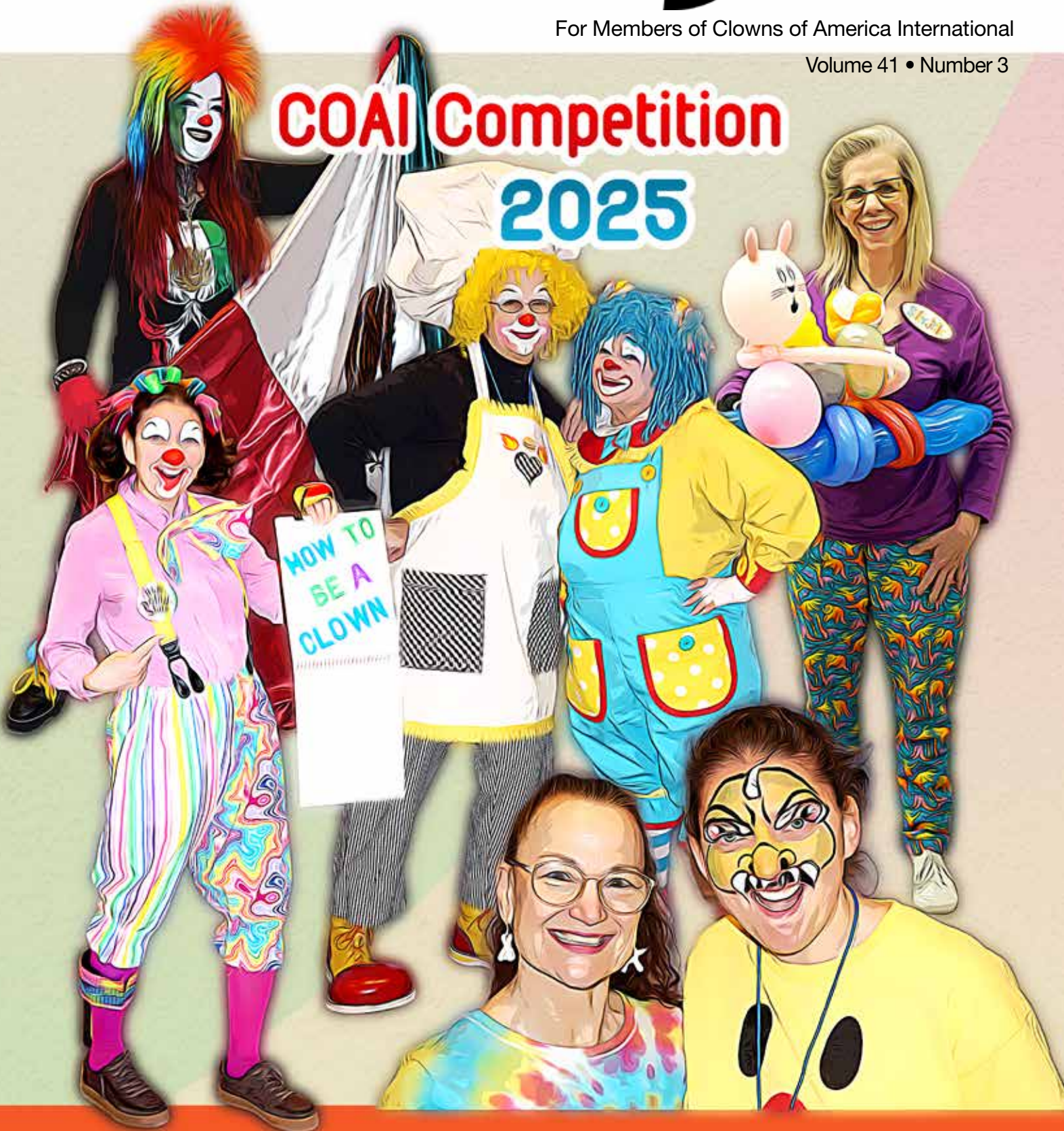


THE NEW CALLIÖPE

For Members of Clowns of America International

Volume 41 • Number 3

COAI Competition 2025



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Membership cards sent out by the COAI Business Office are intended to be permanent, so no expiration date is included. Your card is valid only as long as you are a current member. In years past, a new membership card was generated and mailed each year. During the pandemic, the COAI Board of Directors voted to discontinue that practice as a cost-saving measure. If your card is damaged or lost, you may still request a replacement.

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From the President

Dan "Fitzwilly" Langwell

Summer is flying by. The only thing that seems to remain constant is the heat and humidity.

As I sit here and write this, the first thing that comes to mind is "Water, water, water, and don't miss the bus." If you have ever been to Mooseburger Clown Arts Camp, affectionately known as Moosecamp, that saying will forever ring in your ears because it is one of the first and last things you hear. Staying hydrated is incredibly important all times of the year, but especially when you're working those hot summer gigs.

Your COAI Board has been sweating as we work through a host of changes and upgrades. We have retained a webmaster for the first time in a number of years. Sammy Smith and Teo Wollrabe have done an amazing job behind the scenes, holding and patching the current website together with duct tape, baling twine, and bubble gum.

These days, people visit websites using their phone or other mobile device roughly sixty percent of the time. Since our current website does not play well on smaller screens, the board has spent many hours working together with our new webmaster on the design and layout of a brand-new website. There is a *lot* of information on our current website and some of that information needs to be updated. You may remember that for the CHARLIE Award, it used to be necessary to snail mail a multi-pound scrapbook to the awards committee. Not only has that become outrageously expensive, at least one book is still going from post office to post office, entertaining all the employees. These days all our award submissions are sent digitally, usually by email.

As you can see, we are still publishing *The New Calliope*, and we will continue to do so. I realize there was anxiety in some corners. We thank you for passing the recommended by-law changes.

Monica Chaney has stepped in as our new business manager, allowing Sammy and his team to focus on this wonderful magazine. Monica and Sammy's team have worked together and made for a smooth transition, and Monica is a joyful voice on the other end of the phone. If she doesn't have a ready answer to your question, she spreads the word and the COAI Board jumps in to help.

We have three new RVPs: Southeast, Northwest, and International. Two are returnees. Merrily Johnston is representing the Northwest, and Marilyn Barrett is back for the Southeast. Our brand-new International RVP is Brian "Blotto" Kinney of the United Kingdom.

When we were looking at the regions and the number of members within each one, we realized we were unbalanced. After months of discussion and deliberation, we decided it was necessary to realign the regions. Keep reading this issue for more information! **TNC**



From the Vice President

Alene "Rufflez" Kraus

It is so wonderful to be off to a solid start this fiscal year. I'm looking forward to a terrific year of improvement and growth for COAI.

Here are a few updates on what we've been doing behind the scenes:

We've added new board members. Merrily Johnston joined us as Northwest RVP and Marilyn Barrett came back as our Southeast RVP. Roger Ragan is our new Treasurer. We thank Patricia Shadel, our previous Treasurer, for filling this position through the Denver convention. Our new Business Office Manager is a dear friend to many of us. Monica Chaney said, "Yes to the desk!" She is doing a great job taking care of our members!

