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4-25-08

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Improv Training Outside the Second City Limits

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When one thinks of Improv, the first city that comes to mind is Chicago, ironically called The Second City. But improvisational acting and performing has become a mainstream school of thought and training that applies to children and adults alike. Improv is a tool that can help in day-to-day interactions, greatly improve the general education experience for children and enhance the communication skills of working professionals in many fields.

There is a plethora of improv options in Chicago for both viewing and training purposes but the desire for these popular and effective skills has spilled outside of the city proper to include suburban locations that offer classes and other improv related services.

At a time when art programs are being cut from public education due to ever increasing budget problems, finding art related education outside of the school has become an excellent way for parents to dramatically help their kids.

There are three suburban organizations that provide improv training specially designed for children as well as adults.

The Noble Fool Performing Arts Academy, located in St. Charles, is a non-profit organization featuring classes for children, adults and business professionals. Their open enrollment policy allows entry regardless of previous experience and their programs are taught by experienced theatre professionals.

They offer Improv Workshops, held at Baker Community Center in St. Charles, for ages 8 to 18 that allow class members to use their imaginations and teamwork skills as they explore characters and situations. Students develop concentration, observation and focus. They concentrate on creating strong characters in detailed situations. Students develop and perform original sketch comedies while developing their own style and learning comic timing. Participants will also have the opportunity to try out stand-up comedy in a safe and supportive environment.

Along with Improv, the Noble Fool Performing Arts Academy offers a wide range of performance related classes and workshops for all ages, as well as internship opportunities for high school and college students who are pursuing careers in the performing arts. For more information call 630/364-0550 or visit online at www.noblefool.org.

The Improv Playhouse, located in Libertyville, is an entertainment organization and full-service acting school specializing in corporate and private entertainment, business training and comprehensive acting classes for adults and youth. They started in 2000 and have satellite facilities in Highland

Park and Round Lake Beach.

The Improv Playhouse Training Center offers youth classes including Improv & Theatre Games, Improv Performance Ensembles and Imagine Action as well as Musical Theatre Training and Performance and Dramatic Training and Performance.

Improv Playhouse performing arts training identifies, nurtures and enhances natural communication ability and talent while building the confidence needed to apply these skills to performance and real life situations. Their youth programs include training for children from kindergarten to high school, with beginning, intermediate and advanced levels. They stress the importance of personal integrity by developing personal expression using the best of one's values and character.

Adult classes include Beginning, Intermediate and Advanced Acting, Improv For Actors, The Actors Workout, Audition Workshop, Voice Over, Stage Combat, Experimental Playwriting and Public Speaking. For more information call 847/968-4529 or visit online at www.improvplayhouse.com.

New Choice Improv, in Palatine, offers classes through the Harper College Continuing Education Program. The classes are led by Deb Quentel and Tracy Boland who believe that each person has a "nougatty center of delicious creativity" that can be accessed through improv. By applying improvisational principles and diligently practicing these principles through improv exercises and games, confidence and skill can be achieved that will facilitate creativity.

Classes offered include The Power of Improvisation, focusing on the fundamentals that make an enjoyable scene; More Power of Improvisation, delving into character and location development; and New Choice Performance Workshop, emphasizing ensemble development, stage presence techniques and the technical and emotional aspects of engaging an audience. This final class will prepare students for two improv shows held during the semester for the at-large Harper community. For more information visit on-line at www.newchoiceimprov.com.

Regardless of the location of the training, there are broad sweeping benefits in pursuing improv training for youth and adults. It creates a larger base of patrons of the arts, because when you participate in something you appreciate it more and include it in your daily life. It promotes better communication skills in general. It facilitates happier people, as they have acquired tools that allow them readily and regularly to access humor. It facilitates better social skills. It provides job opportunities for theatrical and artistic professionals. And perhaps most importantly it promotes ACTIVE participation in life rather than PASSIVE spectating, thereby producing individuals who are more engaged and involved on every level.