

THE DOCTOR IS IN: LAUGHTER MAY BE CONTAGIOUS



BRIAN GAVRILOFF, THE JOURNAL

Paul Hooson as 'Doc Willikers,' from the British Columbia Children's Hospital, entertains Katie MacMillan, who is recovering at University Hospital from an operation for spina bifida. She got a kick out of Doc's humour and the bubbles he supplied.

'Celebrate the life that's there'

Street performers take their shtick to a shut-in but happy audience

JODY WARWARUK
Journal Staff Writer
EDMONTON

Sporting a lab coat and giant stethoscope, the gentle Doc Willikers does his rounds at the hospital.

But these aren't ordinary rounds.

Willikers, a.k.a. Vancouver's Paul Hooson, is a therapeutic clown in Edmonton for the International Street Performers

Festival.

Hooson has come here not only to visit children at the Stollery Children's Health Centre, but to mentor others in the sometimes difficult, but always rewarding, job of entertaining sick children.

"You celebrate the life that's there. You don't focus on illness or disability," said Hooson, one of only five professional therapeutic clowns in the country. "It lightens the whole atmosphere, brings a breath of sunshine into the place."

Laughter is the best medicine, said Street Performers Festival producer Shelley Switzer. This is the second year Switzer has run the Comedy Cares program for all 10 days of the festival.

Now the program has extended to run year-round in medical centres throughout the province, thanks to continued sponsorship from Epcor.

A professional theatre clown for almost 30 years, Hooson admits he still gets nervous when he knocks on a hospital room door to see if the patient inside would like a visit.

"The old fear of rejection kicks in," he said. "I still get frightened absolutely every time I step in front of a child."

"These children have so much imposed on them, so you don't want to impose your own desire to perform on them as well."

As many of the entertainers in Hooson's workshop discovered, it's not always easy being

HOT FUN

IN THE SUMMER TIME

The lazy, hazy days of summer are upon us. Whether you want to beat the heat or bask in the sun's rays, here are some diversions to help you pass the time today.

■ Just you, a map and the great outdoors. Hike, jog or run to find a series of checkpoints in a beginner orienteering course, suitable even for the directionally challenged. Register between 6:30 and 7:30 p.m. this evening at Whitemud North (off Fox Drive, north on Keillor Road, back under Fox Drive). Cost: \$5 a person. Call 455-1916 or visit www.orienteer.ab.ca.

■ The infinite wonder of the universe meets the inner workings of the body at The Odyssey, the recently renamed and spruced-up Space and Science Centre. New exhibits include the Gallery of the Gross, featuring the sounds, smells and sights of unspeakable bodily functions. Escape the heat during exhibit hours from 10 a.m. to 9 p.m., 11211 142nd St. Admission is \$9.95 for adults, \$6.95 for children three to 12.

■ Take a stroll among the exotic and endangered at the Valley Zoo. Boasting more than 100 animal species, it's the only place on the continent you can see South American sea lions. Open weekdays from 9:30 a.m. to 8 p.m., 13315 Buena Vista Rd.

■ The Edmonton International Street Performers Festival continues in Sir Winston Churchill Square until Sunday. Outdoor street shows are on from 11:30 a.m. to 10 p.m.

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