for a freshman student in the materials removal lab. In addition to working as a professional magician, Hunter was a lab tech at Cal Poly.

While that job allowed him to use university machines throughout college, Hunter mostly supported himself with magic, including several gigs for Cal Poly departments and the Cal Poly Corporation.

As a performer who employs others, markets himself and arranges his schedule,



## Video:

Scan to see how industrial engineering graduate Elliott Hunter makes stuff disappear like magic.

Hunter also uses business skills.

“Being an entertainer on stage means I have to be an entrepreneur off stage,” he said.

Those experiences, on top of Hunter's extrovert personality, helped him in class, said Trian Georgeou, a lecturer in the Industrial and Manufacturing Engineering Department who first saw his student's magic show during a department banquet.

“By being able to perform in front of large crowds, he has built his confidence level up,”

Georgeou said last year. “And I've seen that in class. When dealing with his peers, he has that confidence and he's able to be a leader in class.”

Hunter was a typical college student with an active social life. Except not completely typical. When he began attending parties, Hunter would bring his cards and work on his muscle memory. Inevitably, crowds would gather, the music would stop and Hunter would find himself performing.

At parties and events for his swim club and triathlon team, it just became expected that he would perform.

“So, yeah, I got to socialize at parties, but also I got to go around and practice my strolling magic that I could then polish to then get hired to do,” he said.

Since graduation, he has worked for KonaMetrix developing remote leak detection systems for water. But he has also returned to in-person performances, which has included headlining the Magic Castle and a return to Cal Poly, performing at the

Spanos Theater during the Week of Welcome.

“It's been great being back in person,” he said. “People are so starved for live entertainment.” ■