

# miss manners

By Rachel Judy

How does a successful fashion model with political aspirations become known as “The Manners Lady”? Just ask Judi Johnston Vankevich '87 (Government). But, when you ask, be prepared for her to do more than just tell you; she just might break into song. After all, there's no better way to explain what she does than to sing about the Bad Manners Monsters—six characters who embody the ultimate in disrespect.

The Bad Manners Monsters—Grouchy Rouchy, Messy Bessy, Whiney Rhino, Grabba Jabba, Slobbo Roo and Wiggly Jiggly—are familiar to fans of the Manners Club, an international organization whose goal is to teach children the importance of good manners and respect for others. Created by Vankevich, this initiative to bring

**“MANNERS ARE AN OUTWARD EXPRESSION OF INWARD BEHAVIOR.”**

respect and integrity back into schools, homes and even the workplace, has become an international success.

Seeing the impact that manners initiatives have had on the people she's come in contact with, Vankevich is convinced that manners and civility are the cornerstone of a successful society. “We live in a very self-centered, me-first

society where kids are growing up with a sense of entitlement demanding their ‘rights’ rather than a sense of service, giving and thankfulness,” she says. “The world is selling our kids a false philosophy of ‘Do your own thing,’ ‘If it feels good, do it’ and ‘If it feels right for you, then it's right.’ These are lies.”

In a society where good manners seem to be more the exception than the rule, Vankevich goes beyond the occasional please or thank you. She teaches children how to act when they meet new people—right down to proper handshake form, how to respect their parents and how correct behavior can impact all areas of their lives.

Vankevich started the Manners Club out of her apartment in Regent Village while her husband Ned Vankevich '02 (Communication) was working on his Ph.D. She'd been teaching modeling classes at a local agency in Virginia Beach but realized that there were important lessons that were lost in the focus on outer beauty. Vankevich's

initial response was to start her own modeling agency where she could tailor instruction to include topics that went beyond image. But, before long, friend and 700 Club co-host Terry Meeuwssen suggested that she take her instruction in principles and manners a step further to include instruction in manners and respect for girls and boys of all ages.

Today, the Manners Club has grown far beyond the walls of a tiny campus apartment.

Vankevich travels throughout Canada and the United States performing high-energy concerts, conducting workshops and speaking to sports clubs, business professionals and other groups. She's the founding director of the Canadian Project for Manners and Civility, as well as its American counterpart. The Canadian and American projects were started “with the vision of helping America and Canada get back to their roots that made these countries great—hard work, character, civility, honor, respect,” she explains.



**Judi Johnston Vankevich '87**

Her message is simple: Good manners aren't optional at any age—but the implications are huge. "Manners are an outward expression of inward behavior," Vankevich says. "This is a generation of kids who don't even know what the Golden Rule is."

Her music gives children (and their parents) a fun, nonthreatening way to consider how their outward behavior impacts others. The songs "help kids visualize the behaviors and attitudes that are not welcome in our homes, communities and sports teams," explains Vankevich.

Her presentations are light-hearted and upbeat, but Vankevich is serious about the need for significant change in respect and integrity. She firmly believes that a person's manners have a huge impact on society as a whole and sees crime as the ultimate display of bad manners. Recognizing the value of this stance, the solicitor general's office in Vancouver recently sponsored nine Manners Lady events as part of a crime prevention initiative.

"Children learn that through citizenship, character and self-control they can make a difference in fighting crime, bullying and rudeness in their communities, schools and in their families," says Vankevich.



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"They're visualizing that we can say no to crime, to bad behavior."

Kids are clamoring for her fun performances—original songs that include "The Five Fabulous Phrases" and



**Judi The Manners Lady performs at an Easter Concert outreach at Christian Life Assembly in Langley, B.C. for 1,500 children. During the concert, 45 Children came forward to commit their lives to Christ.**

the "Golden Rule Rap." But the impact of her message is hitting home with adults too. In one of her latest projects, Vankevich created the RESPECT pledge that will be signed by every parent, player and coach in the Langley United Youth Soccer Program in Langley, British Columbia. "We'd already prepared a version of the pledge for Langley baseball, so we were excited to be able to reach thousands of Langley soccer players and families with this vital message of respect both on and off the field," she says.

Most of her performances to date have been in Canada and the United States, but the Manners Club is spreading around the world. Her award-winning CD, "It's Fun to Have Good Manners!" is being translated into Spanish, French, Russian, Arabic and Chinese. She has authored *Manners Matter* and *Character Counts for Kids*. Her latest book, *30 Days to a Great Mannered Kid!*, was released in 2010.

Vankevich has also spearheaded the campaign to establish National Manners

Month (officially held in October) in the United States and Canada. Children from all over the world are signing the Good Manners Pledge, and a Manners Club curriculum has been developed for use by schools and religious organizations, regardless of affiliation. One of her latest projects, the "Say Hello to All the World" campaign, was used in preparation for the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver to encourage Canadian children to adopt a spirit of hospitality toward people of other nations.

Fifteen years after the Manners Club was born, Vankevich knows that what she's doing has significance far beyond what she imagined. "I thought it would be politics," she says of her expectations for her future and the ways she could impact the world around her. "I never thought it would be something like this ... It's thrilling to see kids get excited about doing the right thing and honoring their mom and dad and learning to love God and love others."