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3 Faces of Erik Sgariglia

IWU freshman juggles roles as a clown . . . nursing student . . . baseball player . . .

New Lenox
area

Editor's Note: New Lenox resident Erik Sgariglia--a sometime clown, a fulltime nursing student at Illinois Wesleyan University, and onetime high school baseball player--is profiled in this story. The Sgariglia family resides at 1410 Grandview Dr., New Lenox, Ill.

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--Dressed in blue jeans, a baseball cap, and a plaid oxford shirt, Erik Sgariglia looks like a *typical* clean-cut college student.

He isn't--*typical*.

You see, Sgariglia, an Illinois Wesleyan University freshman from New Lenox, Ill., is a nursing student, a baseball player--and, for the last two summers, he's earned some extra cash playing Rosco, the clown.

Sgariglia got into clowning when Fran Myles, the mother of his friend and clown partner, Anne Marie, got him into the act. Fran had more jobs than she could handle, so she asked Sgariglia if he wanted to clown around since he had two key prerequisites for the job--an artistic flair and a friendly way with people.

"It's not a typical job," Sgariglia deadpanned. "No one can tell who you are. You can get away from everything else. I've never had a bad [clowning] job."

After Fran Myles helped him pull together a clown outfit--and after hours of face-painting practice on the Myles family--Sgariglia spent his first official day on the job as a clown wearing his funny nose at a Mt. Prospect, Ill., festival attended by about 12,000 people. Since then, he's worked about 25 gigs at company parties, private parties, promotions, festivals, and birthdays.

"I've always done art," Sgariglia said. "But it's different when you do face painting for eight hours. You learn some tricks"--and some child psychology.

"Anything that's too hard to paint, you just say, 'We don't do those on Saturdays, or whatever day it is, and kids don't seem to argue. That makes sense to them.

"You have to have a sense of humor with kids and yourself," Sgariglia added. "Half the time, you're laughing at what you're doing."

Since his Mt. Prospect initiation, Sgariglia has honed other important clown skills,

(more)

IWU Nursing Student-Clown-Baseball Player/2

like balloon tying, and he has developed *the look* for his clown alter-ego, Rosco.

"I chose different things and tried different things," he said. "You have to like how you look. It helps you relax and act the part."

Sgariglia tried on Fran Myles' costumes and looked through books and circus programs to see what he liked in a clown.

"You can go with the big nose or a painted nose," Sgariglia explained. "You can be the hobo kind [of clown], have freckles, a smiling face or a frowning face. I always thought of clowns with big bow ties, so I have a bow tie."

Sgariglia's owes his clown name, Rosco, to a character from the old television series, "The Dukes of Hazzard," now in reruns on cable television's Family Channel.

Transforming himself into Rosco is a time-consuming process for Sgariglia. It involves up to an hour of applying makeup and selecting an outfit from a growing collection of clown costumes.

Sgariglia likes to change his appearance sometimes, but typically Rosco is suited up in baggy, red clown pants, suspenders, a vest, and a black derby accented with a flower. Instead of classic big clown shoes--which cost about \$100--Rosco sports a pair of blue suede shoes (with apologies to Elvis Presley). Rosco also has an ever-smiling face with a big red nose.

Clowning might be a hassle, Sgariglia says, but it's also lucrative. He earns \$50-\$100 an hour, though, he quickly points out, professional clowns can earn \$250 an hour or more.

When he tells people he's a clown, "they think I'm kidding," Sgariglia said. "They make fun of me, call me by my clown name, but they usually think it's a cool job."

Sgariglia also got mixed reactions when he told his high school baseball teammates that he was going to major in nursing in college.

"They would laugh and say I was doing it for the girls," Sgariglia said, referring to the stereotype of nursing as a female-only profession.

At IWU, Sgariglia has continued to play baseball. He's a pitcher, who started in one game, for the 6-2 Titans as of March 26. Sgariglia gave up four hits and four runs, including a home run.

However, Sgariglia put a lot of thought into selecting his college major.

"I wanted something either science or art based," he said, explaining what he was looking for in a college major. "Science seemed more career oriented."

Nursing fulfilled two other prerequisites important to Sgariglia.

"I like being around people," he explained, "but being in an office doesn't appeal to

(more)

IWU Nursing Student-Clown-Baseball Player/3

me."

Sgariglia is not sure he'll remain a nursing major, but at IWU he had more male company in the field than he might have at other schools. The IWU freshman nursing class has a 3-to-1 female-male student ratio. At some other schools he looked at the ratio was more in the 25-to-1 range.

Sgariglia said that while male friends may tease him for being a nursing student, he gets a different reaction from female friends.

"They're usually like, 'A male nurse, ooh, they make good money,'" he said.

If he sticks with nursing, Sgariglia thinks his clown experience will help him professionally.

"Clowning, like any job where you're around people, will help," he explained, since nursing is a people-oriented profession.

Clowning has taught Sgariglia something else--the importance of being prepared to cope with unforeseen circumstances--like the time he and Anne Marie Myles were stranded along Interstate 80 near Joliet when they ran out of gas, victims of a faulty gas gauge. They were dressed head-to-toe in their clown costumes and the nearest service station was three miles away. If they started to hoof it down the highway, they knew they would face the inevitable and embarrassing cat calls from passing motorists. But they were prepared. Anne Marie had a car phone--and they simply called her father for a helping hand.

IWU nursing majors take courses leading to the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree. The curriculum is based on Orem's Self-Care Deficit Theory, which sees health care as a collaborative process among nurse, patient, and other care providers. Students have clinical experiences through cooperative arrangements IWU has established with hospitals, home health agencies, child care centers, community health-care agencies, and others in central Illinois. IWU's liberal arts focus gives nursing students the chance to develop communications and interpersonal skills, as well as the critical thinking and decision-making skills required by the nursing profession.

IWU's School of Nursing was founded in 1959. It is approved by the Illinois Department of Registration and Education, which means students are eligible to take the registered nurse licensure exam upon graduation. The School of Nursing also is accredited by the National League for Nursing and is a member of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing.

IWU, founded in 1850, enrolls about 1,850 students in a College of Liberal Arts, College

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IWU Nursing Student-Clown-Baseball Player/4

of Fine Arts, and a four-year professional School of Nursing. A \$15 million athletics and recreation center opened in the fall of 1994; and a \$25 million science building opened in the fall of 1995. The Carnegie Commission for the Advancement of Teaching promoted Illinois Wesleyan to a "Baccalaureate I" institution in 1994, a classification that places it among 161 highly selective National Liberal Arts Colleges in the annual *U.S. News & World Report* rankings. *Barron's Profiles of American Colleges*, another respected college guide, rated IWU "highly competitive (+)" in its latest edition.