

Bruce Wilson expertly mounts a pair of stilts in the gymnasium of Woodman Elementary School in southeast Wichita and declares to the children seated on the floor, “This is how I get high – on stilts, not on drugs.”

Wilson, G’95, is here as his alter ego, Slim Goodbody, a character who has been entertaining and educating schoolchildren nationwide about healthful habits for three decades. The third-, fourth-, and fifth-graders are instantly absorbed in the show, a fast-paced 50 minutes of music and skits about turning away from drugs and peer pressure.

Best known for his bodysuit – literally a Spandex map of the human body – Slim is now played by multiple actors. For the past five years, Wilson has been the one appearing at schools in the northeastern United States, but he spent this past spring back in Wichita for an extended run of shows in USD 259.

That dream was almost derailed when the University phased out the drama degree before he graduated. He was allowed to complete his program but he had few peers to collaborate with. “You can’t learn theater by yourself or through a book,” he said.

So Wilson got creative. He asked if he could expand his senior project, which was typically to direct a one-act play, into a full-fledged musical. His professors agreed, and his production of “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat” wound up being the school musical that year.

“Had I been in a school with a larger program, I don’t know if I would have been afforded the freedom to expand my leadership skills that way,” he said.

After graduation, Wilson set out for New York City to pursue an intense four-semester program at the American Musi-

Fit and Trim, Like Slim

BY ERIN O’DONNELL



PHOTOS BY STEVE RASMUSSEN

It was a special time for Wilson, who said he relished being something of a local celebrity for a few months to 20,000 Wichita kids. More importantly, he enjoyed the opportunity to spread Slim’s positive message about health and nutrition in his hometown, thanks to a federal grant to the school district for physical education programming.

“With the rise in childhood obesity and diabetes, the whole nation is having to realize this crisis,” Wilson said. “I am passionate about the message of good health. I like being that healthy, positive voice in a society where fast food restaurants and foods containing high fructose corn syrup dominate our culture’s diet.”

Becoming a children’s entertainer is not exactly what Wilson envisioned while pursuing a drama degree at Friends University. His sights were set on Broadway.

cal and Dramatic Academy. Soon after, he came full circle with his first professional job – a role in the national tour of “Dreamcoat” for 15 months. He continued to make New York his home as a bona fide working actor.

Going on innumerable auditions eventually led Wilson to the role of Slim. He continued trying out for other roles for a time, but “I kept going back to the Slim Goodbody tour, and I fell in love with it.”

Broadway is still a dream, but Wilson said even if that does not happen, he is still satisfied professionally.

“To work with kids has been sheer joy. Every day I go to work, there are usually 400 or 500 faces staring up at me like a superstar.”