Dan has redrawn the COAI regions to better serve our members. Myke Hutchings created a bylaws survey, which was emailed to all active members. All six bylaws were approved by membership and immediately went into effect. Thank you for voting!

The 2026 COAI Convention is taking shape. We know it's our job to create a convention that provides excellent instructors, an exciting vendor room, and an excellent atmosphere where you're safe to be the best clown you can be. We did that in Denver and we'll do it again in Nashville.

The Millennium Maxwell House Hotel in Nashville, Tennessee will be our convention home. Room rates are \$109 a night and the resort fee will be waived at check-in! Reserve your room now and pay when you check in. The hotel, which is very excited about hosting our convention, will honor the discount three days prior and three days after the convention!

We continue to add instructors and other highlights to the convention lineup. Julia Swanson is lining up great instructors, and the one-and-only Silly Billy will be our headliner—more on this later!

Register for the 2026 COAI Convention now at www.mycoai.com. We sure do hope Nashville is ready for us!

If you have questions about the convention, please contact Alene at srateach@gmail.com or at 610-864-5969.

COAI Regions Updated

By Dan Langwell

We are a membership-based organization. COAI's membership numbers peaked in the early to mid-1990s, as they did with most membership-based organizations. With the rise of "glorified typewriters" that somehow could "talk" with each other over something called the "web" or the "net," fewer people took the time to join local clubs, groups, troupes, or Alleys. Bridge clubs, bowling leagues, and Clown Alleys struggled to stay relevant. Why sit through an in-person meeting when you could ask the world—the "online" world—a question anytime one pops into your head, day or night?

Adding to the shift was a rash of films that worked hard to take fun, innocent items like pets, dolls, and yes, even clowns, and turn them into scary, evil villains. As the popularity of clowns decreased and new ways to spend time became available, people slowly dropped away from clowning. Life in general became busier and to spend the time that good clowning deserved, well ... it required a love of the art, and the hearts it touched.

Technology has enabled us to eliminate travel expenses for board meetings, as well as many other expenses. Every few years we have needed to raise our dues as inflation has its way.

As I'm sure you have heard by now, the COAI Board has been hard at work designing a brand-new website that will be much more user friendly, especially on mobile devices. The new website will allow us to grow in new ways to meet the needs of ever-changing search habits.

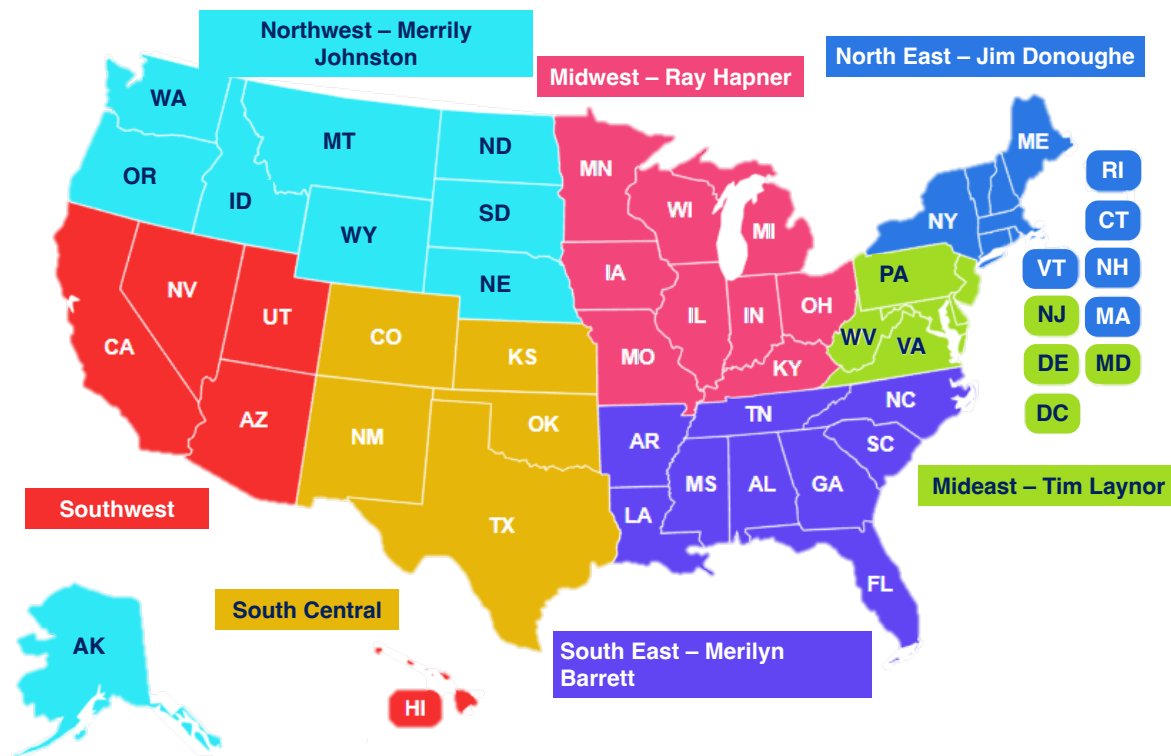
Every month we download the database of members, sort by region, and send a copy to RVPs and Bob Gretton, the membership director. Bob sends out a nice

welcome email and the RVPs are encouraged to reach out to new members in their region.

As we sorted the regions, we also started sorting by state. What we realized surprised us. The largest region in the United States had more than quadruple the members in the smallest region. After months of discussion and deliberation, we decided it was necessary to realign the regions so their membership numbers were more balanced. What that means is that a number of states have shifted from one region to another. If you have questions, you can still reach out to your old RVP as well as your new one, or any member of the board.

While membership has grown, the ratio between states has remained pretty consistent. The map shows what the new regions look like.

Feel free to reach out to me with any questions. My contact information—and contact information for the entire board—is on page 2 of each issue of *The New Calliope*.





Application and Renewal

Solicitud de Iniciacion y Renovacion

Female / Femenino Male / Masculino

Name / Nombre _____
First Middle Last

Street / Direccion _____
City / Ciudad State / Estado Zip / Codigo Postal Country / Pais

Phone (Required) / Numero de telefono _____

E-mail _____

Date of Birth / Fecha de Nacimiento _____

Clown Name / Nombre de Payaso / a _____

COAI Number if Renewing / de renovacion _____

Age / Edad _____ Alley / Nombre del Alley _____

GIFT A MEMBERSHIP

Regale Una Membresia

- Please gift a membership to the person on this form /
Por favor regale la membresia a a persona indicada en esta solicitud.
- I wish to remain anonymous / Deseo permanecer anonimo.
- I wish for you to identify me to the recipient /
Deseo que usted me identifique al recipiente.
- I wish to write a note / Deseo escribir na nota.

Please give us your name and phone number so we can contact you if necessary. If you wish to remain anonymous, check the box above and we will not reveal your identity.
Por favor denos su nombre y numero de telefono para poder ponemos en contacto con usted si es necesario. Si usted desea quedarse anonimo, marque la casilla indicada arriba y no revelaremos su identidad.

