

The 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Northeast Clown Institute  
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For 19 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" Chaloge 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 **16** Past Presidents of ISCA, over **650** Shrine Clowns and over **250** Non-Shriners and Ladies. Along these lines, **49** different Shrine Centers have been represented at NCI. One Past ISCA President, Oscar “Clyde” Cloutier was the 2<sup>nd</sup> 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. Over **900** 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 Association 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. Senior students volunteer to become mentors and they assist the novices in make-up application. All students make up as a whiteface, auguste, hobo or tramp and they also receive 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 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> 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, 19 years in all since the first weekend in 1990. Several others, including myself, have 18 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 an actual birthday party (class) held on Saturday night for all interested.

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. Every year, the Radisson presents a check for \$1000 for the Sneaker Fund and they have done this for eleven consecutive years.

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. This year, 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.

Representatives from several Shrine Centers brought donations for the Sneaker Fund to present to ISCA President Ken Taylor. An auction on Sunday morning brought in approximately \$2400 and the Total Sneaker Fund Donations for the 2008 Northeast Clown Institute was **\$26,590.**

This year, NCI welcomed the following ISCA officers - President Ken "Grimee" Taylor, 1<sup>st</sup> VP Bill "10 Can" London, 2<sup>nd</sup> VP John "Hambone" Wilbanks, Historian Richard "RC" Cain and Imperial Liaison Ernest "Rollo" Pearlstein. Rollo is on the Board of Directors and is an 18 year veteran of NCI.

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](http://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....