

# The 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Northeast Clown Institute

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The 20<sup>th</sup> Annual Weekend of the Northeast Clown Institute (NCI) is now in the history books. It most certainly was a weekend to remember. Over 120 clowns from across North America traveled to Plymouth, Massachusetts for a weekend of classes and competitions. Balloon sculptures were meticulously created, make-up was applied to perfection, impressive costumes were proudly worn and colorful clowns strutted all over the Radisson Hotel in Plymouth Harbor throughout the weekend event.

The NCI Board of Directors had planned this event for months and their hard work paid off for everyone. Novice students were educated in the basics of the clowning profession. The second year and above students were allowed to compete for prized “Ron Lee” trophy statues, which signifies First Place honors. Winning a “Ron Lee” also gives the winner bragging rights for the ensuing year.

The vendors room was bristling with enthusiasm all weekend as clowns and clown wannabees shopped for magic, props, shoes, costumes, make-up and lots of other clown stuff that can only be found at the NCI. Two vendors, Spear Shoes and Clownsupplies.com have participated with the Institute every year since the beginning, twenty years ago. All of the vendors agree that NCI is one of the premier education venues in North America and they love coming back whenever the opportunity comes their way.

NCI was also honored by the presence of Megan Johnson from Seattle, WA who was invited to start her clown education as the guest of the Institute. Known in costume and make-up as “Lollypop” the Clown, Megan is a patient in the Shriners’ Hospital for Children and she has written a book titled, “Clowns Make a Difference.” Lollypop participated in several competition categories and was awarded the first “Children’s Choice” award given at NCI.

Everything began on Friday with registration running smoothly, followed by the introduction ceremony. Our gracious hosts at the Radisson Hotel kicked things off by presenting a check for \$1000 for the ISCA Sneaker Fund. This fund is for burns research in the Shriners Hospitals for Children and is approved by Shrine Headquarters in Tampa. This was the 12<sup>th</sup> year that the Radisson Hotel Plymouth Harbor has supported our charity with this generous donation.

This event was quite different from previous years as Balloon Sculpting competitions and Skit competitions were included for the first time. Thirty two skits were performed on Saturday afternoon and the audience was treated to some of the best skit entertainment seen in years.

For the first time, Balloon Sculptures were created for competition and they were amazing. Bouquets of flowers, puppies, fishermen, hats, rainbows, bracelets and more filled the venue all weekend long. Of course, the students spent each evening shooting balloons into the lobby chandelier and that exercise has become an annual, favorite pastime at the hotel.

Following the Balloon competitions, a delicious buffet dinner banquet satisfied the eager and hungry clowns and their families. After dinner, Steve Taylor, our incredible ventriloquist from Seattle, Washington wowed the crowd with his magic and comedy performance.

Saturday morning began with the Costume & Make-up competition and the clowns looked great. Beautiful costumes adorned the joeys in all four clown categories except for the Hobo/Tramps who still managed to get noticed with their down-trodden and tattered looks. After lunch came the Skits competitions and we were not disappointed. One-clown, two-clown and group-clown categories all had plenty of participation and the skits were great. Classic routines were performed with expertise. New and original skit ideas filled the room with laughter and appreciation. Even our judges had smiles and enjoyment while scoring the performance efforts of the clowns. Our judges each had over twenty years of clowning experience. When you see them smiling and laughing at a competition like this one, it's a sign that they were really enjoying themselves. Our judges were Tom E. Boy, Pricilla Mooseburger and FuddyDuddy, three veteran clowns with long clown resumes and impeccable credentials.

On Sunday morning, Ernest "Rollo" Pearlstein brought excitement and fun to this annual fundraiser for the Sneaker Fund. Presentations were made to ISCA President, Bill "Ten-Can" London who collected donations from various Shrine Temples in the northeast. All this happened with the knowledge of a snowstorm barreling towards New England. The snow had already arrived early Sunday morning to maintain the tradition of a white weekend at NCI. Four years ago, Plymouth received 39 inches during the Institute weekend and all of the attendees were stranded at the Radisson for an extra day while the roads were cleared.

The last presentation was from the President of the Clowns of America International organization, who gave NCI a beautiful, framed award in recognition of achievement in the educational arena. The Northeast Clown Institute was one of six in North America to be honored for their works in teaching the art of clowning.

Finally, the awards were presented to the winners of the competitions. Plaques and trophies were accepted by clowns from all ages, male and female. There were winners from Shrine Temples from across the United States and Canada, as well as from the non-Shrine community. And Aleppo Temple was well represented in the winners circle. Matt "Dusty" Brodeur took 3<sup>rd</sup> Place honors in Multiple Balloons Sculpting. Dusty and his dad, Richard "Hoppy" Brodeur won 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> place respectively in the Tramp/Hobo Costume & Make-Up category. Paul "Lefty" Johnson and Ray "Matey" King won 1<sup>st</sup> Place in the Two-Clown Skit category. Diane "Daffy-Dill" Newcomb also competed and took home 2<sup>nd</sup> Place awards for Costume & Make-up as well as Two-Clown Skit categories. Douglas "Homer" Peters and several others received Top Five and Top Ten certificates.

Last but not least, the International Shrine Clown Association again showed its support for this annual event by attending with their top officers. The President, Bill "Ten-Can" London was presented with several donations from across the Northeast Region. The Sneaker Fund for Burns Research is the ultimate beneficiary of our efforts at NCI. While students receive the best instruction and the atmosphere is similar to a huge family reunion, the focus is always to have fun, spread cheer and to support our Shrine hospitals.

All-in-all, the 2009 NCI weekend was another tremendous success. Our host hotel, the Radisson Hotel Plymouth Harbor proved once again why that location is known as the home of the Northeast Clown Institute. The hospitality is wonderful, the service is superb and as their guests for the weekend, the clowns always feel like they are at home.

Just like last year's wrap-up article, the consensus is clear. We're already looking forward to next year and the 2010 Northeast Clown Institute. Keep smiling.