Name / Nombre _____ Phone # / Telefono # _____

Annual Membership Dues / Cuotas Anuales de Socios

- Individual Membership (16 – 64) Membresia Individual.....\$45.00
- Senior Membership (65+) Membresia Mayor de edad.....\$35.00
- Junior Joey w/Print Magazine (8 – 15) Jovenes.....\$15.00
- Junior Joey Online Magazine (8 – 15) Jovenes\$10.00
- Family Membership Membresia Familia.....\$25.00
- LIFETIME Membership Membresia de por vida.....\$1,000.00
- E-Membership Membresia E Nacional.....\$35.00
- International E-Membership / Membresia E Internacional.....\$25.00

Payment Method/Metodo de Pago

- Check No. / Cheque a nombre de _____
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All COAI memberships are on an annual basis. Todas las membresias en COAI son anuales.

The Power of Costume in Clowning

By Richard “Design-O” Smith

Oh, the amazing power of costumes in clowning! If you’ve ever worn big polka-dotted pants or put on really large, silly shoes, you know exactly what I mean. Costumes aren’t just clothes—they’re a huge part of how clowns express themselves.

The moment I tied that bright red bow around my neck for the first time, I felt a strong burst of energy. I went from being Richard, the quiet costume maker, to the loud and funny clown called “Whimsical Design-O.” With a flick of my wrist, I became a bringer of laughter. You see, a costume is like a magic wand, and every clown is a wizard, spreading joy through the air—often with a lot of confetti!

Costumes tell stories—each stitch and every small detail say something. Shiny sequins might remind people of amazing performances. Torn edges might hint at funny accidents—sometimes (to my embarrassment), even showing someone’s ankle!

Take the clown nose, for example. That bright red nose has made people laugh for years. It’s not just a joke—it’s a symbol of silliness! Imagine how people react when they see a serious adult walk by with a big red nose and honk it—people laugh right away, like a bottle of soda just got shaken and popped open. Costumes help clowns connect with people, start conversations, and challenge social rules in a funny way.

Now, let’s talk about how costumes affect the mind. For performers like jugglers and unicyclists, the right costume can totally change how they feel and how the audience sees them. For example, a clown in a plain black outfit with no color might seem like a “mysterious street magician.” But a clown in crazy colors and wild patterns gives off a “splash-Tasics’11” vibe! I’ve made costumes where colors went from hot pink to grass green, all to show different personalities and characters.

One time, I made a custom costume for a clown named “Bubbly Bill.” He wore a colorful vest and a flowy skirt that looked like a balloon. The result? The crowd didn’t just see a show—they saw a wild, joyful event that felt bigger than a regular comedy act. It lasted way longer than most performances!

Costumes also open the door to creativity. I’ve spent hours happily sewing sequins onto jackets, only to start dreaming up new costume ideas minutes later. That’s the beauty of creativity: it comes in waves, sparked by shiny fabric and fun shapes. And it doesn’t just inspire clowns—it excites the audience too!

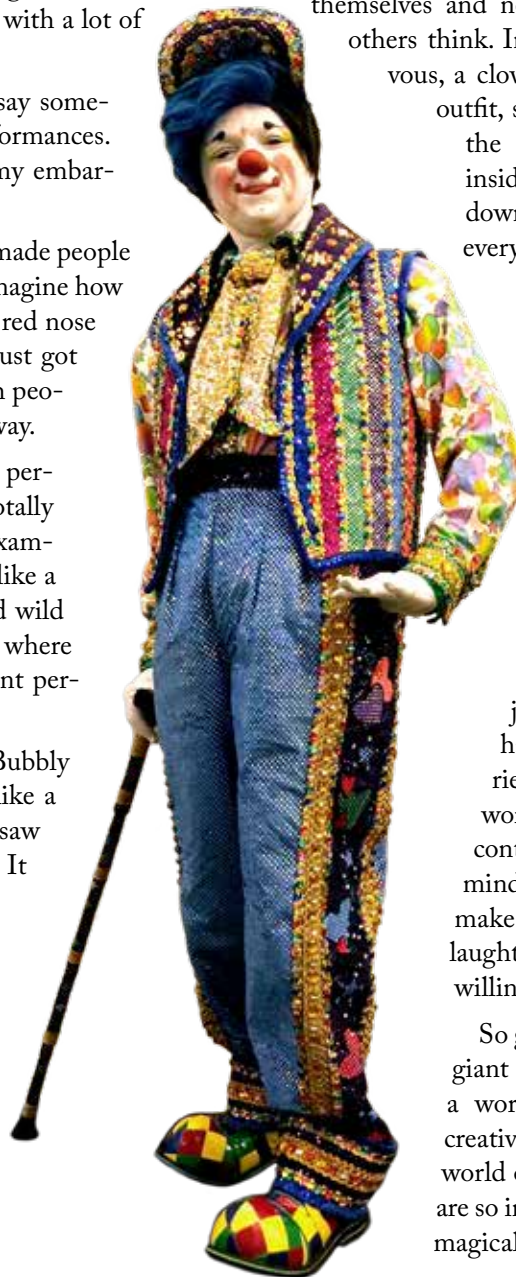
Let’s not forget about practicality—yes, costumes have to actually work on stage. What clowns wear can affect how the show goes. A clown’s costume wings might look magical,

but they could catch on a doorway and ruin an entrance! I learned this the hard way during a show when my costume had bells that jingled loudly every time I moved. My friends had trouble hearing the jokes! The lesson? Costumes need balance—they should look fun but also work well. That’s the joy of clown costumes—they give freedom with a splash of chaos.

Think about how much a costume affects identity. For many clowns, what they wear doesn’t just make them laugh—it gives them confidence. Wearing a bright costume helps clowns feel free to be themselves and not worry about what others think. Instead of feeling nervous, a clown puts on a colorful outfit, stands tall, and shares the silly spirit that lives inside. Costumes break down the boring walls of everyday life, making way for clowns to bring fun and joy.

In the end, the power of costumes in clowning changes how people think. Costumes are part of storytelling, humor, and creativity—all woven into the fabric. Clowning can’t just be described—it has to be felt and experienced! And while my work as a costume maker continues, I’m always reminded that every outfit I make holds the promise of laughter and joy for anyone willing to be a little silly.

So go ahead, put on those giant shoes, and jump into a world full of color and creativity—because in the world of clowning, costumes are so important, they’re truly magical!



Richard Smith. SPS PHOTO

COAI ANNUAL CONVENTION 2025



We saw lots clowning around at the COAI 2025 Convention held in Denver, Colorado, April 2 through May 2 at the Sheraton Denver West Hotel. Don't miss the fun next year! Join us in Nashville, Tennessee, April 28–May 2, 2026. Visit mycoai.com for details!



UNHAPPY CAMPER

My Idea of Camping is the Holiday Inn!

