

Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor Presents

ON THE EDGE

Humor in the Hard Places



Annual Conference & Humor Academy

May 14-17, 2026
San Diego, CA

HEAL★ARIOUS™

— IMPROVING MENTAL FITNESS WITH HUMOR —

WE'RE EXPANDING— AND WE'RE LOOKING FOR FACILITATORS!

Turn humor into impact. Turn impact into income.

★ HEAL PEOPLE ★ INSPIRE CHANGE ★ CREATE CONNECTION

Are you passionate about the power of humor to heal,
connect, and transform lives?

HEAL ★ ARIOUS IS GROWING!

We're building a dynamic network of facilitators to deliver our
evidence-based, high-impact programming across the country.



WHO WE ARE

HEAL★ARIOUS is a pioneering organization revolutionizing how humor is used in:

- ✓ Mental Fitness for the Veteran Community
- ✓ Healthcare & Patient Care
- ✓ Leadership & Workplace Culture

Founded by Robin Phoenix Johnson—Certified Humor Professional, Veteran Fellow, Hoover Institution at Stanford University and 5-time combat veteran—HEAL★ARIOUS blends science, storytelling, and strategy to create transformative experiences.



WHO WE'RE LOOKING FOR

We're seeking engaging, credible, and purpose-driven individuals who:

- ✓ Have experience in facilitation, training, coaching, or speaking
- ✓ Believe in humor as a tool for healing and human connection
- ✓ Are comfortable leading interactive workshops or keynotes
- ✓ Bring a background in healthcare, mental health, education, leadership, or organizational development (preferred, not required)



WHAT YOU'LL DO

As a HEAL★ARIOUS Facilitator, you will:

- ✓ Deliver signature programs in your region and beyond
- ✓ Lead workshops in healthcare systems, universities, corporations, and military communities
- ✓ Help organizations build resilience, connection, and culture through humor



WHAT YOU'LL GAIN

- ✓ Access to proprietary curriculum and training
- ✓ A chance to be part of a mission-driven, growing brand
- ✓ Flexible, paid facilitation opportunities
- ✓ Ongoing professional development and community

WHY NOW? DEMAND FOR MENTAL FITNESS, BURNOUT PREVENTION, AND HUMAN-CENTERED LEADERSHIP IS EXPLODING.

Organizations aren't just looking for speakers—
they're looking for facilitators who can create real change.

THAT'S WHERE YOU COME IN.

★ ★ ★ LET'S TALK! ★ ★ ★

Interested in joining the HEAL★ARIOUS movement?



VISIT:
HEALARIOUS.ORG



BRING YOUR EXPERTISE.

★ BRING YOUR HUMANITY.



BRING YOUR HUMOR.

★ LET'S REVOLUTIONIZE HOW THE WORLD HEALS—TOGETHER. ★

Welcome To Sunny San Diego!



Dear AATH Community,

Welcome - and thank you for being part of this remarkable gathering.

AATH has always been about more than humor itself; it's about the people who choose to bring humor into spaces where it can make a real difference. This conference reflects that shared commitment across disciplines, roles, and experiences.

As you move through the days ahead, I encourage you to take full advantage of what this community offers. Engage in conversations that challenge your thinking, exchange ideas that spark new possibilities, and build connections that extend well beyond this conference.

What you do matters - and the way you bring humor into your work matters even more. Together, we continue to expand how humor is understood, applied, and valued in meaningful ways. Thank you for the energy, insight, and dedication you bring to AATH.

I look forward to all that will emerge from our time together.

Warmly,

Todd Hart

President, Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor

Conference Welcome

Dear Fellow Humor Professionals,

Welcome to the AATH Conference - we are delighted you are here.

However your journey brought you to this moment - whether smooth, challenging, or somewhere in between - you have arrived in exactly the right place, among colleagues who understand the importance of humor, especially when it is needed most.

This year's theme, ***On the Edge: Humor in the Hard Places***, invites us to explore how humor supports us in life's more difficult moments. Not as an escape, but as a meaningful tool for connection, resilience, perspective, and, at times, simply moving forward.

Over the next few days, you will hear from speakers, researchers, clinicians, educators, and performers who share a common understanding: that humor plays an important role in serious work. Together, we will explore how it helps us navigate challenges, build relationships, and bring light to moments that may not always feel easy.

We encourage you to engage fully - attend sessions, ask questions, share your experiences, and connect with colleagues from around the world. There is much to learn, and much to share.

Thank you for being part of this global community and for the work you do each day. It makes a meaningful difference.

We are honored to have you here.

Let us lean into the edge—together.

Fueled by humor,

Katy Maag CHP & Chip Lutz CHP
2026 Conference Chairs



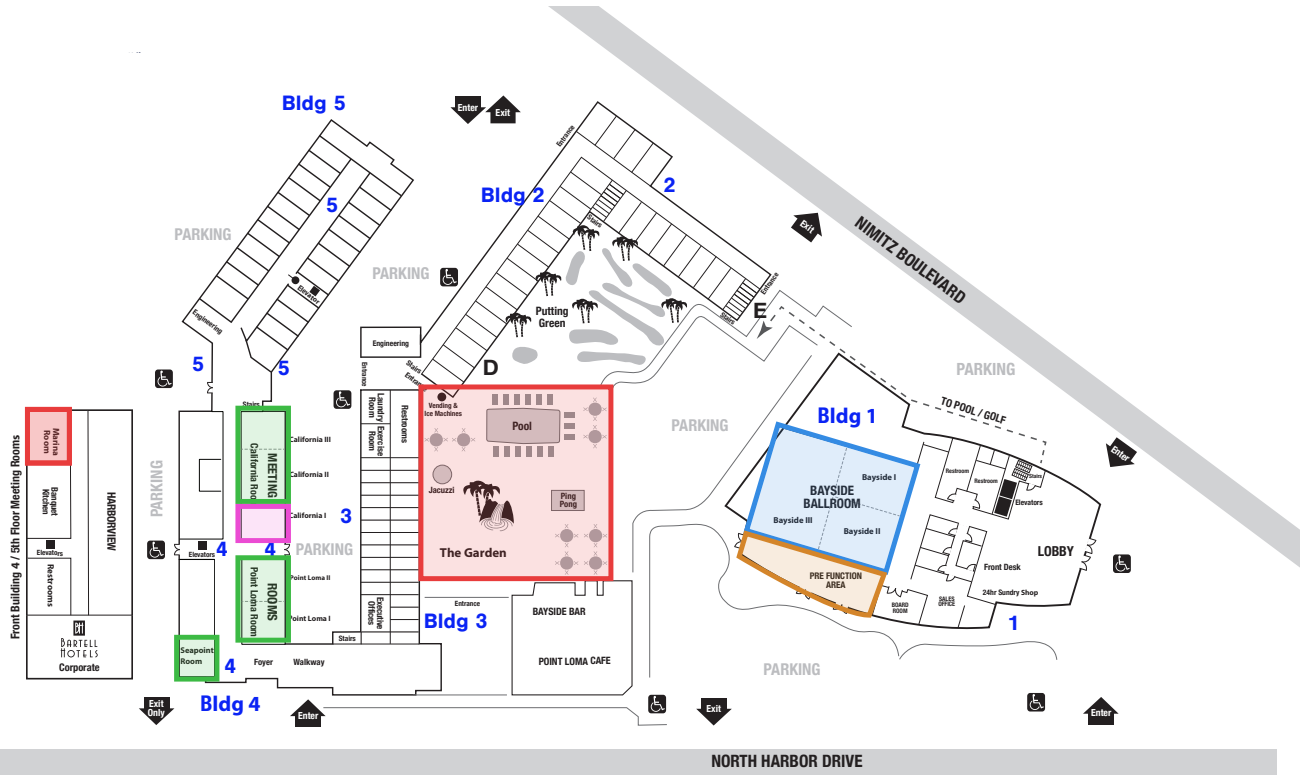
WELCOME

What is Therapeutic Humor?

Therapeutic humor is any intervention that promotes health and wellness by stimulating a playful discovery, expression or appreciation of the absurdity or incongruity of life's situations. This intervention may enhance health or be used as a complementary treatment of illness to facilitate healing or coping, whether physical, emotional, cognitive, social or spiritual

Floor Plan

DoubleTree by Hilton San Diego Bayside
4875 North Harbor Drive, San Diego, CA 92106
(619) 224-3621



HOTEL MAP

General Session: Bayside Ballroom

Breakout: Point Loma

Breakout: California II-III

Breakout: Seapoint

Humor Hideaway: California I

Welcome Reception: Bayside Pool & Patio

Lifetime Member Reception: Marina Room (5th floor)

Exhibit Showcase: Bayside Foyer

Meals: Bayside Ballroom

Exhibit Showcase Open Friday & Saturday

- The Humor Habit
- HumorMatters
- Illuminutty
- Jill Knox Peace Through Humor Fellowship
- LaughMD

AATH REGISTRATION DESK

Open daily at 7:30 am
Bayside Foyer

AATH BOOKSTORE

Friday & Saturday 7:30 am - 4:00 pm
Sunday 8:00 am - 10:30 am

Inclusivity Statement

The conference aims to create a warm and inclusive atmosphere where all attendees can connect and exchange diverse viewpoints and experiences. It's an opportunity for everyone to feel motivated and enlightened through the presentations and discussions. As you join in, we ask that you support our pledge to maintain a discrimination-free and prejudice-free environment. Speakers are encouraged to address their subjects with sensitivity and respect, ensuring that every voice is acknowledged and valued.

