

Tri City Chapter Spreads Smiles Around The World

AMBUCS members have been known to coming up with some unique ways to carry out our organization's mission. However, one chapter in particular has discovered that bringing smiles and joy to people in need of a little levity can be the best way to make a difference in their community.

For the past two decades, the Tri-City, FL chapter has been actively involved in humor therapy, proving that laughter is often the best medicine.

"The therapeutic benefits of magic, music, laughing, art, and helping people have been promoted by our chapter since its inception," said treasurer Jim Greiner, one of the founding members of Tri-City and a long-time professional magician. "Learning, planning and performing simple magic tricks involves cognitive, physical, speech, and occupational therapies to various degrees."

Drawing from the cities of Clearwater, Tampa and St. Petersburg, Florida, the Tri-City chapter currently has six dedicated members - many of whom perform as clowns and magicians. They meet each Wednesday at 11:30 AM at the Cove Cay Country Club in Clearwater, FL. There, the members assemble in a "fun, relaxed atmosphere" for lunch, updates, brainstorming, and project management. Serving as chapter president this year is Pat Bounes, a resident of nearby Largo, FL. Tri-City was formed, approximately enough, on April's Fools Day in 1968. Since then, its members have focused on improving the world around them, one smile at a time.

"What makes our chapter special is that we really enjoy making people laugh," said member Jean "Daffodil" McNabb, who goes by the stage name "Daffodil" and is a well-respected trainer of new clowns in her area. "A lot of people under-estimate just how important laughter can be to your overall well-being."

Greiner said that most of the chapter's fundraising revenue comes nowadays from lectures, shows, and demonstrations. In addition, they also provide humor therapy supplies for local caregivers, including clown noses, magic equipment and their own How-To magic DVD. Despite being one of the smallest chapters in AMBUCS, Tri-City has managed to make a global impact through its numerous community service initiatives.





The members began their humor therapy work about twenty years ago after meeting with a group of missionaries to Uganda. The missionaries informed them that the leading causes of death in that region of the world were bad water and common diseases which are routinely immunized in the United States. After learning how responsive the children were to certain toys, the chapter immediately created 4,000 balloons and pencils that displayed the AMBUCS logo and the messages: “Boil Your Water” and “Immunize Your Children.” These items were distributed by the missionaries at their temporary clinics in Uganda and were gladly received by children and parents alike. The brightly-colored items succeeded in helping to promote hygiene and health education. The chapter has continued to provide similar items for medical missionaries around the globe and it’s been estimated that over 20,000 lives may have been saved from their efforts.

In 2004, the Tri-City donated comedy supplies and AMBUCS promotional items to medical missionaries who were traveling to areas affected from by tsunami. Most recently, the Tri-City chapter was the first AMBUCS group to respond to the Hurricane Katrina disaster, as they shipping hundreds of noses and comedy supplies to a Baton Rouge therapist who distributed them at a shelter for hurricane victims. The chapter also installed the first “humor cart” for use at a local hospice. Through a partnership with the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor (AATH), they developed the cart which contained a big television, a VCR, and many classic and comedy videos.

Another successful project Tri-City was involved in was the “Before the Fall” grab bar installation program. This was project spearheaded by Bounes, who operated an adult congregate living facility and noticed that a large number of his new residents had suffered falls in their own bathrooms. Family members of the residents would often use the phrase “Before the fall...” when describing their loved one’s medical history.

With Bounes leading the charge, the Chapter celebrated the installation of its 500th Grab-Bar in 2006.

“Any way we can help our community, our members are ready to contribute”, said Griener, who will be hosting an educational session on humor therapy at the upcoming AMBUCS National Conference in Rogers, Arkansas this summer.

“It’s all about finding your niche and using your talents to help those less fortunate.”