PAKED UP

PAKED UP

Dinky

PAKED UP





PHOTOS BY MERILYN BARRETT • EDITING BY REGINA WOLLRABE
DESIGN BY REENA KAMBOJ

COAI Competition 2025 • Denver, Colorado

Balloon Challenge



1st
Silly Jilly



2nd
*Merrily
Johnston*



*Candy
Will*



3rd
*Jackie
Reynolds*

Face Paint Challenge



Merrily Johnston

1st



Linda Hartin

2nd



Ryn Goodwin

3rd

Group Skit



1st

Hamburger Stand
Sara Kreutz and Linda Hartin



2nd

Two Rivers
Rosalinda Trevino (blue wig),
Darryl "Goody Goody" Dugan,
and Isabel Nuanez

Paradability



2nd

Patricia Moyer Shadel



1st

Isabelle Reyes



Linda Hartin



3rd

Jackie Reynolds

Got Talent



1st

*Chloe
Evers*



2nd

*Michelle
Healky-
Tucker*



3rd

*Jefferey
Hitchens*

Clowns of America



Denver, CO

International 2025



Colorado

The Historic Clown House

By Paula Blackwelder

Tucked away in the tiny town of Windermere on the outskirts of Orlando, under grand, old oak trees, sits the happy, unassuming home of Ron Severini. It's strategically centered on a manicured lawn at the end of a winding stone walkway, lined with fresh, blossoming flowers in a rainbow of colors. The exterior is a quaint, charming, 1940s-style Florida cottage, but it's what's inside the cottage that's the real treasure.

It's actually a disguised clown-house! One step past the front door and the magic begins. An uncontrollable smile forms on your face and stars replace your eyes as you gaze upon the collected history of clown mirth and merriment from days gone by.

Severini's collection of clown, show business, and variety arts memorabilia spans his five-decade career as a circus clown. After graduating from Ringling Bros. & Barnum and Bailey Clown College in 1971, Severini became a professional circus clown with RBBB Circus from 1971-1978. Then, from 1978-1984 he was promoted by producer Irvin Feld to be the dean and director of Ringling Bros. & Barnum and Bailey's World-Famous Clown College. In addition, he also became the Clown Ambassador of Goodwill for both Ringling Circus units, as well as the Director of all Clowns at Circus World Theme Park in Orlando, when Ringling was the park owner.

These credentials ultimately landed his clown face in the center of the theme park's official one-sheet poster, as well as their highway billboard.

Severini worked in various leadership roles for RBBB Circus for twenty years, until 1990, when he was courted to become the talent casting and booking director for all of Walt Disney World, ultimately investing the next ten years of his career.



The outside of Ron Severini's Florida cottage, where he houses five decades of clown and variety arts memorabilia.

After the Walt Disney Company, he moved on to work with Siegfried & Roy Presents and then NBC's *Star Search*, before becoming an authorized casting agent for Cirque du Soleil. He eventually opened his own entertainment companies, beginning with Castle Talent, Inc., where he produced several award-winning off-Broadway shows. His newest company, The SEVERINI Company, which publishes his books, will eventually produce a forthcoming feature-length movie he's currently writing.

"I was twenty years old when my mentor, the late, great Otto Griebling, first put his famous tramp clown makeup on me," Severini said. "I vividly remember sitting in Otto's room on the Ringling circus train during a run, mesmerized,



Ron Severini poses with the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Gold Unit in Japan.



Chicago mayor Richard M. Daley greets Severini and Michu, who worked with Severini and was said to be the world's smallest man.

while he applied his clown makeup design on my young face. Otto's makeup looked great on me, and I was so honored, but, in actuality, I felt I was just a bit too young to warrant the hobo beard."

Severini's unique circus clown collection includes three of Otto Griebing's famous pie pans, Otto's disappearing bottle gag, one of Otto's clown hats, and a huge oil painting of Otto, as well as the last putty clown nose Otto ever wore.

Hanging next to his Otto collection is another exciting find: an original Ringling circus poster from when Ringling Bros. Circus played in his hometown of Irvington, New Jersey, on the date of his birth! "Ringling was still under canvas at that time," he said.

Other treasures include a ring worn by a sideshow giant, the official circus whistle of ringmaster Harold Ronk, a hand-carved foam rubber sculptures by the amazing Mark Anthony, and the clown shoes of the late, great master of master clowns, Lou Jacobs.

Then, there's an original Ringling Bros. stock certificate, an original photograph of all the sideshow performers, an elephant "bull hook" once used for King Tusk (the largest elephant at Ringling in the late twentieth century), as well as a



Severini's clown memorabilia includes a photo and original, autographed drawing by the famous circus clown Grock.

photo of Severini sitting atop the tusks of King Tusk next to Cinderella's Castle in Anaheim, California. At the time the photo was taken, Severini was in charge—on behalf of Ringling producer Kenneth Feld—of managing the transformation of Disneyland into a Circus Fantasy event for three consecutive summer seasons.

Also, Severini made lots of memories with Michu, the "Smallest Man in the World," as he was assigned to watch over Michu and conduct publicity stunts with him.

"I used to put Michu in a tiny little wooden trunk and take him to the mayor's office in various major cities where Ringling was appearing," Severini said. "We'd make a nice introduction, then Michu would pop out of the tiny box and perform a little Hungarian dance atop the mayor's executive desk. Each mayor would then give us the "key to the city" on behalf of Ringling, proclaiming it to be the official Circus Week in whatever city we were appearing in, making front-page news in the local papers, helping to garner free publicity to inform the local public about the Ringling engagement," he said.

Severini has some very special Michu memorabilia sitting behind glass doors in his clown kitchen, including a hand puppet of Michu as well as some very cherished, framed and autographed photos of them from when they worked together.

A few more steps into this true "funhouse" is Severini's hat stand, which is as big as a tree and features hats from famous clowns including Frosty Little, Bumpy Anthony, Mark Anthony, Bobby Kay, Prince Paul, Swede Johnson, Wayne Sidley, Toby Ballantine, and the great French mime Marcel Marceau, all surrounding his own clown hat, as well as his cherished military hat from when he served in the United States Navy. There's also a wonderful tin wind-up toy clown collection from the 1930s-1950s, as well as a few antique hand-carved wooden clown pieces from the 1800s.

As Severini works on writing his next book and designing his next clown costume for his newest clown act, he is happy amongst his nostalgic memorabilia and his autographed photo collection of clown greats, including Grock, Lou Jacobs, Otto Griebing, Mark Anthony, Felix Adler, Harry Dann, Red Skelton, Dick Van Dyke, Jerry Lewis, Popov, David Larible, Bello Nock, and the great Charlie Chaplin.

"I love being here in my house," Severini said. "When I'm in my clown room, I feel like I'm in my own clown alley, surrounded by the memory of very powerful performers. Comedic artists that were extremely passionate about being the greatest they could be in their lifetime. All of this clown greatness inspires me."

His walls include a few pieces of his own clown artwork, which he's



At Ron Severini's Florida home, which doubles as an informal clown history museum, his hat tree features hats from famous clowns ranging from Frosty Little to French mime Marcel Marceau.



