



Children's Hospital "Clowns on Call" Rose Grier, Annettee "Babycakes" Neuman and Sharon Wilcox



Volunteer Spotlight

Clowns On Call Proves Laughter is Good Medicine

BY MARCY HAYES

If one clown is good, reasoned Annette "Babycakes" Newman, wouldn't two clowns be better? And why stop there? How about a platoon of clowns? A flock? A flotilla?

Thus was born Clowns on Call, a growing troupe of red-nosed volunteers who roam from room to room each week, eliciting giggles from the patients of the Children's Hospital of Michigan.

Newman, a volunteer from Waterford, came to Children's Hospital after only a few years of clowning around. She says it all began when she ran into a character called Dan the Balloon Man at a suburban restaurant, where he was entertaining guests by creating balloon animals.

"Dan told me about a 9-week Clown School in Livonia, taught by a husband and wife," Newman said. Intrigued by the idea of making strangers laugh, she signed up.

Armed with a newfound knowledge in make-up, balloon sculpture and simple magic – but alas, no facility with juggling – she took her skills and fondness for fun to Children's Hospital. But after a while, being the only clown didn't feel right.

Newman and fellow clown, Rose "Rose Petal" Grier had started crafting

their own manual on how to clown in a hospital setting. With few classrooms or books to learn the special nuances hospital clowns need to know, Babycakes and Rose Petal hoped to help encourage others, those who have never clowned before as well as seasoned pros.

Clowns on Call found the Boston Hospital Clown Troupe and the hospital brought them in to share their expertise. "They are the best," says Newman. "We were excited to find they had written a manual, and it's great." Children's Hospital's clowns learned about their experiences and got tips on approaching and engaging the children.

Newman continues to seek out clown classes she can share with her group; she wants Clowns on Call to be the best!

"My ultimate dream is to train with Patch Adams," said Newman, "and work in a third-world country." She's making up the process as she goes along, which only makes sense: When you wear size 28 shoes, anything is possible.

For more information on how to become a Children's Hospital of Michigan volunteer, contact Erin O'Mara at (313) 745-5312 or eomara@dmc.org.