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Thanks, advertisers!

Supporting the work that makes the hard stuff lighter.

- **HEAL*ARIOUS**
- **Humor Camp**
- **HumorMatters**
- **Nurse FUNshine®**
- **The Top Line...LLC**

This conference wouldn't be possible without the creativity, dedication, and heart of our **Conference Planning Committee**. Thank you for bringing this experience to life and for all the work behind the scenes that makes it so meaningful. Katy Maag CHP [Chair], Chip Lutz CHP [Chair], Holly Anderson CHP, Roberta Gold CHP, Cathy Grippi CHP, Mary Laskin CHP, and Tabatha Mauldin CHP

Gratitude in abundance!

A big shoutout to our incredible sponsors - you help bring lightness to the moments that need it most. Your generosity makes this experience possible, and while it deserves a standing ovation, please accept our heartfelt thanks (and a well-earned round of applause).



Moments & Memories Sponsor

Conference Tote Bag Sponsor



healingheadbands.com



First Round's On Us Sponsor: Laskin Family Giving Fund

Humor Academy Peace Luncheon
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Lifetime Member Reception
sponsored by **Steve Sultanoff, PhD**

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The Jill Knox Peace Through Humor Fellowship
is made possible through generous grant support from the **Shelby Cullom Davis Charitable Fund**



5/13: Welcome Humor Academy

6:30 - 8:00 am	Humor Academy Check-In <i>Bayside Ballroom</i>
8:00 - 8:30 am	Welcome (In Rooms)
8:30 - 11:30 am	<p>Humor Academy Instruction:</p> <p>HA Level 1 Instruction w/ Tabatha Mauldin, CHP, Heather Walker, CHP, & Holly Anderson, CHP <i>Point Loma</i></p> <p>HA Level 2 Instruction w/ Dr. Michael K. Cundall Jr. CHP <i>California II-III</i></p> <p>HA Level 3 Instruction w/ Karyn Buxman CHP <i>Seapoint</i></p> <p>CHP Professional Growth w/ Mary Laskin, CHP <i>Bayside Ballroom</i></p>
12:00 - 1:00 pm	Knox Peace Luncheon: Humor, Peace, & Good Will - Something to Chew On <i>Bayside Ballroom</i>
1:30 - 2:30 pm	Certified Humor Professional Competency Framework: Standards for Ethical Practice of Applied & Therapeutic Humor w/ Heather Walker, CHP and Mary Jo Neil, CHP <i>Bayside Ballroom</i>
<i>All Conference Attendees Invited to Attend the Afternoon HA Program</i>	
2:45 - 4:00 pm	Humor Academy Project Presentations <i>Bayside Ballroom</i>
4:30 - 6:00 pm	Humor Academy Graduation <i>Bayside Ballroom</i>
6:00 - 7:30 pm	AATH Welcome Reception <i>Bayside Bar & Patio</i>
7:30 - 9:00 pm	Step Up & Stand Out Talent Show, hosted by Jim-Bob Williams CHP <i>Bayside Ballroom</i>
8:00 - 8:30 am	Conference Opening <i>Bayside Ballroom</i>
8:30 - 9:30 am	★ Keynote: Dead Serious: Finding Light in the Darkest Times with Dr. Melissa Mork <i>Bayside Ballroom</i>
9:45 - 10:45 am	<p>Breakout Sessions – Choose One:</p> <p>Start Strong with AATH: First-Year Roadmap to Connection, Growth, and Impact w/ Roberta Gold, CHP & Todd Hart, CHP <i>Point Loma</i></p> <p>Humorbreaking: Breaking the Ice with Humor and Play, Peacefully w/ Jaypee Oliva, Aravilla Tan, & Oshan Gunathilake <i>California II-III</i></p> <p>That's NOT All Folks: If You Have to Leave Them, Why Not Leave Them Laughing? with Dr. Don Baird <i>Seapoint</i></p>
11:00 am - 12:00 pm	<p>Breakout Sessions – Choose One:</p> <p>POWERPOINT®: The Musical! w/ Ronald Berk & Jocelyn Jones <i>Point Loma</i></p> <p>Good Humor Helps Us Thrive! w/ David Fessell <i>California II-III</i></p> <p>A Comic's Lived Experience with MS: Balancing a Sense of Humor While Trying to Balance at All w/ Shari Short <i>Seapoint</i></p>
12:00 - 12:30 pm	Humor Academy Poster Walk <i>Bayside Ballroom</i>
1:30 - 2:45 pm	Research Showcase <i>Bayside Ballroom</i>

5/14: Humor Academy Day

5/15: Conference Day 1

CONFERENCE AT-A-GLANCE

3:00 - 4:00 pm

Breakout Sessions – Choose One:***Understanding the Psychology Behind Failed Laughter and Repairing Ruptures*** w/ Dr. Patrick Harris | *Point Loma****Are You Serious? Humour and Conflict Resolution, Really?*** w/ Dr. Anita Dorczak | *California II-III****Gelotophobia: The Fear of Being Laughed At*** w/ Louis Franzini | *Seapoint*

4:15 - 5:15 pm

★ Keynote: Ed Talks: AATH Tasks in a Politically Charged Environmentw/ Dr. Ed Dunkelblau, Karyn Buxman, CHP, Paul Osincup, CHP, and Steve Sultanoff, PhD, CHP | *Bayside Ballroom*

7:30 - 9:00 pm

The Jollytologist® Sneak-Preview Screening | *Bayside Ballroom*

8:00 - 8:30 am

Grins & Gratitude: Honoring our Scholarship and Fellowship Recipients and Sponsors | *Bayside Ballroom*

8:30 - 9:30 am

★ Humor, Laughter, & Religion: Does God Laugh? w/ Dr. Michael K. Cundall, Jr., CHP | *Bayside Ballroom*

9:45 - 10:45 am

Breakout Sessions – Choose One:***Between Tears and Laughter: Humor As a Path Through Loss*** w/ Mary Jo Neil, CHP | *Point Loma****Humor As a Psychotherapeutic Tool in Collective and Cumulative Grief*** w/ Joseph M Hepburn | *California II-III****The Ballad of Uncle G: Laughing Through the Darkness*** w/ Greg Langford | *Seapoint*

11:00 - 12:00 pm

Breakout Sessions – Choose One:***Laughing in the Dark: Finding Light, Connection, and Courage Through Edge-of-Crisis Humor***w/ Karyn Buxman, CHP | *Point Loma****Laughter & Tears: Expressive Meditation*** w/ Pragito Dove | *California II-III****Playful Power: Using Humor to Build Trust and Inclusion – No Clown Nose Required***w/ Dr. Renee Cohn Jones | *Seapoint*

12:00 - 1:15 pm

Lunch & Board Elections

1:15 - 2:15 pm

★ Humor Intelligence: Engaging Communication for Serious Contexts with Andrew Tarvin | *Bayside Ballroom*

2:15 - 2:30 pm

Say Cheese! AATH Group Picture | *Bayside Ballroom*

2:45 - 3:45 pm

Breakout Sessions – Choose One:***Your Humor Intelligence Profile: A Personal Assessment Workshop*** w/ Andrew Tarvin | *Point Loma****A Journey Through Decades of Therapeutic Humor*** w/ Steve Sultanoff, PHD, CHP | *California II-III****Finding the Light in the Darkness of Chronic Pain*** w/ Mary Laskin, CHP | *Seapoint*

4:00 - 5:00 pm

Breakout Sessions – Choose One:***Peace Fellow Stories of Humor in Hard Places*** w/ Stephanie Knox Steiner PHD, Ajmal Ramyar, Oshan Gunathilake, Kaamela Barvin, Rolando Pelicot | *Point Loma****Bringing lightness into the heavy: The power of music and humor to transform hard situations***w/ Amy Standridge, CHP | *California II-III****Cancer: Balancing the Deadly Serious with Absurd Humor*** w/ CJ Grace | *Seapoint*

6:00 - 7:00 pm

AATH Lifetime Member Reception, By Invitation Only | *Marina Room*

6:30 - 11:00 pm

AATH Reception & Awards Banquet | *Bayside Ballroom*

8:00 - 9:00 am

Laughter Yoga/Morning Stretch | *Bayside Ballroom*

9:00 - 9:30 am

Smiles Before Goodbyes | *Bayside Ballroom*

9:30 - 10:30 am

★ Keynote: Humor, Incorporated: How Humor Healed My Life, Love, & Businessw/ Dr. Heidi Hanna, CHP | *Bayside Ballroom*

10:45 - 11:45 am

★ Wrap-Up Keynote: Keep Your EDGE w/ Sporty King, CHP | *Bayside Ballroom*

HA Schedule – All Levels

Attendance is required during all periods for all Academy students.