A young Ron Severini, shortly after Otto Griebeling applied tramp clown makeup to his face.

extremely proud of creating. During the Covid quarantine time period, Severini taught himself to draw cartoons.

For the past several years, Severini’s original artwork has been auctioned off at the World Clown Association’s annual convention and the Mooseburger Clown Camp.

“They were specifically created for this purpose. The proceeds go to the future Junior Joeys of America, who want to learn to become clowns but who might not have the funds to attend an annual convention, nor afford their own clown makeup or clown costume. We raised two thousand dollars last year auctioning off three pieces of my latest original artwork,” Severini said. “Mooseburger Clown Camp is the best clown training in America for hometown clowns these days.”

He is currently preparing for another week-long session at Mooseburger Clown Arts Camp in Minneapolis, in August, where he’ll lecture and coach almost one hundred attendees who desire to learn the art of clowning.

Drawing clowns, teaching and lecturing about clowning, collecting unique clown artifacts, and writing about clowns and clowning keep Severini very busy lately. He’s also the official Clown Historian for the World Clown Association and he is proud to have become one of only four recipients of the coveted Legacy of Laughter Award for Lifetime Achievement, for his devotion to what he calls, “The ancient and honorable true art and craft of true clowning.”

For more information about Ron Severini, visit www.the-severinicompany.com, where you can purchase a copy of his book *Ringling Remembered Through the Eyes of a Circus Clown*.

‘Editor’s Choice’ and ‘Best in Press’ Award Recipients Announced

The New Calliope Editor, Sammy Smith, presented two awards at the 2025 COAI Annual General Meeting in Denver, Colorado, on May 1, 2025.

The Best in Press Award, given annually for excellence in publishing an alley newsletter, went to Ann Sanders for her work with the *Kolonial Krier* for COAI Alley #357.

The Editor’s Choice Award for contributions to *The New Calliope* went to Roger “Skip” Way, frequent contributor and author of “The Kidshow Way” column.

Be a New
CALLIOPE
Writer

We’re always looking for fun and informative material for your magazine! Authors retain the copyright to their articles and illustrations.

Send your ideas and articles to

thenewcalliope@gmail.com

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Have you told a friend about COAI?

Leave a legacy...

You may now help **COAI** continue its mission of sending Ambassadors of Joy into the world by remembering Clowns of America International with a financial gift in your will - or by making a **Living Legacy Gift** right now.

Your name will be included on a special **Legacy Roll of Honor** published annually in **The New Calliope**.



To discuss a Legacy or Living Legacy donation,
Contact the COAI Business Office at

1-352-357-1676

Mr. & Mrs. Clown: A CIRCUS LOVE STORY

By Donna Wolf Lamb

Book review by Bruce "Charlie" Johnson

Donna Lamb explains in the front of *Mr. and Mrs. Clown: A Circus Love Story* (Based on the True-Life Adventures of Roy & Joy Thomas) that "this book is a fictionalized adaptation based on a true story ... The author's husband is a grandson of Della 'Joy' Thomas."

Lamb made some changes to improve the story, and she invented some of the characters. She imagined the conversations. However, it is an enjoyable narrative that accurately portrays life as a professional clown performing at fairs, carnivals, and circuses during the middle of the twentieth century.

This book is based on Lamb's extensive research. Joy shot movies and made audio recordings as hobbies. Lamb had access to that material. She interviewed Thomas family members. She read newspaper and magazine accounts about the couple or about Joy. She interviewed circus performers and historians. She also visited locations that were important to Roy and Joy. She studied documents like route books that listed where they had performed. There are many photos of the actual clowns included in the book.

Although this is a novel, the book does present a lot of historical facts. Historical novels often explain as an epilogue the facts that inspired it. Often that is just a few pages. Lamb includes twenty-two pages of notes. I found these so interesting that I used two bookmarks while I was reading. One marked how far I had gotten in the story and the other marked where I was in the notes. When I found a reference number in the story, I would flip to the notes to learn the facts that inspired it. For example, in the story, Roy reluctantly tells his wife about his military service during World War I. That is an imagined conversation. The notes explain what is known about his actual service. It is known that he was hospitalized and later received the Purple Heart. However, it is not clear if he was injured in battle once or twice.

Roy and Joy Thomas became partners in 1930 while they were still married to other people. After they obtained divorces, they married. They began performing an acrobatic act but then became clowns. They appeared together as clowns through the 1960 Kelly Miller Circus season.

Roy and Joy Thomas were promoted as the only married couple of circus clowns. Joy did not make that claim. It was not true. Other married couples clowning in circuses in the first half of the twentieth century include Harry Brandon and his wife, Fred and Mable Parker, Fred and Doodles De Marrs, Harry and Loretta La Pearl, Felix and Amelia Adler, and Shorty and Peggy Sylvester.

There may have been others that I don't know about. Lists of circus clowns are incomplete. Reviews of shows in publications like *Billboard* often would list the most prominent clowns in an Alley, and then indicate how many other unnamed clowns

were in the Alley. Sometimes the names of clown acts were listed instead of individual clowns. For example, the La Pearl Trio was frequently listed without explaining that the trio was Harry, his wife Loretta, and a little person hired to perform with them. The La Pearl Trio would portray a family in their routines.

Until I read this book, I was not aware of Roy and Joy Thomas. I also did not know that the Thomas Trio appearing during the 1920s was Roy Thomas, Jeanette, his wife, and Howard, their son. They performed a knockabout acrobatic act and two track gags as clowns. Lamb reprints four articles about the trio. A review in the 1926 Elm City, Oklahoma newspaper said, "After the screams of laughter have died away, one of the most agile of the three takes off her mask and cap and displays her boyish bob, to convince the spectators that a girl can hold her own in a mélange of rough and tumble buffoonery."

It does not matter that Roy and Joy were promoted as the only married pair of circus clowns. The circus is a fantasy world. Claims are made to improve audience enjoyment. Clown acts with mules were extremely popular in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Several circuses advertised that their show featured "Maud, the world's most famous mule." Maud was a fictional comic strip character so she did not really exist. However, if audience members were thrilled that they were seeing her, it increased their enjoyment of the show without causing any harm. Uno was famous for ending his hand-balancing act by balancing on one finger. He did not actually do that. It was a magic illusion using a gimmick hidden in the pair of gloves that he donned for that trick. If audiences seeing Roy and Joy perform thought they were privileged to see the only married pair of clowns, it increased their enjoyment and did no harm.

The harm comes when we accept hype as truth. I heard a phrase that I like when I attended a Circus Historical Society Convention. A speaker said, "There is

circus truth, which is often different from historical truth.”

One advantage of that hype about Roy and Joy is that it motivated journalists to interview them. Joy did a good job being interviewed. Those articles preserved information about their career.

Lamb did get her facts correct. I'll confirm a few of them based on my own experiences touring with outdoor circuses.

