

YatedNe'eman

LEV LEYTZAN LAUNCHES NEW PROGRAM FOR HOMEBOUND

By Liba Lieberman

Lev Leytzan doesn't clown around when it comes to bringing *simcha* to members of *Klal Yisroel* in need of a *refuah*. Founded in 2004 by its current executive director, Dr. Neal Goldberg, Ph.D., the innovative organization, called "Lev Leytzan: The Heart of Therapeutic Clowning, Inc.," is headquartered in Lawrence and has become an international force, bringing therapeutic clowning to the medically ill, patients at hospitals and residents at nursing homes. Now, in response to requests for home visits, Lev Leytzan has launched a new program, "Lev Leytzan Medical Clowns on Rounds."

After more than ten years of working primarily in medical facilities, the organization is expanding its services to bring therapeutic medical clowning into the private homes of homebound elderly and children recently discharged from the hospital.

"The concept is to give back to our local community," explains Dr. Goldberg. "Clowns on Rounds will allow us to extend our services outside of medical facilities to recuperating children after their hospital discharge and homebound elderly throughout the year. Old-fashioned home visits will allow us to bring magical moments to those who are isolated and lonely or challenged with their recovery."

Clowns on Rounds is being inaugurated in partnership with Bikur Cholim of Far Rockaway and the Five Towns. In addition to their regularly scheduled hospital rounds, clowns are now available for home visits in the Five Towns, Far Rockaway and Brooklyn.

"We are hoping to build long-term relationships with people who don't have visitors or family. Many don't," Dr. Goldberg points out.

Clowns on Rounds is based on Lev Leytzan's highly successful ElderHearts™ program, launched in 2010. As the 2013 recipient of a grant by the Alzheimer's Foundation of America, ElderHearts™ reaches out to patients with Alzheimer's disease and other related dementias through interactive experiences that help patients reconnect with the world while alleviating their

loneliness and isolation. The program operates in collaboration with Pediatric Hospice Program and Metropolitan Jewish Hospice. Referrals are also received from qualified professionals, such as pediatricians and gerontologists. In this beginning phase of Clowns on Rounds, ten people are being visited on a weekly basis.

Who are these wonderful clowns? Lev Leytzan's children's program is comprised of clown volunteers who undergo

professional clowns with vast backgrounds in performing arts. These professional clowns also are further trained in Lev Leytzan's techniques for working with patients who have been diagnosed with Alzheimer's and dementia. Another aspect of the program enlists "clown doctors," who are paid professional clowns working in medical facilities.

Dr. Goldberg recalls a visit to a small child with a life-threatening illness.

lying across the boy's lap, seemingly taking a brief rest. I was 'awoken' when my partner found exactly what he was looking for beneath the father's shoe. Voila, a prized piece of award winning lint that was needed for display at a museum by day's end! And so the visit began. No longer was the spirit of the room focusing on the youngster's life-threatening illness and no longer was everyone sitting in awkward silence."

A second story recounted by Dr. Goldberg brings out the "magical moments" of clowning in the ElderHearts™ program. "Shuli's grandfather sat in the corner, holding a newspaper in his hands but staring into space, possibly sleeping or day-dreaming. It was becoming harder to engage him in conversation as the dementia had progressed rapidly over the past several months. Shuli took a chance and requested a Lev Leytzan ElderHearts™ visit, curious if a medical clown might have some impact on his grandfather's interaction. The medical clowns entered the room, offering Mr. R. a shoeshine and polish. He faintly nodded. The two clowns noticed that Mr. R. was holding the paper open to the travel section of the newspaper. They, too, were uncertain of what he was thinking or processing and began a slow banter about their travel experiences. Starting to notice Mr. R. becoming interested, they included him in the conversation. For a brief while, Shuli sat in the corner listening to his grandfather share favorite travel experiences with the special guests. His grandfather was animated and quite silly, even asking one of the male clowns if he'd like to accompany him on an upcoming cruise that he was planning. Situations like this are not uncommon and are magical moments of engagement."

"There are many worthy and genuine organizations that are motivated by *chesed*, but none can compare in terms of the professional attributes, training and experience our members possess when it comes to using therapeutic clowning approaches," says Mr. Noah Gordon, director of development for Lev Leytzan.

While the new home-based program is being sponsored by Brach's, the Good People Fund, Metropolitan Jewish Health System, White Plains Linen and Ossie's Fish, the no-charge foundation of the program requires ongoing private sponsorships to ensure its ongoing viability. For sponsorship or more information, contact Dr. Goldberg at 516.612.3264 or visit <http://www.levleytzan.org>.



eight months of rigorous training and then eight months of supervised visits.

"Our program trains individuals who are interested in creative arts and healing," Dr. Goldberg observes.

The ElderHearts™ program enlists pro-

"It seemed like they were sitting vigil for Moishe when we arrived to their small apartment," he says. "The children were sitting solemnly on the couch. The father was saying *Tehillim*, while the mother was silently straightening up the kitchen. Our initial thoughts were communicated in our eyes and body language: 'Run! They aren't up to a visit this afternoon!' Then, my partner, the medical clown, became engaged and started making strange noises, searching for some unknown object between the children seated on the couch. Wiggling my clown-seated to fit between the children, hoping to find a comfort spot, led to the realization that my clown was most comfortable

