

The NESCA Road Trip for Hospitals and Kids

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For three days in July 2008, members of the North East Shrine Clowns Association (NESCA) came together for a very special road trip to benefit the three hospitals in the northeast region and the kids who are patients there. The trip covered over a thousand miles and when it was all over, there were a lot of smiling faces, colorful pictures and happy memories.

The idea for this road trip was actually born back in January at a NESCA meeting in Massachusetts. The meeting was fairly standard, as far as meetings are concerned. Several issues were dealt with, decisions were made and reports were read and accepted. One lively topic of discussion was an idea to make a donation from our NESCA organization to support our causes of Shrine Clowns. A committee was formed to investigate the possibilities and to act accordingly under the restrictive guidelines in place.

A great deal of research was done to find an appropriate donation which would honor the NESCA clowns for their efforts over the years. There were phone calls and e-mails to hospital administrators, equipment manufacturers, product development personnel and others to find a solution to a reasonably simple request. How can we make use of the NESCA treasury in a special way that supports the three hospitals in our northeast region, supports the Sneaker Fund, gives joy to all concerned and helps our kids?

During a call with an executive at Shriners Hospital in Boston, the idea of a pediatric utility transporter was brought up. This is a versatile and fun kind of wheelchair that allows for pediatric patients to be transported from place to place while enjoying safety and comfort. These colorful BearWagon transporters replace gurneys or stretchers in a non-intimidating, encouraging and “kid-friendly” manner. They are also designed to provide for easy operation with IV pole mounts and equipment holders. The company, Steelcraft Inc. which manufactures the BearWagon transporter is in Millbury, Massachusetts, and having a local business involved was well accepted by all parties. Doug Backman, President of Steelcraft Inc. was easily accessible, knowledgeable and very enthusiastic about the opportunity to have his equipment in the Shriners hospitals. Without hesitation, Mr. Backman offered to donate a pediatric IV stand with each transporter purchased for a Shriners Hospital. Valued at \$300 each, these colorful stands have been specifically designed for pediatric patients. They have roller blade-type wheels with sealed axle bearings which allow for smooth and silent operation, even over carpeting or elevator door gaps. Armed with this information, the plans began to fall into place and the road trip began to take shape.

The officers of NESCA worked together, making a flurry of further calls and e-mails. Calendars were checked and a plan for deliveries and presentations was put into place, with July 8th as the starting point. Ill. Peter Stone, P.P. and Recorder at Aleppo Shrine Center offered the Aleppo Shrine hospital van to NESCA, to be used for the three-day road trip. NESCA officers and Nobles Dave Newcomb, Ed Dowling and Ernest Pearlstein along with Aleppo Clown Dave “High Tower” Sullivan first traveled to Millbury to pick up the equipment.

We met with Mr. Backman who greeted us with excitement in his voice and a bounce in his step, inviting us into his office and sharing with us some history and background of his manufacturing

plant. Our team brought the equipment to the van, secured it inside and continued on to the Springfield hospital.

Arriving right on time, we brought the first transport into the Springfield hospital lobby where we met Mark Niederpruem, the Springfield Hospital Administrator. Also present was Kirk Burkins P.P. and a member of the Board of Governors. Additionally, in attendance there were Melha clown Jim “NitWit” Allard and Anah clown Andrew “Iggy” Matlins, who drove from Bangor, ME to join in the presentation. (“Iggy” left Bangor at 3:00am. Whoever said, “You can’t get there from here” doesn’t know NESCA Clowns.) A patient was chosen to be the first to try out the new BearWagon Transporter and her smile told us that this was an excellent gift for the hospital and the kids. “High Tower,” “Iggy” and “NitWit” took their opportunity and visited the kids in the playroom and a few pictures were taken there. After the pictures were taken, the NESCA team continued on to the Boston hospital to make the next presentation that afternoon.



(Pictured L-R around the new BearWagon Pediatric Transporter and some of the Springfield patients: “NitWit,” “Iggy,” Ed Dowling, Dave Newcomb, Springfield Hospital Administrator Mark Niederpruem, Ernest Pearlstein, Kirk Burkins and “High Tower”

We arrived in Boston shortly after 1:00pm and were greeted by the Boston Hospital Administrator C. Thomas D’Esmond and David Faulkner, Director of Development. (Mr. Faulkner was instrumental in our donation research and his knowledge of hospital equipment originally led us to Steelcraft Inc. and the pediatric transport.) As in Springfield, the clowns visited the playroom and Iggy and High Tower took the opportunity to spend more time with the kids. A child was chosen to take the first ride, and again, her smile gave them the confirmation we were waiting for. The BearWagon pediatric transporter is a winner and the kids are finding it irresistible.