Clowns today would probably be surprised by how much circus clowns earned. Lamb lists the salary for a new circus clown in the 1950s as being \$40 a week. In addition, they would have received room and board so their living expenses were low. She lists a new clown's salary in 1960 on the Kelly Miller Circus as \$50 a week plus room and board. That is accurate. I started my clown career in 1976 by touring with Circus Kirk, the first tented youth circus. New performers on that show received \$50 a week. They received \$60 a week during their second season with the show. When I joined the Carson & Barnes Circus in 1980, I made twice that much, but there was a clown without any circus experience who earned \$50 a week plus room and board that year.

Lamb refers to a holdback. With many circuses, the performers receive half of their pay the first two weeks of the season. If they stay the entire season or give two weeks notice, they receive the second half of their first two weeks of pay. There are two purposes for that practice. First, the show does not need as much cash on hand at the beginning of the season. Second, it helps prevent employees from being stranded at the end of the season. They have a little more money to travel to their next booking or to return home.

There is a second type of holdback, one to guarantee that you finish the season. I was dissatisfied with conditions on the Carson & Barnes Circus during the 1981 season and had decided to leave the



show. After I turned in my two weeks notice, the management offered me a 25 percent raise as a holdback. I accepted their offer. I continued being paid my original salary. However, at the end of the season, I was paid the extra amount for every week of the season. That ended up being enough for me to make a down payment for a station wagon and trailer when I moved to a small show the next season.

In this book, the performers are told “the eagle is flying” to inform them that their pay was available at the show's ticket office. Circus slang varies somewhat from show to show. Other phrases for pay being available include “the eagle has landed” and “the ghost is walking.” Those phrases are used to protect the circus employees. Circus people are more likely to be the victims of crimes than the instigators. The slang is used to prevent local crooks from knowing that the circus employees have cash.

Lamb refers to an underground economy where circus employees tip each other for services. For example, during the 1981 season, I tipped the water boy two dollars a week to fill my two water buckets each day. Letters were delivered to the cookhouse each day and I could pick them up there. However, if Jeanine

Reynolds, the circus mail agent, went out of her way to deliver a package directly to me at my room in the sleeper, I would tip her a little. In 1980, the Ringmaster performed a magic act in the show. He tipped two girls to appear in his act, plus unload his props from his truck each afternoon and load them back into the truck at night. When one of the girls was injured, he tipped me to replace her for a week.

“Cherry pie” is a term that means extra work for extra pay. In 1981, the lot superintendent tipped me ten dollars a week to drive a show-owned truck from town to town. The big top boss tipped me five dollars a week to help set up the curtain for the performer's entrance. The concessions manager tipped me ten dollars a week to hand out balloons during the Peanut Pitch. (If an audience member found a prize ticket in a package of Fiddle Faddle sold, while the arena for the bit cat act was being taken down, they would bring it to me and exchange it for a balloon.)

(Note: Circus slang can vary. “Cherry pie” and “Chinese” are both terms used for extra work. Sometimes “cherry pie” is paid and “Chinese” is unpaid work covered by a “be generally useful” clause in a contract. I have also heard the definition of those terms reversed. For example, when I toured with Circus Kirk, “cherry pie” meant unpaid extra work.)

Tips were not always in cash. In 1980, a woman at the Carson & Barnes Circus would give haircuts. Her price was a can of beer. People quickly learned it was better to be one of her first customers of the day than it was to be her last.

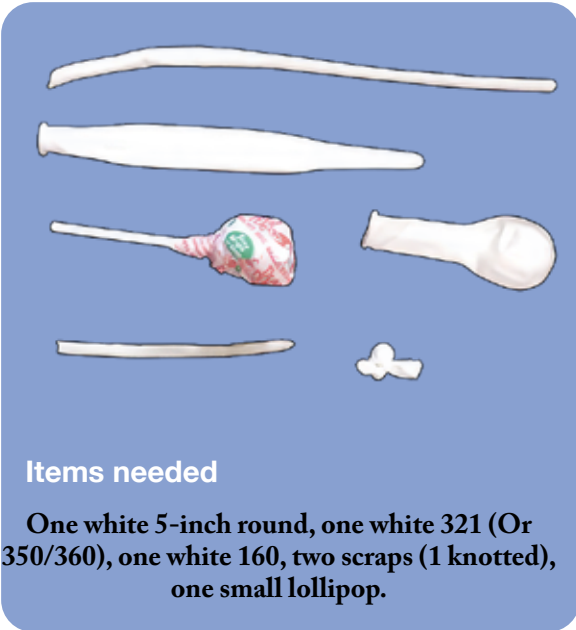
I recommend this book highly to anyone who would like an idea of what being a circus clown was like. It succeeds on two levels: it is an enjoyable novel, and it is also an interesting way to explore some of the realities of that life.



Ghost Lollipop

Two Treats in One
Great for Trick-or-Treats

By Merrily Johnston



Items needed

One white 5-inch round, one white 321 (Or 350/360), one white 160, two scraps (1 knotted), one small lollipop.



1.



2.



3.

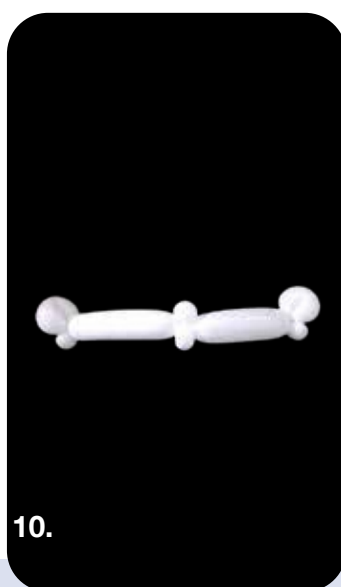


4.

1. Insert knotted scrap into 5-inch round. Inflate, then release air til softball sized. Tie knot.
2. Hold with nozzle up and pinch knotted scrap through bottom of round balloon.

3. Holding on to knotted scrap, twist several times. Tie the unknotted scrap around the twist between the knotted scrap and the rest of 5-inch round balloon (raisin twist).

4. Push air toward nozzle end. (This will be the head.) Set aside.



5. Inflate 321 or 350/360 to six fingers. Tie a couple of knots to make it easier to grab.

6. Push knot end into the balloon with finger.

7. Grab knot with other hand. (Pinch between thumb and forefinger.)

8. Remove finger from balloon and while continuing to hold the knot. Twist several times. (This will be the body.)

9. Continue to hold the body by the knot. Pick up round with other hand and wrap the scrap, several times, around the knot in the body and tie.

10. Inflate 160 to fifteen fingers. Make a one-finger pinch twist and small loop for the hand.

11. Make a four-finger arm, two one-finger pinch twists, a second four-finger arm, a loop for the second hand, and a one-finger pinch twist. Remove remainder of 160 and tie.

12. Wrap arm in between the ghost's body and head. Add artwork. Add lollipop.

Brooke's COAI Business Office Farewell

Brooke Fiedler has been one of the friendly voices behind the scenes at the COAI Business Office since October 2023. At the end of June, she will sadly be stepping away from that role—but not from the COAI community! She'll continue to be part of *The New Calliope* team as an editorial assistant and occasional contributor.

