



THE JOY BUSINESS

They weren't performers by trade, but for one day each year, they transformed into something unforgettable.

They were the clowns. The beloved, bumbling, joy-bringing faces of Festival of Trees.

Every November, long before the floats rolled and the balloons took flight, a different kind of magic began to gather downtown. Business leaders, bankers, teachers, parents, the people you'd see in suits or meetings any other day, were suddenly unrecognizable. Red noses. Rainbow wigs. Painted smiles.

The Quad-City Times chronicled them faithfully — “the corps clowns,” “the business clowns,” “the army of volunteers.” Reporters followed their early-morning routines, their post-parade laughs, their pure-hearted reason for doing it. For one day, they weren't titles or positions; they were joy in motion.

They didn't ride on floats. They walked.

Rain or shine, cold or oddly warm, they paraded through the streets of Davenport arm in arm, waving, dancing and hugging their way down Third Street. They stopped to greet kids on curbs, to shake hands with strangers, to wink at the crowd like Santa's advance guard.

Each clown's walk was a message: Together, we've made it through another year. Let's celebrate what we've built — our creativity, our resilience, our shared story — through Festival of Trees.

That morning, they weren't just leading a parade; they were personally ushering the Quad Cities into the holiday season. They embodied the festival's truest promise: that laughter, humility and community belong to everyone.

And that was the genius of it. These weren't hired entertainers; they were servant leaders in greasepaint. The men and women who built the businesses, nonprofits and civic projects of this region were the same ones clowning side-by-side — living proof that leadership and levity can share the same space.

The late Bill Wundram called it “the joy business.” And it was. The clowns became a symbol of the festival's spirit — humble, human and wildly generous.



That spirit still lives on.

Festival of Trees continues to run on volunteer power — thousands of hours donated by people who believe in bringing joy to others. And through The Cultural Trust, that same energy now has permanence. It exists to ensure that the art, the creativity and the kindness those clowns embodied keep shaping the region's story, long after the makeup fades.

Because culture doesn't just happen in galleries or theaters.

Sometimes, it walks — rain or shine, in oversized shoes — right down the middle of Third Street.

Because culture matters here — and it always will.