Our Boston patient was helped out of a similar type of transporter that is more commonly found in many pediatric hospitals. The older version is much plainer looking and without the bright colors and safety rails.

A brief conversation with the staff at the Boston hospital gave us additional confirmation regarding the safety features, specifically the bumper rail. This difference should alleviate many minor accidents associated with the older equipment. Also, the new BearWagon Pediatric Transporters are made with superior materials and should give many more years of service than the currently used models.



(Back row L-R: Ed Dowling, Dave Newcomb, Boston Hospital Administrator C. Thomas D’Esmond, Ernest Pearlstein, David Faulkner
Front L-R: “Iggy,” The new BearWagon Pediatric Transporter with hospital patient and “High Tower”

With two BearWagon pediatric transporters safely delivered to the two Massachusetts hospitals, the NESCA team called it a day and each member went home. On Wednesday, Nobles Newcomb and Pearlstein would make the trip to Montreal. The travel plans were checked and contacts were made with counterparts in Canada. With passports in hand, we started off at 8:00am on the 325 mile journey to Montreal.

The weather cooperated for most of the ride, with the only exception being the down-pour that happened around lunchtime. While the skies looked threatening when we stopped for something to eat, it was still dry. Unfortunately, coming out of the restaurant, we discovered that the skies had opened and our van was receiving a refreshing rinse. Unfortunately, we received a complete rinse as well. But we still had a few more hours of northbound road-trip remaining, and we still had plenty of time to dry off.

We crossed the border into Canada and checked the directions we had from MapQuest. Our copy gave specific instructions and yet the road signs were not cooperating with our MapQuest directions. Specifically, the road signs were more French than English so we followed the signs to Montreal and continued on. Without any more problems, we cruised over the bridges and into the City of Saints. Finally, we called the hospital and were easily guided in to our destination. Some simple navigation and some good luck had brought us within a few blocks of the hospital and we were within ten minutes of our planned arrival time.

The Montreal hospital was a busy place as Shrine hospitals usually are. The front entrance area was filled with visitors, patients and hospital personnel along with several clowns from Karnak Shrine. They welcomed us with smiles and hugs and brought us inside to meet Montreal Hospital Administrator Celine Doray and members of her staff. The official presentation was made as we had done previously in the Springfield and Boston hospitals. Ms. Doray expressed her gratitude and appreciation, as well as those of her colleagues and the patients who will use the equipment.



(L-R: Karnak Clowns “Squid,” “Pi-vous,” Ernest Pearlstein, Montreal Hospital Administrator Celine Doray, Dave Newcomb, “MacFEZstir” and Mark Laxer, Karnak Ambassador

The work of the day was completed. It had been a long, tiring day and it was time for relaxing. For dinner, members of the Karnak Clowns treated their American visitors to a delicious dinner at Le Bifhèque steakhouse. After dinner and the easygoing conversations that accompanied it, we retired to our hotel in Montreal to rest up for Thursday.



L-R: David “Do-No” Newcomb and Ernest “Rollo” Pearlstein in Montreal with the kids

Nobles Newcomb and Pearlstein, a.k.a. Do-No and Rollo simply had to take advantage of our opportunity to do what we do best - to perform for the kids at a Shriners hospital. In anticipation of this, we came prepared with our costumes and make-up and were ready as usual. While many of the patients were French, we simply performed in the universal language of magic, laughter and smiles. Rollo was comfortable with his usage of “merci beaucoup” while Do-No freely used his newfound and universally French expression, “ooh-la-la.” In a few hours, we were done.

The seven-hour trek back to our homes in Massachusetts gave us time to reflect on our NESCA Road Trip. We both felt the satisfaction of completing our task and representing NESCA honorably. In conclusion, with one more task at hand, the final donation to the Sneaker Fund for Burns Research was made from NESCA. The kids received visits by the clowns. The hospitals received new equipment. The Sneaker Fund received a nice donation. Friendships were made. And the NESCA Road Trip was a success.

Perhaps now, we should start thinking about planning the next road trip. Ooh-la-la....