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Friday Fun: A Laugh a Day Keeps the Blues Away

If you could use a good laugh amid the budding pandemic, financial crisis, terrorism and torture news, [consider the example of tiny Manzanita, Ore.](#), a town of 700 on the Pacific coast.

Four weeks ago, a handful of residents began gathering at 12:05 p.m. every Thursday in the town square for a group laugh-in, says Michael Burkett, [editor of the North Coast Citizen](#), the local biweekly newspaper. The bookstore owner dons a mullet wig, a local artist carries a stuffed flamingo on his shoulder, another resident wears a rainbow-hued clown wig – just for laughs. Resident Craig Mackie arrived yesterday sporting a handmade plastic-dinner-plate chapeau worthy of the Mad Hatter. For three minutes, the sound of laughter echoes through the town.



Laughing in Manzanita, Ore. CREDIT: Michael Burkett, The North Coast Citizen, Manzanita, Oregon

“Laughter has always been healing for me,” says Patty Phillips, a co-founder of the event with fellow resident Andy Norris, a gardener, writer and filmmaker. Mr. Norris says the idea sprang partly from the joy he experiences listening to his own young daughter laugh. Summoning up a laugh isn’t without cost; resident Maia Holliday says yesterday’s exercise made her cheeks feel strained. But the good feeling she got was worth it, she says.

During the darkest days of the last recession, the minister at my church skipped the usual greet-your-neighbor handshaking session in favor of a mass laughing exercise. She asked us all to stand up, stretch, take a deep breath and laugh out loud for 20 seconds. I thought she was nuts and my laughter felt strained at first. But soon, the sight and sounds of several hundred other people around me laughing sparked genuine levity. Halfway through the exercise, I was enjoying a good belly laugh.

The health benefits of laughter have been the subject of scholarly studies, [which show it can have effects similar to exercise](#). [Some people](#) enroll in “[laughing yoga](#)” classes. One [Chinese university set up a laughing club](#). And laughter as a form of meditation is practiced regularly by some.

Readers, have you found good ways to insert laughter into your day?