Wednesday, May 13: Welcome Humor Academy

6:30 - 8:00 PM | Humor Academy Check-In

📍 Bayside Ballroom

Thursday, May 14: Humor Academy Day

8:00 - 8:30 AM | Welcome (in rooms)

8:30 - 11:30 AM | Foundation of Humor: Theory Course with the Level I Leadership

Holly Anderson CHP, Tabatha Mauldin CHP, & Heather Walker CHP | 📍 Point Loma

Participants delve into humor theory while networking within our AATH community of professionals. Emphasizing humor theory and focused networking, this program fosters interactions and collaboration among Humor Academy colleagues, providing a platform for dialogue among those interested in the research and applications of humor/laughter.

8:30 - 11:30 AM | Level 2 Instruction | Humor Projects: Making Humor Come Alive

Michael K. Cundall Jr. CHP | 📍 California II-III

It's true! The power of applied and therapeutic humor can change the WORLD! During this course, participants will identify their humor passion, explore related research, and complete an individual Humor Project of their choice. These projects are presented to the AATH membership at the end of the course, allowing them to be shared and come alive within many communities.

8:30 - 11:30 AM | HA Level 3 Instruction | What's So Funny About Leadership?

Karyn Buxman CHP | 📍 Seapoint

Lead with Levity. Influence with intention. Discover how the strategic use of humor can elevate your leadership, boost your influence, and strengthen your relationships - both at work and beyond. In this year-long journey, you'll be part of a diverse group of emerging leaders from around the globe that explores the serious science behind humor and develops practical techniques to lead with authenticity, relatability, and joy. Yes, it's evidence-based. Yes, it's transformational. And yes... it's fun.

8:30 - 11:30 AM | CHP Academy | A Masterclass in Mirth and "Mary"ment

Mary Laskin CHP | 📍 Bayside Ballroom

Certified Humor Professionals gather to celebrate with members and reconnect. This session will deepen mutual understanding, explore our organization's history, and share experiences in applying therapeutic laughter. Participants share their expertise within the Academy and AATH, fostering camaraderie and inspiring laughter.

30-MINUTE BREAK

12:00 - 1:00 PM | Knox Peace Luncheon: Humor, Peace, & Good Will - Something to Chew On

Roberta Gold CHP & Stephanie Knox Steiner PhD | 📍 Bayside Ballroom

The Peace Luncheon is the perfect opportunity to enjoy each other's company. HA is a true Family of Friends, and what better way to come together than around the table - just like home.

30-MINUTE BREAK

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

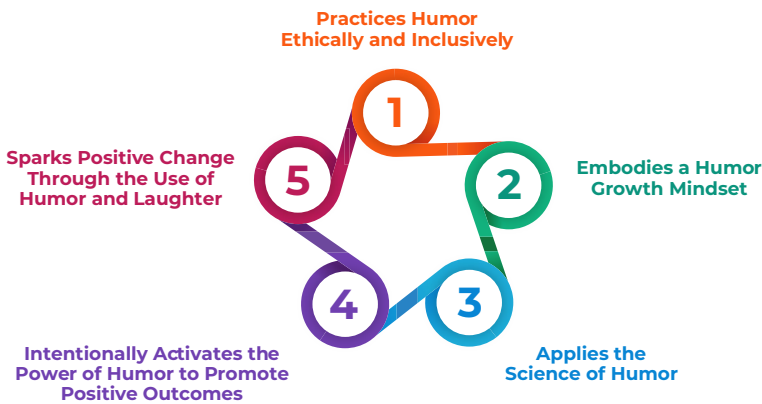
WEDNESDAY - THURSDAY

HA Schedule – All Levels

1:30 - 2:30 PM | Certified Humor Professional Competency Framework: Standards for Ethical Practice of Applied & Therapeutic Humor

Heather Walker CHP & Mary Jo Neil CHP | 📍 Bayside Ballroom

As part of the certification process for those enrolled and completing the Academy program, each participant is asked to verify an understanding of defined standards for ethical practice of applied and therapeutic humor. In this session, members of the development committee will highlight the importance of this framework to maintain certification.



Scan to explore your place within the framework. Use this tool as a checkpoint and a compass - celebrating progress, identifying opportunities for growth, and strengthening your commitment to intentional, ethical, and impactful humor.

15-MINUTE BREAK

2:45 - 4:00 PM | Humor Academy Project Presentations

📍 Bayside Ballroom

Looking to spark more humor at home, in the workplace, throughout your community, or even around the globe? Join us for a lively series of mini-presentations from our second-year Humor Academy students as they showcase their unique Humor Projects. Then, on Friday at noon, stop by the festive 'Poster Walk' to mingle, chat, and dive deeper into their inspiring work!

30-MINUTE BREAK

4:30 - 6:00 PM | Humor Academy Graduation



📍 Bayside Ballroom

'Sail Away with HA' as the 2026 Graduates drift forward and upwards after a fantastic year!

THURSDAY

HA Instructors

Karyn Buxman CHP [Director, Level III Instructor] bio on page 17
Michael Cundall Jr CHP [Level II Instructor] bio on page 18
Mary Laskin [CHP Coordinator] bio on page 22
Mary Jo Neil CHP [Speaker] bio on page 23



Holly Anderson CHP

[Level 1 Instructor] is an ordained minister who is the chaplain at her local hospital. She is a Certified Humor Professional and loves learning different ways to use humor effectively. Holly lives in a tiny house in a tiny town. She loves the beach and lives in North Dakota, so she watches Netflix and Prime Video - a lot of Netflix and Prime Video. decade.



Tabatha Mauldin CHP

[Level 1 Instructor] is a nurse, academic, and educator with a passion for humor! She is currently a Senior Instructor in the Scholarship in Nursing course at Western Governor's University. She has worked as a Phlebotomist, Medical Technologist, Pediatric Nurse in Pediatric med/surg and Pediatric Hematology/Oncology at Brenner Children's Hospital. She has worked as a nurse educator with

Practical Nursing programs, Associate Degree Nursing programs, Bachelors Nursing programs (traditional and accelerated), and Masters Nursing programs. She lives in Mount Airy, NC with her husband, Eric and they have three children (Kalei aged 22, Konnor aged 20, and Kameron aged 17), two dogs (Kookie and Lexie) and two cats (Salty and Musie Q).



Dr. Heather Walker CHP

[Level 1 Instructor] is an award-winning organizational psychologist who helps Fortune 500 leaders create cultures where top talent thrives. She specializes in strengthening onboarding, preventing burnout, and building trust across teams. Dr. Walker is the founder of Lead with Levity, a consulting firm known for blending psychology, leadership strategy, and real-world experience. Her approach centers on levity — not

as entertainment, but as a strategic force that helps people rise above pressure, stay connected under stress, and perform at their best. A sought-after speaker and host of the Lead with Levity Podcast, Heather's work inspires leaders to design workplaces where people stay, grow, and give their best.

Life got you down?

Sunny Side Up in San Diego—and beyond—is possible, one connection at a time.

Let NURSE FUNshine guide you toward health, happiness, and a brighter path forward.

Cheryl B. Fell R.N.
NURSE FUNshine® with Nurse Egg
Health and Happiness Consultant



NURSEFUNSHINE.COM



October 8-11, 2026 in Jamestown, New York - Home of the **National Comedy Center** and the **Lucy Desi Museum**.

July 15-18, 2027 in Vincennes, Indiana - Home of the **Red Skelton Museum of American Comedy**.

Humor Camp Explores Humor's Role in Helping People to Better Cope, Communicate and Connect.

In today's world where it seems that nothing (or everything) is funny... in a world where mental health challenges are abundantly accelerating and the social, emotional skills essential to making genuine, human connections are dangerously declining... ***Humor Camp serves to bring more fun, more play, more joy and more laughter into our personal and professional lives while also sharing WHY it is beneficial to do so.*** Join us... and earn CEU's, too!

We need Help - We need Hope - We need Humor - We need Humor Camp.

Special discounts if one of the following applies to you: **Member, AATH (Assoc. for Applied & Therapeutic Humor)**, **Member, ISHS (International Society for Humor Studies)**, **Member, LPS (Lighthearted Philosophers Society)**, **Member, CHSA (Critical Humor Studies Association)**, **Member, CCI (Caring Clowns International)**, **CLL (Certified Laughter Leader)**, **LYI (Laughter Yoga International)**, **First Responder (Police, Fire, EMT)**, **Military (Veteran, Active Duty or Reserve)**, **Student / Campus Faculty**

To learn more, visit HumorCamp.com or call **862-3LAUGHS (352-8447)**

Conference Schedule

2026 AATH Humor Conference | Thursday, May 15 – Friday, May 16

Thursday, May 14: Welcome to the 2026 AATH Annual Conference

6:00 - 7:30 PM | AATH Welcome Reception (*Bayside Bar & Patio*)

 **Bayside Bar & Patio**

Join us for light bites, good company, and one complimentary drink ticket (no pressure, but we trust you'll put it to excellent use). This is your space to reconnect, meet new faces, and ease into the conference.

