

Clowning around: Midland native overcomes shyness

Julie Wright has placed well in international competitions

BY ADAM BOUTON
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MIDLAND — Midland native Julie Wright has made a career out of clowning, whether its been locally at birthday parties or on a bigger stage in the Royal Hanneford Circus.

But crafting balloon masterpieces, juggling and generating laughs aren't the only benefits of her job.

It has also helped her overcome her shy nature.

"I was a very shy person, so the clowning helped me. It's like a mask," Wright said. "I still struggle with my shyness in certain situations, around strangers. But, I have a character that isn't shy."

As Jewls The Clown, Wright not only has masked her shyness, but has brought joy to thousands of people during her 25-year career.

Her clowning also has earned her some high accolades.

Wright recently returned from the 2012 Clowns of America International convention held April 24-29 in Kansas City, Mo. She placed in the top 10 in seven of the eight categories that she entered. Hundreds of clowns attended the competition.

"It was an international competition, so you have no idea who is coming," she said. "We had clowns from Israel, Italy, Puerto Rico, Spain and Mexico. It's really quite an honor to place as low as I did."

She won gold medals for both her Multiple Balloon Structure

and Balloon Arrangements. She crafted a monkey in a palm tree on an island with bananas and flowers in under 15 minutes to win the Multiple Balloon Structure award.

Wright also collected a bronze medal for her Single Balloon Structure, a baseball glove that she created in under 10 minutes.

Wright said that she happened on a career in clowning after attending Delta College.

"I studied business at Delta College, and I had a professor who told us to find something that no one else is doing and do it well," she said. "At that time, there was no one doing any type of clowning or family entertainment. I thought that perhaps this would be a good business."

She became so good at her craft as a clown that she joined a national circus for a time, picking and choosing dates to join the Royal Hanneford Circus, which traveled all over the country.

What she enjoys most, however, is performing locally on smaller stages.

"The living room circus is one of my favorite venues," Wright admitted. "I used to travel the Michigan state festival circuit. I still do a handful each year. But, I really do enjoy the living room circus."

Another of Wright's talents are juggling as she handles everything from machete knives to torches, but she is sure not to mix clowning for children and the juggling of dangerous items together.

Being shy in certain situations and especially as a child, Wright understands the fear of clowns. It's actually helped her relate to shy, younger audience members throughout her career.

"I was extremely, painfully



Midland native Julie Wright as Jewls the Clown.

shy as a child," Wright said. "When I see a shy child, I know how they feel. It's OK to feel shy. I studied child development and I understand the fear of clowns and how to help them and give them their

own space."

Wright added that performing as a clown has brought her joy throughout her career. It's also helped to bring joy to many others.

"I perform for children of all

ages," Wright said of clowning for kids all the way to assisted living centers. "Everyone has a child inside of them that wants to play. It's so true. The child needs to come out every once in awhile."

Public input sought on area transportation study

BY BETH BELLOR
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BAY CITY — It might seem early for a plan with the year 2040 in its title, but that's what members of the Bay City Area Transportation Study have released — and now they want public input.

BCATS members include representatives of local governments, as well as Bay Metro Transit Authority, East Michigan Council of Governments, Michigan Department of Transportation and Federal Highway Administration. They provide transportation planning services for the cities of Bay City and Essexville and the townships of Bangor, Frankenlust, Fraser, Hampton, Kawkawlin Monitor and Portsmouth.

One of the group's major functions under federal law is to produce a transportation plan for the area, which guides where federal transportation funds should be spent. The 2040 Metropolitan Transportation Plan was developed starting in January 2011 and incorporated the updated Great Lakes Bay Region Travel Demand Model, which identifies peak period deficiencies. It identifies area transportation needs through the year 2040, and outlines policies and projects, both funded and unfunded, to meet those needs.

A public open house is scheduled from 3 to 7 p.m. May 23 in the Old Commission Chambers on the second floor of the Bay County Building, 515 Center Ave., Bay City. Comments, suggestions and questions on the long-range transportation plan are welcome.

The previous version, the 2035 Metropolitan Transportation Plan, expires July 31, 2012.

The 2040 plan has not yet been adopted.

COURTESY