



# The Heart of the Triangle

*sharing the vision, supporting the mission  
of the triangle area non-profit community*

## Laughter for Those Who Need it Most

by Megan Cutter

Remember Robin Williams in the role of the goofy and somewhat rebellious medical student Patch Adams? Studies show volunteer programs in hospitals that include pet therapy, visual and creative arts, and laughter help patients heal faster. Utilizing these skills gives patients a sense of play, comfort and connection while they are recovering from illness or surgery.

According to a study by the University of Maryland Medical Center, people with heart disease were 40% less likely to laugh in certain situations. Laughter can protect the heart, circulatory and immune system. For children in hospitals, it is even more important to have a positive and uplifting environment.

Door to Door, established in 1993, brings artists and performers to the UNC Hospitals. Performers choose the work they offer, allowing many opportunities to bring smiles and laughter. Founder Joy Javitz comments, "We bring in many types, including musicians, puppeteers, drummers, storytellers, writers and magicians. Laughter releases endorphins integral to the healing process, increases oxygen flow and relieves stress." They are supported by the UNC Volunteer Association, NC Arts Council, and the Medical Foundation of NC, Inc.

The Health Arts Network at Duke (HAND) was founded in 1978 to bring visual, literary and performing arts to staff, patients and their families at Duke Medical Center. Offering many types of interactive programs gives patients

the positive environment they need in order to heal. Director Olivia Woodford comments, "Many patients do not expect programming that gives them a feeling of joy. When they have this unexpected spontaneous experience of joy, the relief and delight that follows often gives rise to laughter. This laughter emerges from a deep place within, of remembering and reconnecting to what is pleasurable."

HAND programming includes performers on every unit, an artist in residence program, Art-Cart, Concert Series, revolving exhibitions, a touchable art gallery, journaling sessions, an annual employee art show, and a student volunteer group with more than 50 members. In addition, the oncology department has a pet therapy program. A urology nurse mentioned that the services HAND provides "reach a place that pills never will." HAND needs volunteer performers, curators, gallery docents, and administrative assistants.

Rock Against Cancer (RAC) supports the emotional needs of young cancer patients with music therapy and special music events. RAC brings board certified music therapists to the bedsides of children fighting cancer, with the goal of easing the anxiety, pain and nausea. Founder Dr. Lisa L. White adds, "The music therapists also engage children in songwriting to help them express difficult emotions. RAC provides digital recording equipment to record songs for children and teens. RAC provides music therapy to Duke Children's, NC Children's and Levine Children's as well as eight top Children's Oncology

Group hospitals around the country. RAC's hope is to bring music therapy to all seven Children's Oncology Group hospitals in NC."

There's nothing like alleviating stress and anxiety, providing an outlet to express their emotions during treatment, and attending special concerts and events to put a smile on a child's face. Rock Against Cancer brings the healing power of music to children battling cancer. They need your donations to continue making music part of the cure.

Volunteer opportunities abound. Your talents are needed to bring laughter and smiles to children and youth recovering from illness or surgery. Donate to these organizations who are dedicated to helping bring laughter through performance, music and the arts.

### **Door to Door**

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