7:30 - 9:00 PM | Step Up & Stand Out Talent Show

Hosted by the always-entertaining **Jim-Bob Williams, CHP!** |  **Bayside Ballroom**

The laughs don't stop when the reception winds down—the Talent Show is just getting started. Cheer on your colleagues as they share their creativity, courage, and comedic timing. No props required - just an open mind and a willingness to laugh where it matters most.




Friday, May 15

8:00 - 8:30 AM | Conference Opening

 **Bayside Ballroom**

A weekend of laughter, learning, and connections starts here. You're in the right place—where humor meets life's toughest moments. Grab your badge and your sense of humor. Let's get started.

8:30 AM | Dead Serious: Finding Light in the Darkest Times

Melissa Mork, CHP |  **Bayside Ballroom**

What do homicide detectives, child exploitation investigators, and widows have in common? Sometimes, the only thing left to do is laugh. Blending research, irreverent history, and field experiences, Dr. Melissa Mork will explore humor theory and application. Participants will leave with a deeper understanding of when dark humor helps, when it harms, and how to intentionally use humor to support resilience and wellness in high-stress work.


KEYNOTE

9:45 AM | Start Strong with AATH: First-Year Roadmap to Connection, Growth, and Impact

Roberta Gold CHP & Todd Hart CHP |  **Point Loma**

New to AATH or attending your first conference? This interactive, energizing session is designed to help you confidently navigate your first year as a member. Participants will explore the full range of AATH resources while building meaningful connections with fellow attendees. You'll leave with a personalized action plan to maximize your membership, deepen your involvement, and begin applying therapeutic humor in your work right away.


9:45 AM | Humorbreaking: Breaking the Ice with Humor and Play, Peacefully

Jaypee Oliva, Aravilla Tan, & Oshan Gunathilake |  **California II-III**

Ever been part of an icebreaker that felt more like ice freezing back up again? Let's fix that - peacefully! In this laughter-filled session, we'll turn ordinary icebreakers into "humorbreakers" that melt tension, spark connection, and warm even the chilliest space. Come ready to laugh, play, and discover how humor, when used mindfully, can build bridges, not punchlines. Warning: side effects may include smiling, bonding, and unexpected moments of peace.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

9:45 AM | That's NOT All Folks: If You Have to Leave Them, Why Not Leave Them Laughing?

Dr. Don Baird |  **Seapoint**

The topic of coming to terms with death may sound like a grim undertaking (if you'll pardon the expression). But it doesn't have to be. You've heard of Art Appreciation—now come explore Life Appreciation! Discover how to make every day count, using humor to reflect on life's most meaningful topic. Let's learn how to laugh all the way to the very end.

THURSDAY - FRIDAY

Conference Schedule

2026 AATH Humor Conference | Friday, May 15

15-MINUTE BREAK

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

11:00 AM | POWERPOINT®: The Musical!

Ronald Berk & Jocelyn Jones | 📍 Point Loma

Can you transform your PowerPoint presentation into a Broadway musical? Of course not, but you can try. Add pop music and videos to your content slides to create "Singing in the Brain." Multimedia embedded in the slides can also provide a vehicle for humor. Short clips of only a few seconds serve as "punchlines" to trigger laughter. You don't want to miss this opportunity to produce your own "jukebox PowerPoint."

11:00 AM | Good Humor Helps Us Thrive!

David Fessell | 📍 California II-III

Need more laughter, levity, and lightness in your day? Join us for "Good Humor Helps Us Thrive!" - an energizing, interactive session that will lift your mood and recharge your mind. Through improv games, laughter yoga, and playful cartoons, you'll discover how humor boosts joy, melts stress and builds stronger human connections. Expect insights, laughter, and a reminder that joy is possible - and seriously fun!

11:00 AM | A Comic's Lived Experience with MS: Balancing a Sense of Humor While Trying to Balance at All

Shari Short | 📍 Seapoint

Tapping into your darker sense of humor does not mean you are not coping, in fact it's quite the opposite. Come learn how this comedian and healthcare communications professional discovered how living with Multiple Sclerosis actually made her a better advocate and gave her even better material.

12:00 – 12:30 PM | Humor Academy Poster Walk

📍 Bayside Ballroom

Wander, Wonder, and giggle through a showcase of creative, heartfelt and humor-powered projects from our Humor Academy Level 2 students. See how humor makes a real-world impact - implementing humor that is therapeutic, building community and turning research into joyful action. Chat with the masterminds behind the posters, ask questions, and leave inspired.

LUNCH | 30-MINUTE BREAK

1:30 – 2:45 PM | Research Showcase

📍 Bayside Ballroom

Explore the latest insights at the intersection of humor and healing. This engaging session features research on therapeutic humor in nursing, comedy-based mental health interventions for cancer care, the teachability of humor through stand-up, and the role of humor in building connection in the classroom. Join us to discover how humor, used with intention and care, can strengthen resilience, communication, and well-being across diverse settings.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

3:00 PM | Understanding the Psychology Behind Failed Laughter and Repairing Ruptures

Dr. Patrick Harris | 📍 Point Loma

Ever cracked a joke that tanked spectacularly? This engaging, research-driven session unpacks the psychology of when humor goes wrong and why good intentions sometimes spark awkward silence and hurt feelings instead of laughter. Grounded in contemporary social, cognitive, and cultural psychology research, we'll explore how intention, emotion, and identity shape humor's success or failure. Join us to laugh, learn, and discover how to turn comedic misfires into opportunities for empathy, understanding, and authentic human connection.

FRIDAY

Conference Schedule

2026 AATH Humor Conference | Friday, May 15

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

3:00 PM | Are You Serious? Humour and Conflict Resolution, Really?

Dr. Anita Dorczak | 📍 California II-III

Have you ever faced conflict and been terrified of lawyers? This presentation will equip you with serious tools to deal with conflict with a dash of humour without losing face or any other body part. Dr. Anita is a lawyer from another dimension, a mother to a rebellious millennial, and a wife to a grumpy baby boomer. She is also an adoring follower of a bossy Yorkie. One of them makes her laugh daily.

3:00 PM | Gelotophobia: The Fear of Being Laughed At

Louis Franzini | 📍 Seapoint

Gelotophobia is the surprisingly common clinical fear of being laughed at. Happily, it rarely appears within AATH members! Gelotophobia is not the fear of tasting gelato. I have personally investigated that possibility in several countries. Gelato could actually be useful as a primary reward in well-designed behavior therapy programs. This session, of course, should itself be a tasteful and useful reward for all AATH attendees, seeking relatively new information for their diagnostic and therapeutic repertoire.

15-MINUTE BREAK

4:15 PM | Ed Talks: AATH Tasks in a Politically Charged Environment

Ed Dunkelblau, Karyn Buxman, CHP, Paul Osincup, CHP, Steve Sultanoff, PhD, CHP | 📍 Bayside Ballroom

This engaging panel explores the challenges of practicing therapeutic humor in today's politically charged environment. We will explore how humor professionals navigate political sensitivity, shifting social norms, and reactive communities while maintaining humor's healing power. Attendees will examine the evolving role of AATH, explore current controversies in therapeutic humor, and generate ideas for how humor practitioners can move forward effectively. Active audience participation is encouraged.

KEYNOTE

DINNER (ON YOUR OWN) | 2-HOUR BREAK

7:30 - 9:00 PM | The Jollytologist® Sneak Preview Screening

📍 Bayside Ballroom

Join us for a special sneak preview of *The Jollytologist*®, a heartfelt and humorous documentary exploring how laughter helps us navigate life's toughest moments. This engaging evening begins with opening remarks and the introduction of special guests, including Allen Klein (the original "Jollytologist"), followed by an exclusive early screening of the film.

Stay after for a live Q&A with the filmmakers and guests—bring your questions, your curiosity, and your sense of humor.

Open to conference attendees and the public, this event invites everyone to experience the power of humor to shift perspective, lighten the load, and remind us that even in difficult times, there is room for joy.

The Jollytologist



a film about
Allen Klein

directed by
Sky Bergman

FRIDAY

Conference Schedule

2026 AATH Humor Conference | Saturday, May 16

Saturday, May 16

8:00 – 8:30 AM | Grins & Gratitude: Honoring Our Scholarship and Fellowship Recipients

📍 Bayside Ballroom

Start your Saturday with celebration and appreciation as we recognize this year's scholarship and fellowship recipients - and the generous sponsors who help make it all possible. Join us in honoring their impact and commitment to advancing the field.

