

The 17th Annual Northeast Clown Institute
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For 17 consecutive years, there has been an institute held in New England strictly for the purpose of clowning. Originally started by Frank “Pinky” Yetner of Palestine Temple and Socrates "Socko" Chalogue of Bektash Temple, this institute was originally called the Northeast Shrine Clown Institute. It grew over the years until it opened its doors in 1999 to non-shriners and became the Northeast Clown Institute.

Among its alumni are 15 Past Presidents of ISCA, 585 Shrine Clowns and 250 Non-Shriners and Ladies. Along these lines, 40 different Shrine Centers have been represented at NCI. One Past ISCA President, Oscar “Clyde” Cloutier was the 2nd Dean of the Institute, from 1994 to 1999. Our students and instructors travel from throughout the United States and Canada to Plymouth, Massachusetts every January to participate in this annual weekend event. A total of 835 people from across the United States and Canada have come together during the third weekend in January to learn about clowning. I have been Dean of the Institute since 2004. Jim “Buttons” Sickles, a Past President of the North East Shrine Clowns Assoc. has admirably held the position of President/Treasurer since 1996.

This is a 3-Year institute. Students register as a “Novice” in their first year, whether they are brand new clowns or experienced joeys. The novices are introduced to the various clown categories and assigned to attend classes to give them each an understanding of the basics. This year, senior students volunteered to become mentors and they assisted the novices in make-up application. All students were made up as a whiteface, auguste, hobo or tramp and they also received comments and critiques from instructors and other senior students.

Second year students are called “Advanced.” Their instruction is more in-depth and the advanced students have the option to compete in the costume & make-up competition. This competition is available for 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th year students. The understanding is that after completion of the three year institute, students will have two more years at this institute to compete. Of course, they have the option to compete elsewhere as they wish.

Third year students are called “Master” students and applications of the skills and talents are taught and showcased by top professional clowns, magicians and entertainers from all over North America. The Master classes learn skills, tricks and applications from COAI, WCA, ISCA and others in the clowning profession. The camaraderie among our attendees is one of the best parts of NCI. As such, students of this 3-Year institute come back year after year. One student, Jappo the Clown from Anah Shrine in Maine has come every year, 17 years in all since the first weekend in 1990. Several others, including myself, have 16 years attendance.

In addition to the classes offered at NCI, it’s also common to find students and alumni set up in the lobby areas to offer their own brand of instruction. Informal balloon clinics and magic shows are happening throughout the hotel. As our people are gathered for the weekend, it’s easy to find clown antics in progress in the restaurant, the lounge, the

swimming pool area, hospitality suites and the main lobby, where each year we artfully enhance the lobby chandelier by shooting balloons into it. And, traditionally, there is a birthday party held on Saturday night for all interested.

While this past January's institute weekend had unseasonably warm weather, last year we endured 39 inches of snow at the Radisson Plymouth Harbor Hotel. Our host hotel welcomes us every year with open arms and they accommodate our every wish and request. The staff is friendly, helpful and supportive of our philanthropy – The Sneaker Fund. This year, the Radisson presented a check for \$1000 for the Sneaker Fund and informed us that they hope to welcome us in Plymouth for years to come.

Since the beginning, the mission of the NCI has been to support Burns Research. Each year, when schedules are available, we invite the Shriners Hospital in Boston to give a talk to the students and educate them of the Shrine hospitals, and in particular, the Burns Unit in Boston. The last institute in January 2006, we were honored to have Bob Tibbetts, Director of Volunteer Services and C. Thomas D'Esmond, Administrator of the Boston Burns Hospital who spoke eloquently about the Boston hospital and the world renowned research programs that are ongoing in the Boston facility.

Besides the clowning instruction and camaraderie at NCI, we are also very proud to support Burns Research and the ISCA Sneaker Fund. This year, donations included the following:

Aleppo Shrine	\$2,650
Bektash Shrine	\$2,500
Cairo Shrine	\$1,000
Kora Shrine	\$ 350
North East Shrine Clowns Assoc.	\$ 500
Spinx Shrine	\$4,000
Radisson Plymouth Harbor Hotel	\$1,000
Northeast Clown Institute	\$5,000
Total Sneaker Fund Donations	\$17,000

These donations were hand carried by one of our NCI Board of Directors to the Shrine Clowns Mid-Winter convention. Ernest "Rollo" Pearlstein presented these to the new ISCA President, Sanford "Ootz" Morris who was thrilled to receive this generous and sizable amount.

Of course, the efforts and support of the Shrine Centers and Shrine Clowns are certainly appreciated. We are also justifiably proud of the non-shriners who have been educated regarding burns research and the orthopedic hospitals. They also feel an obligation as NCI students and alumni to support the Sneaker fund and the Shrine hospitals. These are two of the greatest rewards of NCI – to be a part of the clown family and to be part of the successful fundraising effort supporting the Shriners burns research.

The NCI is held on the third full weekend of the month every January. Registrations are limited to the first 200 and we sell out every year. Classes are held throughout the weekend, starting mid-day on Friday. Friday night is usually a buffet dinner with some kind of entertainment. Saturday has classes followed by competition and critiques. Sunday morning has entertainment, donations, auction and graduation. Further information can be found at

the website, www.clowninstitute.com. Registrations for the Institute and hotel are both available only through the website. We begin processing the registrations in October.

As Dean of the Institute, I am proud of the accomplishments and look forward to our future. If you have attended before, we hope you had a great time. If you haven't been to NCI yet, then make your plans. This is an awesome weekend.

As always, keep smiling....

David "Do-No" Newcomb
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