

Civic-minded volunteers take clowning seriously

BY SALLY GERAK
STAFF WRITER

"I'm having a ball!" said Michigan Bell president Bob Hurst as he frolicked down Woodward Avenue Thursday in a clown costume and red foam nose. Hurst and his wife Joyce, a dedicated volunteer for a number of area charities, live in Bloomfield Hills and are new members of Michigan Thanksgiving Parade Foundation's Distinguished Clown Corps.

There are many clowns in the parade, but the Distinguished Clowns are a singular lot. They are business, civic or charity leaders who pay \$1,000-per-year dues for the privilege of clowning around for a few hours one day a year.

The corps was established in 1983 when the parade's very existence was in jeopardy. "Back then I thought if we got 10 (clowns) we'd be lucky," remembered Tom Adams, who, with Detroit Edison chairman at the time, Walter McCarthy, conceived the idea.

Distinguished Clown Corps membership has since become so coveted that the 100-member limit was increased to 125 this year, according to Birminghamer Gary Wasserman. He is the Parade Foundation special events chairman.

Adams, retired chairman of Campbell-Ewald who lives in Bloomfield Hills, was saluted at the pre-parade breakfast for Distinguished Clowns, their families and VIPs. He was dressed in the corps' token of esteem—the first 10-year clown suit.

The subtle differences in clown suits are unnoticed by most parade watchers. First year clowns wear one-piece, harlequin-patterned suits which they keep for five years, adding ruffled arm bands for each year of membership. After five years, a Distinguished Clown is issued a two-piece suit containing some silver fabric. The top hat and the gold fabric in Adams' new suit are symbolic of 10 years of membership.

Following the above guidelines, matching clown suits are created for Distinguished Clown couples. Oakland County couples with



Happy face: Lathrup Village resident Robert Raisch has clown makeup applied by his daughter, Julie, who volunteered her time along with other members of the St. Dunstan's Theater Guild specifically to paint clown faces for the parade.

these include the Hursts, Foundation president Sandy Duncan and his wife, Rosanne, the Bob Awreys, John Bellans, Paul Bormans, Gil Bormans, Jack Robinsons, Donald Petersens, Alvin Wassermans, Gary Wassermans, Henry Colmans and Loree Carn and Rod Wasserman. Southfield entrepreneur Richard Kughn and his wife, Linda, who chaired the parade, also have his and her outfits.

Paula Blanchard of West Bloomfield was also honored at the breakfast, where clowns socialize while awaiting their turn at the make-up stations. Blanchard led the effort to save the parade when she was Michigan's First Lady. On Thursday she was designated Distinguished Clown Corps Founding Director, which freed her to march in the parade.

"Previously I had to be businesslike. Now it's time to clown around," she quipped.

So why do these busy community leaders don costumes, wigs and makeup and act silly?

"You lose your inhibitions," noted Betty Jean Awrey as she sprayed Instant Fun Streamer on

some laughing youngsters midway down the two-mile Woodward Avenue parade route.

"I especially like shaking hands," said Rosemary Kelly, co-founder of the Rose Hill Center for mentally ill adults. Then she pressed a child's hand and said, "Happy Thanksgiving, honey."

"It's so nice to see Detroit smiling," exclaimed first-year clown Lorre Carn, who kept stopping curbside to cheerlead the spectators.

Fourth-year clown Deb Lobring elaborated. "Seeing all these colors of Detroit, all these people having a good time together—that's a real high!"

Indefatigable charity worker Maggie Altesse invariably got lots of laughs from spectators when she bopped policemen on the head with a screwy rubber chicken.

"It's great to be a kid and it's great to make kids happy," declared Barbara McClure, first-year clown and manager/vic president of Troy's Naiman Marcus. Her company also sponsored, along with The Ritz-Carlton, a hospitality suite for VIPs at One Detroit Center.



STAFF PHOTOS BY DAN DEAN

Clown for a day: Waving to the folks lining the Woodward Avenue parade route is Bob Hurst of Bloomfield Hills, one of many who transformed themselves into clowns for the annual event.



In step: Saluting crowds along the parade route is yet another local "clown," Birmingham resident Alan Haroith.

New street lights brighten up Hills Olde Town section

BY BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

A move by the city of Farmington Hills should brighten things in the Olde Town section.

The city council approved a plan to install a total of 22 lights in the city's oldest residential neighborhood in the southeast corner.

The ambient lighting, first requested by the city's police department, will provide better security and safety in the city's most densely populated area, said City Manager William Costick.

Detroit Edison will install 10 light fixtures at intersections north of Eight Mile and west of Inkster, mostly east of Botsford Hospital, and another 12 fixtures for all intersections along Independence Street between Middlebelt and Cowell.

The installations will cost the city \$4,787. The city will also pay annual lamp charges of \$3,850 for the 100 watt, high sodium lights.

'In Olde Town, it is more difficult for the fire department, police and EMS to find streets. It's a safety factor and a crime deterrent.'

Ida Ranesbottom
Olde Town resident

cult for the fire department, police and EMS to find streets," said Ida Ranesbottom, an Olde Town resident and community activist. "It's a safety factor and a crime deterrent."

Costick said the money to pay for the lighting would come from the city's general fund.

The measure passed unanimously, although some council members were concerned with the fairness of the city paying for lighting in one neighborhood, while others had to pay through resident association fees.

But the improved lighting would save the city in the long run, because public safety and security would improve, easing the

burden on police and other services, said Councilman Ben Marks.

"All enforcement officers are saying we have to light our streets and roads," Marks said. "That's one of the single best (crime) deterrents."

Councilman Terry Sever said since Olde Town residents had paid for much of the city's infrastructure before new subdivisions were built, the cost of lighting the neighborhood was owed to its residents.

"For the last 30 to 40 years, I think (Olde Town) residents could argue that they paid for a lot of services that they might feel they didn't get paid back for."

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