One of Brooke's favorite things about being part of the COAI office staff has been getting to know clowns from all over the world—whether that was through helping someone renew, conducting an interview for an article, or just having a fun, friendly chat with a clown.

Brooke first discovered the magic of the clowning world through working with the COAI Business Office, and it didn't take long before she was hooked. "Until I started working here, I had no idea how big, kind, and joyful the clown community was," she said. "Now one of my favorite things to tell people is, 'I work for the clowns!' and it always gets the best reaction."

Though she doesn't perform as a clown, Brooke has even created her own clown persona—Blitz—because, let's face it, once you've talked to enough clowns on the phone, you start to become one yourself.

Of all the journalistic and editorial projects she's worked on, *The New Calliope* is her absolute favorite. "It's fun, joyful, and full of heart," she said. "Getting to read submissions, help put together each issue, and share in the creativity of the clown community is a real joy."

While she may be stepping away from the day-to-day business side, Brooke is excited to stay connected through the magazine and remain part of the clown community that continues to surprise and inspire her.

After nearly twelve years of managing the COAI Business Office, SPS Publications ended their contract on June 30, 2025. Stay tuned for an interview with our new COAI Office Manager, Monica Chaney, in the next issue. Please note the new office address on page 3. The phone number will remain the same.



Brooke Fiedler

Giggle-Bytes
COAI Clown Alley

The Alley meets on ZOOM
2nd Monday of the month
8pm Eastern
FREE for COAI members!
Topics covered help you
become a better entertainer

Past Topics

- Balloon entertainment (beyond twisting)
- Magic
- Storytelling
- Props
- Parades
- Puppets
- Ventriloquism
- Balloons
- Clown Ministry
- Care Clowning
- Face painting
- Bubbles
- Improv
- Staging
- Music in your shows
- Sound equipment
- Costume design
- Getting organized
- Business smarts
- Phone scripts
- Santa class
- Seasonal characters
- Creating seasonal shows
- Character development
- Turn free requests into paid gigs and so much more

mycoai.com

Annual General Meeting Minutes

As we go to press with this convention issue, we have not received the minutes from the 2025 Annual General Meeting held in Denver, Colorado. Although the meeting was hosted on Zoom, we understand that the poor audio quality made it difficult to follow. We hope to include the written record of this meeting in the next issue.

Welcome,
NEW MEMBERS!

Due to the changeover of the COAI Business Office and the transfer of information to a new website, we were unable to publish a list of new members in this issue. Look for the complete list in the next issue of *The New Calliope!*

Give the gift of fun! Give your friends a COAI membership!

Are You a Real Clown?

By Rick “Albert Ping Pong” Heath

Some four decades ago, after an end-of-the-school year performance for children at our Larcom Theatre, a young girl, maybe five or six years old, fresh as a daisy in her white dress and with a ribbon in her hair, approached me as I stood by the steps at the front of the theatre’s stage. She waited, silently, for several moments, just looking at me with wide, innocent, inquiring eyes. And then she asked, “Are you a real clown?”

I, behind the makeup and costume, was stunned. Never had I been asked that question. As a silent clown, I could not speak. Could I have spoken, I had no answer.

I do not remember my response. Perhaps a weak smile or gesture. But never will I forget the young girl and her disarming question. And, I remember thinking, “If I were to answer ‘Yes,’ it would be a lie. To answer ‘No,’ would also be a lie.”

Four decades after having been put on the spot, the somewhat humorous thought arises that I would rather have been confronted with the age-old Zen koan, “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” than the question, “Are you a real clown?”

It’s a serious question when one takes it to heart. It seems clear that a red nose, some creative dabs of greasepaint, and trappings of plaids and polka dots do not necessarily make a real clown. The same with gadgets and gizmos, buttons and balloons, puns and pratfalls, magic and mime. Fun stuff for sure, but behind it all is the question—not to be figured out in the head, but to be *felt* in the heart.



Rick Heath as “Albert Ping Pong.”

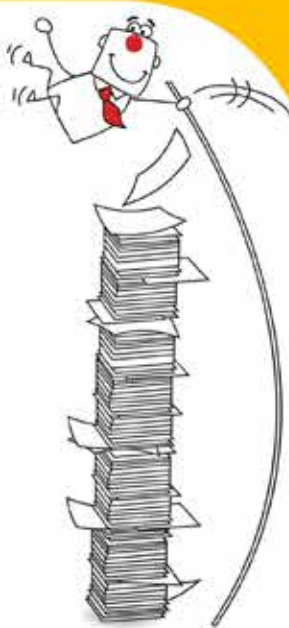


Perhaps, during my performing days, I came close to being a real clown when I was able to communicate a deep affection for life itself, that it’s worth it to be alive, and that each day is truly a most amazing day. Perhaps I came even closer when I cared deeply, when I could see something special in others, and when each performance was an offering from the heart.

So, if you wish, ask yourself, “Am I a real clown?” Then step into those oversized shoes, *feel* the question, and go *live* the question!

Rick Heath was both a clown and an artist for Le Grand David and his own Spectacular Magic Company, the stage magic

troupe that enjoyed a thirty-five-year record setting run from 1977–2012 at its two historic theatres in Beverly, Massachusetts, USA. Rick would love to hear from you by email at rick.heath@magicianwithapaintbrush.com.



Vaulting Over The 15,000 Page Mark!

Since 1984, Clowns of America International has focused on clown education through conventions, alley meetings, and *The New Calliope*.

In 2018, SPS Publications (the folks who produce *The New Calliope*) digitized more than 10,000 pages for COAI and launched The Vault—giving members free online access to every issue of *The New Calliope* ever published!

But wait—there’s more! Last year, SPS Publications went back to the original Clowns of America publication, the *Calliope*, from the 1960s and ’70s, and added another 5,000 pages to The Vault!

The accompanying chart shows areas of instruction and inspiration that we strive to provide to our readers. Our Creative Consultant, Regina “Cha Cha” Wollrabe, came up with this chart back in 2013. We think it’s a fun and useful way to look at what we’ve learned as clowns, and can still learn, to be our best as Ambassadors of Joy.

If you haven’t spent much time in The Vault, we encourage you to login to your account at www.mycoai.com and check it out. If you need help logging in or setting a password, don’t hesitate to call your COAI Business Office at 1-352-357-1676 on Tuesdays and Thursdays. (On other days, leave a message and we’ll get back to you as soon as possible.)

Remember that COAI still offers print copies of our magazine, unlike many other organizations. We love creating a robust online experience with The Vault (and our “Free Books in the Clown Crowd”), but we also want to keep providing the printed magazines that so many of our members enjoy. And we’ll keep doing that as long as we have your support to make it happen! So tell your friends about COAI, gift some memberships, and plan to attend the convention! Let’s keep the ball rolling!

Together we can make the world a better, happier place by spreading joy through the art of clowning.