KEYNOTE

8:30 AM | Humor, Laughter, & Religion: Does God Laugh?

Michael K Cundall, Jr., CHP | 📍 Bayside Ballroom

This keynote explores the role of humor and laughter across major religious, cultural, and mythic traditions. What does divine laughter reveal about our gods - and ourselves? Drawing connections between humor and spirituality, this talk invites us to see laughter not as separate from the sacred, but as a powerful way to navigate life's mysteries and deepen our humanity.

15-MINUTE BREAK

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

9:45 AM | Between Tears and Laughter: Humor as a Path through Loss

Mary Jo Neil CHP | 📍 Point Loma

After my father died, I panicked seeing the animal crematorium sign behind the building where I'd sent his body. Dad always wanted pets - I thought he'd finally gotten his wish. That horror-then-laughter didn't dishonor him; it punctured unbearable tension. Humor and loss aren't opposites; they're dance partners. This session explores how laughter emerges organically from grief's absurdity and knowing how to honor it without diminishing pain. Learn to hold space where tears and laughter coexist.

9:45 AM | Humor as a Psychotherapeutic Tool in Collective and Cumulative Grief

Joseph M Hepburn | 📍 California II-III

Don't be shy - just say hi and experience uplifting vibes that can shift your perspective. This session explores how humor can support healing amid personal and collective loss, including climate challenges, family separation, and natural disasters. Through good-naturedness, wit, reflective insight, and even biblical humor, participants will discover how levity creates space for resilience, emotional processing, and self-care - offering a meaningful, therapeutic margin in difficult times.

9:45 AM | "The Ballad of Uncle G: Laughing Through the Darkness"

Greg Langford | 📍 Seapoint

What do you get when you mix a suicide survivor, a recovering alcoholic, and a stand-up comedian? Just one guy, Greg Langford. In this unforgettable session, Greg proves that laughter really can save lives. He'll make you laugh, think, and maybe even tear up as he shows how humor and honesty can turn life's darkest messes into something worth living -and laughing -through.

15-MINUTE BREAK

SATURDAY

Conference Schedule

2026 AATH Humor Conference | Saturday, May 16

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

11:00 AM | Laughing in the Dark: Finding Light, Connection, and Courage Through Edge-of-Crisis Humor

Karyn Buxman, RN, MSN, CHP, CSP, CPAE | 📍 Point Loma

Ever laughed at the wrong time - like a funeral, staff meeting, or staff funeral? You're not alone! Join Hall of Fame speaker and recovering nurse Karyn Buxman for a hilarious and heartfelt look at why dark humor shows up when life goes sideways. Discover how laughter can heal, connect, and keep you sane - especially when everything else feels a little insane.

11:00 AM | Laughter & Tears: Expressive Meditation

Pragito Dove M.A.,C.C.H. | 📍 California II-III

Re-ignite your passion for work and play. Unleash your creative fire. Tap your sense of humor at will. Open your heart to love, happiness and wealth. Revitalize your energy and well-being. Sound good? It gets even better. You'll experience the powerful and playful Laughter Meditation activating your magnetism to manifest your desires. Practice the Tears Meditation, deepening your capacity to transform grief into peace, love, and wisdom. De-stress, heal, and teach others how, too.

11:00 AM | Playful Power: Using Humor to Build Trust and Inclusion - No Clown Nose Required

Dr. Renee Cohn Jones | 📍 Seapoint

Ready to twist your thinking - and a few balloons? This energizing session blends humor, emotional insight, and hands-on fun to explore how laughter builds trust, connection, and inclusion at work, at school, or at home. No clown nose required - just a willingness to play, reflect, and leave with fresh ideas (and a balloon animal or two).

LUNCH & AATH BOARD ELECTIONS

1:15 PM | Humor Intelligence: Engaging Communication for Serious Contexts

Andrew Tarvin | 📍 Bayside Ballroom

In the age of AI, competence is commoditized. The differentiator is how you communicate. Humor Intelligence is the research-backed framework that makes professionals influential in even the most serious contexts. Learn the three-level system (Sense, Ability, Agency) and 8 core competencies used by NASA, FBI, and Fortune 500 communicators to ensure their expertise cuts through the noise. This session proves that the hardest places to use humor are exactly where it matters most.

KEYNOTE

2:15 - 2:30 PM | Say Cheese! AATH Group Photo

📍 Bayside Ballroom

Let's capture the moment! Join us for a smile-filled snapshot of the AATH community!



2:45 PM | Your Humor Intelligence Profile: A Personal Assessment Workshop

Andrew Tarvin | 📍 Point Loma

You've learned the framework - now make it personal. Building on the Humor Intelligence keynote, this hands-on workshop uses the Humor Intelligence Assessment to decode your unique profile across all 8 competencies. Through guided analysis and partner exercises, you'll discover which skills you already use naturally, where your biggest gaps are, and leave with a concrete development plan so you know exactly where to focus next.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

SATURDAY

Conference Schedule

2026 AATH Humor Conference | Saturday, May 16

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

2:45 PM | A Journey Through Decades of Therapeutic Humor

Steven Sultanoff, PhD, CHP | 📍 California II-III

Step inside the untold story of AATH and discover decades of insights, surprises, and maybe even a few “secrets.” This engaging session traces one presenter’s journey - from first fascination with therapeutic humor to developing a personal model and becoming part of the AATH community. Along the way, explore the blend of fact, fiction, and lived experience that has shaped both the field of humor and a meaningful professional path.

2:45 PM | FINDING THE LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS OF CHRONIC PAIN

Mary Laskin CHP | 📍 Seapoint

Are you living with chronic pain, but don’t want to let it take away the shining in your life? Join us and learn how to tickle your funny bone while kicking pain in the shins! Laughter may not seem like the best medicine when living with chronic pain, but it sure can help make the hard places a little easier to navigate.

15-MINUTE BREAK

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

4:00 PM | Peace Fellow Stories of Humor in Hard Places

Stephanie Knox Steiner PhD, Kaamela Barvin, Oshan M Gunathilake, Ajmal Ramyar, Rolando Pelicot Ruiz | 📍 Point Loma

What happens when peacebuilders bring laughter into the world’s hardest places? Moderated by Stephanie Knox Steiner, this session explores the unexpected role of humor in peacebuilding and the power of joy as a force for connection and healing. Four international fellows - shaped by conflict, loss, and resilience - share stories where humor became a lifeline, a bridge, and even a quiet act of defiance. Their experiences remind us that peace can begin with a smile that refuses to fade.

4:00 PM | Bringing Lightness Into the Heavy: The Power of Music and Humor to Transform Hard Situations

Amy Standridge CHP | 📍 California II-III

Bring your inner Cher, Prince, or even “Animal” to this lively, interactive session where music and humor take center stage. Whether you love music or think you can’t carry a tune, you’ll leave energized and inspired. Focused on the challenges of dementia caregiving, this session explores how humor can reframe difficult moments and how music can become a powerful, supportive companion when words - and advice - fall short.

4:00 PM | Cancer: Balancing the Deadly Serious with Absurd Humor

CJ Grace | 📍 Seapoint

Sometimes the silliest ideas spark the most meaningful conversations. In the world of cancer care, humor can open doors to topics that feel too difficult to face. This session explores how to use playful, even edgy humor with intention - helping others process tough emotions without crossing the line. Gain practical tools to lighten heavy moments, foster connection, and create space for healing through laughter.

BREAK

Go Forth, Rest, Return Fabulous

6:00 – 7:00 PM | AATH Lifetime Member Reception

Invitation Only | Sponsored by Steven Sultanoff, PhD, CHP | 📍 Marina Room

Join us for a special pre-banquet reception to connect with fellow members who have made a lasting commitment to AATH. Enjoy conversation, camaraderie, and a moment to celebrate your enduring impact on the community.

SATURDAY

Conference Schedule

2026 AATH Humor Conference | Saturday, May 16 – Sunday, May 17



6:30 – 11:00 PM | AATH Awards Banquet

Doors Open at 6:30 pm | Dinner at 7 pm | 📍 Bayside Ballroom

Cue the spotlight - it's time for AATH's biggest night! Join us for an awards-show-inspired evening filled with great food, meaningful recognition, and plenty of laughter as we celebrate the stars of our community. Expect a little glamour, a little mischief, and a whole lot of fun.

Dress Code: Bring your star power! Go full red carpet glam or show off your comedic side as a favorite funny character - either way, it's your moment to shine.

Sunday, May 17

8:00 – 9:00 AM | Laughter Yoga/Morning Stretch

📍 **Bayside Ballroom**

Wake up, stretch it out, and laugh it up! Join us for a feel-good blend of laughter yoga and gentle movement to boost your energy, lift your mood, and send you off with a smile on the final day.

