

For the Record

Montreal Gazette
Tuesday, July 12, 2005
Page: A2
Section: News
Byline:
Source: The Gazette
Idnumber: 200507120180
Edition: Final
Story Type: Correction
Length: 36 words

In a story published July 7 in The Gazette's Business section about the charitable organization Dr Clown, the chairperson of the board's name was misspelled. The correct spelling is Germaine Gibara.

The Gazette regrets the error.

Astral starts clowning around with caregiving organization: Dr Clown lifts spirits of many patients. Media firm contributes \$3 million to help group that works with hospitalized people

Montreal Gazette
Thursday, July 7, 2005
Page: B1 / BREAK
Section: Business
Byline: ALISON MacGREGOR

Source: The Gazette

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Idnumber: 200507070101

Edition: Final

Story Type: Business

Length: 507 words

Keywords: MEDIA; BROADCASTING INDUSTRY; RADIO BROADCASTING

Illustration Type: Colour Photo

Illustration: Colour Photo: RICHARD ARLESS JR, THE GAZETTE / Astral Media chairperson Andre Bureau gets his heart checked by Dr. Fifi, a clown played by Melissa Holland, at a news conference yesterday. Founded in 2002, Dr Clown's goal is not only to entertain, but to give a feeling of power back to patients through games the clowns play with patients.

Astral Media Inc. is teaming up with Dr Clown, a local non-profit therapeutic clown organization that works with hospitalized children and senior citizens.

The Montreal broadcaster is contributing \$3 million worth of visibility over three years for the charity's advertising campaigns.

Ads will air for free on Astral's television channels and radio stations, and they will be displayed on Astral's outdoor advertising properties.

Astral will also help the charity organize other fund-raising activities.

At a press conference yesterday, Andre Bureau, president of Astral's board of directors, said the company decided to support Dr Clown because the organization brings a "human" touch into health care settings.

"They bring comic relief to situations that are not at all funny," Bureau said.

Founded in 2002, Dr Clown's goal is not only to entertain, but to give power back to patients.

The clowns play games that empower patients, allowing them to take care of someone else for a change, thus boosting their confidence and self-esteem.

For example, clown-doctors are clumsy and vulnerable, and call upon the patient to get them out of the comical fixes they get into.

Melissa Holland, Dr Clown's director of programming, spoke about a patient who was forced to stay in an isolation room because of his weakened immune system.

"We played games with him," she recalled, explaining that the clowns had to stay behind protective glass, but were still able to give him back

some control over his situation by allowing him to control the way they played games.

"He would sing songs and we would dance," she explained.

Dr Clown employs professional performers trained to work in a health-care environment.

The organization employs artists trained in theatre, clowning, dance and music. The performers undergo specialized training focused on working in health care. The clowns are taught about respecting confidentiality, understanding the behaviour of patients and their families, how to be sensitive to caregiver objectives and hygiene, and disease-control regulations.

The organization presently works in the Centre de readaptation Marie-Enfant, Montreal Children's Hospital, Sainte-

Justine Hospital, Institut universitaire de geriatrie de Montreal, CHSLD Residence Paul-Lizotte and the Montreal Jewish General Hospital.

Dr Clown president Germaine Bibara said the charity is not well-known and that the advertising campaign will help raise its profile. "It is fantastic for us to have this kind of visibility at this stage," she said.

The organization has 12 full-time clowns. Two new clowns will join the program in September for a new program. She said a program consisting of two clowns who visit an institution twice a week costs between \$50,000 to \$60,000 per year.

Bibara said the charity is constantly training new talent, adding that it takes a year of training before a clown is ready to work in a hospital. After that, they must keep their clown and care-giving skills up to date.

"We want to maintain the quality," she said. "When

you see them in action, you see how phenomenal they are, but it is all training."

The first television advertisements began airing last night.

On the Web: www.drclown.ca

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