Don't forget that COAI members also have free access to books online under the EDUCATION tab at www.mycoai.com, including *Crash Course on Kidshows*, *Keep It a Secret*, *Clowning Basics*, *Starting in Magic*, *Big Laughs for Little People*, and—coming soon—*American Vaudeville!*



The Kidshow Way



VANISHED

By Skip Way

One of the most common requests I receive from children is “Can you make me disappear?” I patiently explain that vanishing stuff is a wizard thing and, alas, I am but a mere magician. You see, wizards spend seven years at top-rated wizarding schools like Hogwarts, Durmstrang, and the IRS. Student loans for wizards may run into thousands of galleons! We magicians are mostly liberal art majors. In fact, like Rubeus Hagrid, very few of us make it through the entire course.

One group of children was so persistent that I vigorously waved my wand, recited a royalty-free vanishing spell I found on YouTube, and—POOF!—announced them vanished! They looked at each other and stubbornly insisted they were still here! I panicked and explained, “I can still hear you! That must have been an invisibility spell! Invisible people can still see each other, you see.” The parents played along as I struggled to remember how to make them visible again. Did I mention my generous side commission for sending children into therapy?

Then, that great master of MIY (*Magish It Yourself*) Jim Kleefeld inspired a cute idea. I replaced the cutouts from an old set of Hippy Hop Rabbits with two flat 10-inch by 5-inch slats of ¼-inch lauan plywood. I painted one side of the lauan slats a rich royal blue with colorful stars and the word “POOF!” exploding out from the center. On the other side I painted a fading smoke ring and the words “Nope! Still Gone!” I glued these into the Hippy Hop Rabbit bases.

I had a machine shop friend cut two 10.5-inch by 5-inch sheets of thin metal and bend the top to slip over top of the lauan slats. I painted the front of the metal sheets with the same royal blue. I added the cartoon image of a headless birthday boy on one metal sheet and a headless birthday girl on the other.

I created matching balsa wood cards with flat magnets glued to the backs. I painted these the same royal blue, with boy or girl images to match the metal inserts. The covering boxes received several glossy black coats with wizardly stars and crescent moons.

During the booking process, I ask parents for a good headshot of our birthday star, carefully explaining my plan. I size and print two photos, cut out the heads, and tape one each to the appropriate boy or girl metal-and-wood card.

As I place the prop onto my table, I secretly attach the balsa wood card to my back. It takes less than a second for a large steel washer pinned inside my vest to attract the balsa card’s magnet. I explain the government’s Department of Operational Magic (D.O.O.M.) requires me to perform a skill test before vanishing an actual child. Applying Hippy Hop Rabbit handling, our birthday star helps me vanish his or her effigy. After considerable by-play trying to restore the vanished child, the children spot the vanished birthday child hanging on my back.

Mischief managed! Who needs Hogwarts? **TNC**

Skip Way has been a professional children’s entertainer for more than forty-five years. Upon retiring from the Air Force, he settled in Raleigh, North Carolina, and began working stand-up comedy and military clubs along the East Coast. While lucrative, he missed the laughter of children and returned to a career in family entertainment as a classic kidshow performer named Happy Dan. Reach him by e-mail at rway@nc.rr.com.

Our Good Cheer List

Please take a moment to spread a few words of good cheer with a card or note to one of these members.

Ruth “Sweet Sue” Hoppe
Parkview Manor
516 13th St. Room 111
Wallman, IA 52366

Miriam “Senorita Soto” Kleinberger
2 Maple Lane North
Loudonville, NY 12211

Richard “Design-O” Smith
97 Grafton Street, Back Door
Shrewsbury, MA 01545-5646

Fran “Cuddles” Smith
St. Joseph’s Manor
6448 Main St
Trumbull, CT 06611

5 Fun-tastic Christmas Tricks to Make Your Holiday Shows a Success!

SHRINKING GLOVE. A wonderful warm-up routine for young audiences!

You begin wearing a pair of knit gloves. You give one to a child, say the magic words, and the glove has shrunk! A funny effect and a wonderful, magical happening right in their hands! Includes Sammy Smith's complete North Pole Boulevard routine! **Only \$12**



RUDY REINDEER. Show a colorful cardboard plaque of Rudy Reindeer. Rudy couldn't fly like all of the other reindeer, so Santa gave him a magic cape — and a special job. Rudy flies from house to house scouting out which houses have chimneys and which ones have doors.

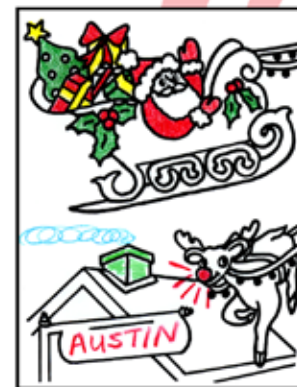
One child holds Rudy in the chimney envelope and another helper holds an empty door envelope. The audience shouts the magic words and Rudy is gone! A cut out area where he used to be is all that remains.

When the door envelope is opened, Rudy's green silk cape tumbles out, but no reindeer! After a frenzied search and lots of enthusiastic "advice" from the audience, Rudy Reindeer is found clinging to the second helper's back! "He made it to the next house—he just went around to the back."

Everybody needs a little R&R—that's why you need Rudy Reindeer! **Only \$25**

A Fun Idea from Silly Billy!

MAGIC CHRISTMAS PICTURE. Show a black and white drawing of a rooftop with reindeer and sleigh ready to land—except the sleigh is empty! No color, no Santa, no presents, oh no! A volunteer picks several crayons and writes his name on the sign in front of the house, colors the reindeer's nose, and adds some smoke coming from the chimney. The child holds the picture while everyone says the magic words. When the picture is turned around, Santa and a sleigh full of presents—complete with a Christmas tree—appears, all magically colored with crayons! The child keeps the magic drawing as a souvenir of the show! 20 refills included. **Only \$25**



BIG RED NOSE. Rudy starts out as a blue-nose reindeer. The children object, so you magically turn his nose to red. You like it better the other way but when you try to change it back, the color vanishes from the reindeer's nose. The children howl as the red nose ends up on you! Complete with glossy cards and a high quality, red foam nose. **Only \$25**

PRESENTS OF MIND. Display a set of jumbo cards, each with a different holiday picture (candy cane, Santa, snowman, candle, gifts, ornament, angel, etc.). Two spectators think of any picture.

You roughly sketch the pictures you think they have mentally selected. Place your sketches on a stand, and when you reveal your drawings, you have correctly guessed the pictures they chose! Absolutely NO artistic skill is required! Complete set includes cards, card stand, and marker. Jumbo size with 8" x 10" heavy-duty, glossy cards. **Only \$75**



Please add \$10 for shipping and handling.

SPS Magic • Post Office Box 787 • Eustis, Florida 32727 **SPS magic.com**

CLOWN COMICS

GRADE A

Featuring

Jim "Donuts" Donouge, COAI Clown of the Year 2023

Photos

Rhonda Cribbs

Script

Ann "Tuttles" Sanders

GET UP!
You're going
to be late for
school!



I don't want to
go to school.



The kids don't
like me.



They pick on
me and call me
names.



But you have to
go to school...



You're the
TEACHER!



COAI CONVENTION NASHVILLE, TN



**APRIL 28TH-
MAY 2ND
2026**

MYCOAI.COM