9:00 – 9:30 AM | Smiles Before Goodbyes

📍 **Bayside Ballroom**

Before we part ways, let's gather for a final burst of connection, conversation, and shared joy. Join us to swap stories, celebrate new friendships, and enjoy a few last laughs together. It's the perfect way to wrap up the weekend and carry a little extra lightness with you on the journey home.

9:30 – 10:30 AM | Humor, Incorporated: How Humor Healed My Life, Love, & Business

Heidi Hanna, PhD, CHP | 📍 Bayside Ballroom

In this deeply personal and science-backed keynote, Heidi (aka Dr. Handa, LOL) reveals how humor became more than a coping mechanism - it became a performance tool, relationship reset, and leadership advantage. Blending neuroscience, sports psychology, and real-life stories (including golf-giggle moments), she shows how humor calms stress, rebuilds connection, sparks creativity, strengthens leadership presence, and turns adversity into growth. This isn't about being funny. It's about incorporating healthy humor into a consistent daily practice.

KEYNOTE

15-MINUTE BREAK

10:45 – 11:45 AM | Keep Your EDGE

Sporty King, CHP | 📍 Bayside Ballroom

This interactive closing session celebrates the conference theme and encourages participants to stay confident and creative. Through storytelling and humor, attendees will be inspired to apply lessons learned and continue growing personally and professionally.

KEYNOTE

Save the Date: 2027 AATH Conference & Humor Academy

Not ready for it to end? Neither are we. Keep the momentum going and **join us next year in Minneapolis, April 1-4, 2027**. We'll be back with fresh ideas, meaningful conversations, and plenty of moments that remind us why humor matters - especially when the work is serious. Start making plans... we'll see you there!

Keynote Speakers

2026 AATH Humor Conference



Dr. Melissa Mork CHP is Associate Professor of Forensic Psychology and Criminal Justice at Walden University. She teaches PhD courses in Law Enforcement Psychology, Criminal Behavior, Psychopathology, Research Methods, and Writing 900 Pages No One Asked For. She also serves on the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and chairs dissertation committees. Outside the university, Melissa works with groups impacted by mass shootings, providing critical incident stress debriefing, and offers grief/trauma triage for survivors, families, and communities. In her spare time, Dr. Mork enjoys SCUBA diving, throwing ugly pottery, and laughing at things that would concern most ethics boards.

★ **Fri, May 15 • 8:30 am | Dead Serious: Finding Light in the Darkest Times**



Dr. Ed Dunkelblau is a globally recognized speaker and consultant specializing in Social Emotional Learning, Safe Schools programming, Emotional Intelligence, and Humor. With numerous publications, including the Social Emotional and Character Development quick reference and Handbook of Humor in Psychotherapy, he advises schools, districts, state boards of education, and corporations. Dr. Dunkelblau teaches at Rutgers University and has been featured in prominent media outlets like the New York Times, Chicago Tribune, USA Today, NPR, and CNN. He has received prestigious awards, including the Lifetime Achievement Award for Applied Humor from AATH.

★ **Fri, May 15 • 4:15 pm | Ed Talks: AATH Tasks in a Politically Charged Environment**



Karyn Buxman, RN, MSN, CSP, CPAE, CHP is a Hall of Fame speaker, TEDx presenter, and neurohumorist - an expert who lives at the intersection of humor and the brain. A pioneer in the science of applied and therapeutic humor, Karyn teaches coaches and leaders how to leverage laughter as a powerful business strategy. A former AATH president, she's also a Lifetime Achievement Award honoree. Through her signature program, *The Missing Piece: Strategic Humor for Coaches, Leaders & Folks Who Listen for a Living*, she helps professionals attract clients, build trust, boost resilience—and their bottom line! Author of nine books and recognized globally by organizations from the Mayo Clinic to the Million Dollar Round Table, Karyn proves that humor isn't just good medicine - it's serious business.

★ **Fri, May 15 • 4:15 pm | Ed Talks: AATH Tasks in a Politically Charged Environment**

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Keynote Speakers

2026 AATH Humor Conference



Paul Osincup CHP is a keynote speaker, corporate trainer, comedian, and author of the best-selling book *The Humor Habit*. As a Humor Strategist, he helps organizations create happier, healthier, and more connected workplaces. Paul's global mission for workplace happiness has led him to work with hundreds of organizations, including Google, Discover, the U.S. Air Force, and the Harvard Kennedy School of Leadership. An AATH Past President, Paul is a Certified Humor Professional and a Certified Stress Mastery Educator. He also creates content for *Happify*, an app delivering evidence-based solutions for emotional health and well-being. His TEDx Talk on *Humor in Leadership* has been viewed over half a million times, and his work has been featured in *The New York Times*, *Forbes*, and—most prestigiously—on his mom's refrigerator.

★ Fri, May 15 • 4:15 pm | Ed Talks: AATH Tasks in a Politically Charged Environment



Steven Sultanoff, PhD, CHP is a master psychologist specializing in health and well-being. With decades of experience as a clinical psychologist, professor, trainer, and professional speaker, he is internationally recognized as an expert in the health benefits of humor. Dr. Sultanoff has published numerous innovative articles on therapeutic humor and is frequently quoted in print and online publications (*Scientific American*, *Washington Post*, *Time*, *Forbes*, *Prevention*, and more). He appears on "What's Your Ailment," (Streaming) and has appeared on FOX, STARS, and PBS. Steve is an AATH past president and "Lifetime Achievement Award" recipient. His website (humormatters.com) provides a wealth of information on therapeutic and topical humor. His website www.myCEmatters.com presents articles, blogposts, and continuing education programs for mental health professionals on therapeutic humor and other psychological issues.

★ Fri, May 15 • 4:15 pm | Ed Talks: AATH Tasks in a Politically Charged Environment



Dr. Michael K. Cundall, Jr. CHP (Dr. Mike) is a professor, researcher, author, and speaker passionate about exploring humor's role in everyday life. His TEDx talk has garnered over 60,000 views, and he's the author of *The Humor Hack* and *Cases on Applied and Therapeutic Humor*, with four more books on the way. Dr. Mike's work focuses on how humor shapes society, boosts well-being, and strengthens resilience. He's delivered keynotes to the U.S. Army, trained healthcare professionals on humor in care settings, and guided business leaders on using humor to enhance creativity and engagement. Through his company, Mirth Management, he helps individuals and organizations embrace humor as a tool for happiness and success.

★ Fri, May 16 • 8:30 am | Humor, Laughter, & Religion: Does God Laugh?

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Keynote Speakers

2026 AATH Humor Conference



Andrew Tarvin is the world's first Humor Engineer, teaching professionals how to get better results while having more fun. Combining his background as a computer engineer at Procter & Gamble with his passion for comedy, Andrew has delivered more than 700 programs for organizations including Microsoft, IBM, NASA, and the United Nations. A best-selling author, he has been featured in *The Wall Street Journal*, *Inc.*, and *FastCompany*, and was named a 'Visionary Alumni' by the P&G Alumni Network. Andrew's talk on the skill of humor is one of the Top 50 Most Viewed TEDx talks on YouTube, with more than 15 million views (only half of which were from his mother). He loves chocolate and singing the Hokey Pokey with his 3-year-old daughter (because that's what it's all about).

★ Sat, May 16 • 1:15 pm | Humor Intelligence: Engaging Communication for Serious Contexts



Dr. Heidi Hanna CHP is the Chief Energy Officer of Synergy Brain Fitness, a company providing brain-based health and performance programs to individuals and organizations, a former instructor at Harvard Extension, and a Fellow and Advisory Board Member for the American Institute of Stress. She is a NY Times bestselling author who has written seven books, including *The Sharp Solution*, *Stressaholic*, *Recharge* and *What's So Funny About Stress?* Dr. Heidi has been featured at many global conferences including the Fortune Magazine Most Powerful Women in Business Summit, ESPN Leadership Summit and the Million Dollar Round Table. She also has several online courses with LinkedIn Learning translated into multiple languages, reaching more than a million students internationally. Her clients have included Google, Starbucks, Microsoft, Principal Insurance, Morgan Stanley, Ameriprise, and WD40 as well as the PGA Tour, and the National Football League. Dr. Heidi is also a Certified Humor Professional with the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor although she won't admit she's funny.

★ Sun, May 17 • 9:30 am | Humor, Incorporated: How Humor Healed My Life, Love, & Business



Sporty King CHP, a native New Yorker, began his 18-year career at *The Wall Street Journal* as a Messenger in 1975 and rose to Classified Advertising Sales Manager before retiring in Chicago. In 1994, he launched his second "Messenger" career as an Inspirational Speaker. Sporty empowers Military Service Members, families, and civilians to become better listeners - key to becoming better citizens, employees, and leaders. Through humor, poetry, and the power of words, he inspires confidence, self-worth, and teamwork, helping people see themselves as vital pieces of life's puzzle. The author of *STUFF Happens* and several books of poetry and affirmations, Sporty champions what he calls "The Top Line"—building inner strength to achieve boundless bottom-line success personally and professionally.

