

**WHERE ARE THEY NOW?****Bayport-Blue Point High School Class of 1975**

# From Phantom to Batman, Spider-Man and Banana Tail

*BBP grad makes his mark in the comic book industry*

By LOREN ELIZABETH CHRISTIE

**BAYPORT-BLUE POINT** — Mark McKenna, a graduate of Bayport-Blue Point High School Class of '75, has created many adventures with his pen over the past quarter of a century as an inker for well-known comic book companies like DC and Marvel. He is currently on the cutting edge of a hot new genre, writing and illustrating his own series of graphic novels for young readers.

The oldest of four children, McKenna moved from Brooklyn to Barton Lane in Bayport at age 8. He remembers playing in the woods near his home as a child.

"Ours was one of the first houses in a new development. So I remember a lot of clay and dirt. There was a Girl Scout camp across the street. My friends and I would play fort in the woods," he recalled.

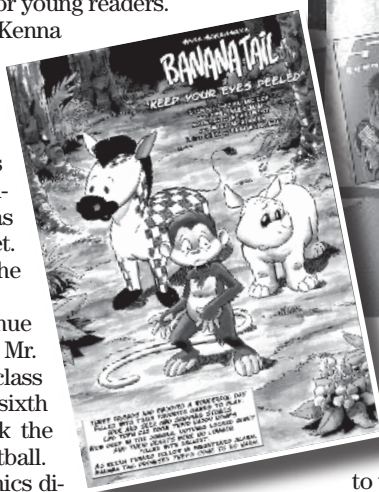
McKenna attended Sylvan Avenue Elementary School. He remembers Mr. Tobl, who taught his fourth-grade class and was "always cheerful." Later in sixth grade, instructor Mr. Benincasa took the class outside occasionally to play football.

McKenna's interest in film and comics directed his career ambitions when he graduated high school and attended the School of Visual Arts in New York City as a comic and film animation major. However, McKenna found it tedious producing roughly 770 drawings for one minute of animation. Tweaking his major, he graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in illustration and connected with Sal Almedola, who was the New Talent coordinator at DC Comics. With the help of Almedola, McKenna began work as comic book inker. In that role for the past 26 years, McKenna has contributed to 475 comics. Over 7,000 pages bear his ink lines telling the adventures of *Batman*, *The X-Men*, *Spider-Man*, *Star Wars* and *Justice League*, just to name a few.

"It's easier to list the comics I haven't worked on, since the list is so short," he said.

He jumped into the world of children's book publishing, looking to expand his opportunities and bring to life an adventurous monkey named *Banana Tail*, the brainstorm of his late father, John.

"Dad was a wonderful idea man. As a teletype operator for Merrill Lynch, that was the only creative outlet he had," McKenna explained, adding that his father never put his whimsical ideas into ac-



**Bayport-Blue Point Class of '75, Mark McKenna. At left: McKenna's work is seen here in the Banana Tail book cover.**

tion, always thinking they had no useful purpose.

"I called him 'The Great Procrastinator,'" he said.

When his dad passed away in 2002, McKenna self-published the first *Banana Tail* book to keep the idea alive and sold out of the first print run (2,000 copies) in the first four months. One school in Monticello, N.Y. bought 550 books as gifts for their students. During that time, McKenna started visiting elementary schools, introducing *Banana Tail* and his friends to beginning readers.

He went on to produce a 32-page children's activity book titled *Banana Tail's Tales and Activities*, featuring the "mischievous yet kind-hearted monkey." A limited edition coloring book has been added

to the series as well.

Today McKenna sees himself as laying the groundwork for transition from comic book artist to writer/illustrator of children's graphic novels. His latest in the ongoing *Banana Tail* series, *Banana Tail's Colorful Adventure*, is published as a graphic novel for young readers geared toward first and second-graders by Image Comics under the imprint Silverline Books.

McKenna resides in Florida, N.Y., a sleepy town in Orange County. He likes the rural aspect of his property, where deer sometimes snooze. He and his wife Kathy have two children, Erin, 20, and Kyle, 16.

A complete listing of McKenna's work is available on [Comicbook-db.com](http://Comicbook-db.com). Find it by searching the artist's name. For more information about Mark McKenna and the *Banana Tail* series, visit his website [www.bananatail.com](http://www.bananatail.com), or check out the *Banana Tail* Fan page on Facebook. ■