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Twin Cities / A 'box of cheer'

A love of laughs unites the members of the 3M Clown Club; the group has been yukking it up for four decades.

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Article Last Updated: 04/29/2008 11:49:18 PM CDT



3M Clown Club member Kim "Zelda" Mazur, 49, right, gets laugh out of Forrest Alldritt, 83, at Oak Meadows Senior Living Centre in Oakdale on Tuesday, April 22nd. Mazur has been with the group for 8 months.

By day, Mary Shafer is an information technology analyst at 3M Co.

But catch her on select evenings or weekends and you'll find that the Hudson, Wis., woman likes to don a pair of colorful overalls, paint a smile on her face and transform into Twinkles the clown.

Just goofing around? You could say so — she's one of two dozen members of the 3M Clown Club, which has been clowning around for more than 40 years.

Anyone can join, and training is provided. Membership includes employees, retirees, and employees' relatives, but one thing ties them together — the love of making people laugh. Members make regular appearances in public, walking in parades and yukking it up at company picnics.

"Just knowing you put a smile on somebody's face or made somebody's day a little better is so rewarding," said Shafer, who has moonlighted as Twinkles for more than 15 years.

Club members also make the rounds at fundraisers, hospitals and senior homes, all free of charge.

"It's a box of cheer," said Giggles, whose real name is Mary Urban.

Urban joined the club about eight years ago after seeing "Patch Adams," a movie about a doctor who used humor to treat patients.

"I just thought, 'I wonder if I can do that?' " she said.

The clown club is one of about 50 organizations for 3M employees, whose common interests range from dancing to photography to archery. Clown club members wear patches or buttons that identify the club, and people sometimes call 3M to request clowns for family reunions or birthday parties. The charge for a private party is \$50 an hour for one clown, with the money used for club supplies and activities.

Last week, Giggles and seven other clowns stopped by the Oak Meadows Senior Living complex in Oakdale. About 50 residents gathered for the 30-

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minute show, and when the troupe walked in, the staid crowd burst into applause.

"The seniors love it — it makes them laugh," said Melody Oaks, activities director at Oak Meadows. "I think it's kind of an extra ray of sunshine for them in the midst of normal, everyday life."

The group performed skits and a magic act, led audience members in song and lobbed jokes.

Afterward, the tenants cracked their own jokes with the clowns.

"You better come again," said one woman to the pink-haired Blossom, aka JoAnn Buhl.

"Maybe we just should stay," Buhl said, taking a seat.

"You're not old enough!" the woman said.

Club members are careful never to make fun of others, nor do they misbehave — they don't want to make anyone fear clowns. They just want to brighten someone's day.

In fact, they'll even act up in unexpected places.

"Sometimes we'll carpool ... and we'll just be jabbering. Then, I'll realize the car next to me has been there for a while," Shafer said. "The kids (in the car) will be waving and you'll remember, 'Oh yeah, you're clowns!'"

"You just smile and wave," she said.

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The 3M Clown Club members Mary "Giggles" Urban, 55, left and Mary "Twinkles" Shafer, 57, performs a skit at Oak Meadows Senior Living Centre in Oakdale on Tuesday, April 22nd. Urban has been with the group for 9 years and Shafer has been with the group for 18 years.

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