★ Sun, May 17 • 10:45 am | Keep Your EDGE

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Conference Speakers

2026 AATH Humor Conference



Dr. Don Baird is a psychologist, author, and speaker recognized for his work on humor and coping. He received the Lifetime Achievement Award from AATH and has led a memorial honoring friends of humor at its conferences for over a decade. He is the author of *Suffering Is Highly Overrated* and has contributed to *American Political Humor*

and *Seeing Mad*, and edited an AATH special issue on humor and death. Dr. Baird has presented widely at national and international conferences. For five years, he has taught virtual stress management classes for visually impaired Chicagoans, recently completing his 150th session. He holds advanced degrees from Northwestern University and The Chicago School and has taught graduate psychology courses for over a decade.



Kaamela Barvin is the first full-time staff member at Starfish Singapore, where she leads its transition from a volunteer-run initiative to a registered charity. After five years as a volunteer, she brings deep commitment to supporting out-of-school youth facing socioeconomic challenges. She now oversees partnerships, communications,

and fundraising. Her experience spans four Singapore nonprofits, giving her a broad perspective from program delivery to grant writing and donor engagement. Previously, she served as Partnerships and Programme Manager at EB Impact, focusing on youth and sustainability initiatives across ASEAN. Kaamela holds an Honors degree in English Literature from Nanyang Technological University. Her contributions to youth empowerment and civic engagement have been recognized through fellowships including YSEALI, the Jill Knox Peace Fellowship, and the ASEAN Rotary Fellowship.



Ron Berk, Ph.D. is Professor Emeritus, Biostatistics and Measurement, and former Assistant Dean for Teaching at Johns Hopkins University, and a Fellow in the Oxford Society of Scholars. He is the recipient of the 2025 AATH Lifetime Achievement Award. Ron became a professor because he could not do eye-high kicks as a Radio City Rockette. He retired 20.708 years ago to enter the Federal Witness Protection Program. He mentored numerous students, many of whom are

in prison or on probation with ankle bracelets. He has presented 400+ keynotes in 42 states, 15 countries, and 3 planets. He destroyed scores of trees and shrubbery by publishing 14 books (3 on humor), nearly 200 journal articles, and 300 blogs. His professional motto is: "Go for the Bronze!"

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Dr. Anita Dorczak (M.A., LL.B., Ph.D., CLP, PC, Cert. EM) is a

Canadian lawyer, mediator, parenting coordinator, and trainer, with over 30 years of experience in dispute resolution. She has provided workshops on conflict transformation and presented internationally at legal and non-legal conferences in Europe, Australia and

North and South America. She holds a Ph.D. in semiotics and the theatre from the University of Alberta, is fluent in 3 languages, and is insatiable in her search for avant-garde methods to settle conflicts.



Pragito Dove M.A., C.C.H. is a globally recognized Master Trainer in Meditation, #1 Amazon Bestselling Author, Hypnotherapist, and Keynote Speaker with over 25 years of experience in the Self-Development and Holistic Wellbeing Field. Pragito transformed her sadness and anxiety into joy and inner peace. Now she shares these secrets with

others. Pragito is founder of the Laughing Buddhas Community, has books published in six languages, and has provided meditation training to organizations including the UCSF Cancer Resource Center, NASA, and World Laughter Tour Inc. Pragito has also published seven guided meditation CDs and teaches highly acclaimed programs such as the Practitioner Certification Training in Meditation and The Laughter Meditation Training. She helps people heal body and mind, find their joy, and create a fulfilled life.



David Fessell is an international speaker, coach for doctors and leaders, and an author focused on humor, emotional intelligence, wellness, and resilience. His book, *16 Ways to Create Happiness Every Day* (2024), is available on Amazon. He serves as a Faculty Associate at the University of Michigan's Ross School of Business and is a retired

Conference Speakers

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professor of radiology from the University of Michigan. He is also a graduate of the Second City Improv Conservatory and a Certified Mindfulness Meditation Teacher. His work has been featured in Harvard Business Review, JAMA, and Psychology Today. Learn more at DavidFessell.com or on his LinkedIn profile.



Louis Franzini earned a B.S. in psychology and a Ph.D. in clinical psychology at the University of Pittsburgh, after an M.S. degree in preclinical psychology at the University of Toledo. He then completed a postdoctoral fellowship in behavior modification at Stony Brook University, NY. He joined the Department of

Psychology at San Diego State University. Upon retiring he pursued writing and the practice of psychology, licensed in CA and FL. He has performed stand-up comedy in a variety of venues.



Roberta Gold CHP is an inspirational speaker, author, and Attitude Adjustment Coach who founded *Laughter for the Health* of It to promote positive mindsets through humor. She currently serves as Past President of the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor (AATH). Roberta is the #1 bestselling author of *Laughter Rocks!*, *Laughter Rocks! 2.0*,

and *The Family That Laughs Together*, and has contributed to over a dozen other books. Her weekly e-newsletter, *Laughter Rocks!*, shares practical tools for keeping your cool and is read worldwide. Roberta develops laughter-based programs for parents, educators, and survivors of domestic abuse. She also facilitates *Parent Power Happy Hour* and *The Sanity Savers*, a six-week group designed to help people develop a more positive attitude through humor and connection.



CJ Grace Ex-BBC journalist CJ Grace is a 2-time breast cancer survivor who is glad to announce, "I'm not dead yet!" Her love of Monty Python taught her to see absurd humor in all aspects of life. She is the author of two self-help books, "My Wild Ride: How to Thrive After Breast Cancer and Infidelity" and "Adulterer's Wife: How to Thrive Whether You Stay or

Not." Comedy is a vital part of her writing, used to make difficult

subjects more palatable. A Brit who has lived and worked on three continents, CJ is now USA-based and since 2022 has been a live TV host for the Thriving Women Network. Fun fact: CJ loves to throw pink bras as part of her breast cancer prevention advocacy work.



Oshan M. Gunathilake is a peace education and transdisciplinary social development practitioner from Sri Lanka, exploring how humor, play, and ethics-based learning foster resilience and belonging in divided communities. With experience across Asia-Pacific and Central America, his work bridges Global Citizenship Education (GCED), Education

for Sustainable Development (ESD), and alternative learning for peace and reconciliation. He currently works with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations in Sri Lanka, focusing on education for circular development and regenerative leadership. A Salzburg Global and Peace Through Humor Fellow, his current research and practice explore how values-based and ethics-driven transformative learning can advance embodied peace, healing, and belonging in alternative and affinity spaces.



Patrick Harris, PhD, LPC is a psychotherapist, educator, and advocate for the healing power of humor. He holds a bachelor's degree in Psychology and Religious Studies, a master's in Counseling, and a Ph.D. in Mind-Body Medicine. Dr. Harris serves as President-Elect of the Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor and maintains

a clinical private practice working with individuals suffering from anxiety, cultural identity issues, disordered sleep, and more. He also teaches as an Adjunct Professor of Counseling at St. Edward's University and Lecturer in Psychology at Texas State University, where his work bridges science, compassion, and laughter to promote mental and emotional well-being.

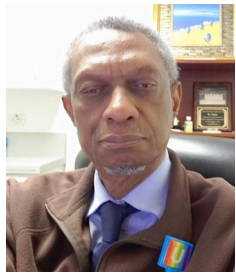


Todd Hart CHP currently serves as president of the Association of Applied and Therapeutic Humor. He earned his Certified Humor Professional (CHP) in 2021 and graduated from Humor Academy in Phoenix in 2022. A trained improviser, mediator, theatrical clown, and laughter yoga leader, he also

Conference Speakers

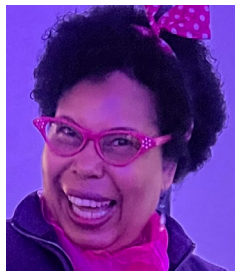
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performs stand-up comedy. Todd co-leads free community improv workshops in La Veta, Colorado, and works as a K-12 substitute teacher. Originally from Chicago, he grew up in Denver and spent nearly 35 years in Austin before returning to Colorado. He is currently in his first year of a BSN (RN) program at Colorado State University–Pueblo. His Klingon name is T’Odd.



Joseph M Hepburn studied Social Ethics at Drew University, earning an MPhil degree, and went on to serve in ministry as a Methodist minister in the Caribbean. Following his retirement from parish ministry, he continued his calling in healthcare chaplaincy, serving for 10 years at UCLA Medical Center in Los Angeles. In 2022, he completed a Doctor

of Theology (DTh) degree in Clinical Pastoral Psychotherapy. He currently serves as a chaplain at Kaiser Permanente Los Angeles Medical Center, where he has worked for the past three years. Joseph is a devoted father of two and grandfather of three. In his personal time, he enjoys astronomy.



Jocelyn Jones is taking time to enjoy the view after a career in the transportation industry as an urban planner and a trainer. She spent the last 20 years at the U.S. Department of Transportation looking for her car in a parking garage and teaching workshops at truck stops along the New Jersey Turnpike. Participants requested topics

such as “Planes, Trains, and Automobiles.” These PowerPoint presentations enabled Jocelyn to combine her tech skills with very little preparation to produce “Death by PowerPoint,” which was “good enough for government work.” By chance, she has an M.S. in Urban Planning from the University of Michigan and a B.S. in Business from Carnegie-Mellon University.



Stephanie Knox Steiner, PhD is Assistant Professor and Peace Education Program Coordinator in the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies at the University for Peace in Costa Rica. She earned her doctorate in the Community, Liberation, Indigenous and Ecopsychologies specialization at Pacifica Graduate Institute. She

has developed peace and nonviolence education programs for organizations such as Teachers Without Borders and the Metta Center for Nonviolence. Stephanie’s mother, Jill Knox, is a past president of AATH and Stephanie is proud to continue her mom’s legacy through supporting the Jill Knox Humor for Peace Fellowship program, which brings peace studies professionals into the Humor Academy to foster the connections and synergies between humor and peace.



Greg Langford is a comedian, author, and suicide prevention speaker whose raw honesty and humor turn painful truths into life-saving conversations. After surviving mental illness, addiction, and multiple family suicides, Greg found redemption through faith, laughter, and purpose. A retired banker with 43 years in the industry, he now travels

the country sharing his story of resilience in *The Ballad of Uncle G* and through his motivational talks. His blend of comedy and candor helps audiences confront stigma, embrace vulnerability, and find hope in the darkest chapters. Greg’s message isn’t just inspirational - it’s a wake-up call to live, love, and lead with compassion.



Mary Laskin CHP recently retired after practicing nursing for 41 years. She held a variety of positions within the field, but her longest tenure was to work as a RN Case Manager in a Chronic Pain Management Program at Kaiser Permanente. She was scolded in nursing school for laughing too much, but that did not stop her from wanting

to learn more. No matter where she practiced nursing, she has been fascinated in the use of Therapeutic Humor to promote a better quality of life in living with chronic illnesses. Mary became a Certified Laughter Leader in 2006 and a CHP in 2019. She currently serves in the AATH Humor Academy Leadership Team as the Co-Coordinator for the CHP group in Humor Academy.

Conference Speakers

2026 AATH Humor Conference



Mary Jo Neil CHP has been finding the funny and sketching the story since childhood. With a Master's in Art Therapy from George Washington University, she blends creativity, compassion, and a touch of improv to help others navigate life's challenges. A Certified Humor Professional (CHP) through the Association for Applied and Therapeutic

Humor, Mary Jo has led countless workshops on resilience, caregiving, and loss—using laughter and visuals to turn insight into action. She founded Drawn Dialogue to spark connection and communication through humor, imagination, and heart.



Jaypee Oliva is a Protection Field Officer with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Manila. Prior to joining ICRC, he developed a strong advocacy for women and children, actively pursuing opportunities that advanced this mission. For over a decade, he has led training workshops on children's rights, leadership,

peacebuilding, conflict management, visual design, disaster risk reduction, and human rights. He is also a module writer, including work focused on empowering youth to combat online sexual exploitation - a critical issue in the Philippines, where high social media use increases children's vulnerability. Committed to "peace through humor," Jaypee integrates creativity and purpose into his work and looks forward to applying his insights to future training materials and advocacy efforts.



Rolando Enrique Pelicot Ruiz is an economist and youth peacebuilder dedicated to advancing social justice, democratic participation, and inclusive development across Latin America. He is the founder and Project Leader of Buen Pela'o, a youth-led initiative that uses art, sports, and play to promote peace and human rights education in

vulnerable communities. Through his work with youth movements, international organizations, and community programs, he fosters dialogue and nonviolent action. He also serves on the UN Working Group on Youth for the Pact for the Future, supporting global youth engagement efforts.



Ajmal Ramyar is the Executive Director of Afghans for Progressive Thinking (APT), a youth-led nonprofit advancing human rights and education across Afghanistan. Under his leadership, APT has launched key initiatives, including the Afghan Youth Representative Program to the United Nations (2025), higher education

mentorship, mental health support for women and girls, and human rights advocacy—reaching thousands through dialogue and leadership development. Ajmal champions the rights of Afghan women and girls by expanding access to education, connecting them with mentors, and amplifying their voices globally. He is recognized for his contributions to international policy dialogues, working with the UN and civil society to promote inclusive education and meaningful youth participation in peacebuilding efforts.



Shari Short started performing standup comedy complete with braces at 14 in comedy clubs in Philadelphia. During her undergrad days at NYU Film School, she went on to serve as the opening act for entertainers such as Sandra Bernhard, Shawn Colvin and has since produced her sold-out one woman show about living with Multiple Sclerosis

called "It's My Mother's MS, I Just Have It" where she has a whole different set of braces. As a Patient Health Experience Strategist and satirical writer, Shari uses her masters in Developmental Psychology and professional education in Narrative Medicine from Columbia University to explore the role of humor, particularly dark humor, in coping with illness as well as disability advocacy.



Amy Standridge CHP Using music and humor as her instruments, Amy orchestrates powerful moments of connection that leave participants feeling encouraged and empowered. As a board-certified music therapist, Amy conducts meaningful music experiences that build community and center on the joy that music adds to our lives. One of

her proudest accomplishments is being the musical director of Grace Notes Community Singers, a performing arts organization for people living with dementia and their caregivers. Members are inspired to move beyond their heavy responsibilities to a place of

CONFERENCE SPEAKERS

Conference Speakers

2026 AATH Humor Conference

relief and new possibilities. Amy has been a music therapist for over 20 years and holds dual master's degrees in music therapy and music education. She is the owner of Oak Song Music Therapy and Consulting Services in San Antonio, TX.



Aravilla Tan is an educator who transitioned into development work, serving in Nepal and Malawi under VSO International. After three years of grassroots service, she began working with VSO Philippines on peacebuilding youth initiatives, particularly in Mindanao. This experience led to her selection as one of the recipients of the Asian Peacebuilders Scholarship, a program funded by the Nippon Foundation in Japan, which allowed her to obtain dual master's degrees. Currently, she works as a consultant, facilitating programs for YouthNEET (not in education, employment, or training) and conducting Training of Trainers (ToT) sessions, where she integrates a humor-infused approach to learning.

CONFERENCE SPEAKERS

Power of Many

NEW VIRTUAL SESSIONS

LEARNING FROM OUR MEMBERS

AATH members share their expertise, experience, and insights to inspire and empower our community.

FIRST SESSIONS

<p>THURSDAY, MAY 21 7 PM CT Prof Frank Chindamo</p>	<p>THURSDAY, MAY 28 3 PM CT Dr Nikki Goldman</p>
--	---

PRE-REGISTER TODAY!

Scan the QR code to reserve your spot.

All sessions are virtual and open to AATH members.

Learn. Connect. Be Inspired.

Scan to pre-register

The Top Line... LLC

... How I Feel Affects Other People!!!

FREE Autograph With Each Purchase.

AATH Bookstore Discount

Passing Thoughts...
SHARE THE THOUGHT...
PASS IT ALONG...
Because what we share are mental moments.

FAITH
Feeling As If There's Hope
The only thing you cannot do is give up.
When one door closes... go for the window.
Put yourself in position to make ANOTHER GOOD CHOICE.

Passing Thoughts...
FOCUS FAITH
SELF FAITH
SILLY WIN
LOSS WIN
LIFE LOVE
LEFT JOY

Passing Words...
SHARE THE WORD & MAKE IT CONNECT...
Because what we share are mental moments.

Passing Words...
"Tell a Story" about how you learned and had fun, ending your comment with this Sentence Connector, which signals the next person to contribute.

BECAUSE OF...

Because what we share are mental moments... use **Passing Thoughts...** as daily inspiration, mailing inserts, discussion to cheer up a friend **or/and** use any of the optional suggestions for helping build trust and fellowship, while having fun. **Even meeting debriefing.**

Passing Words...
Because of...
Believe there's...
Remember...
Expect...
Think about...

Being chosen as the one to witness my mother take her last breath on January 14, 2007. I found the strength to put grief on hold. Blessed with the opportunity to coach youth basketball in 1990, I learned to coach parents, though I have no kids. Bankruptcy in 1999 pushed me to believe in my passionate calling to be a Speaker. And in 2010 I began this new path following my dream. That's how life happens!

After the headline fools you... enjoy the subtiles in LIFE (Lessons Intended For Everyone) that make sure we get where we're going! A **storyline** in poetry about LIVING. A great way to **Keep Your EDGE**

2026 Knox Peace Through Humor Fellowship

Knox Peace Through Humor Fellowship Committee:
Stephanie Knox Steiner, Dana Kristiawan, Obasesam Okoi, and Aravilla Tan



Teresa Ann Bertossi is an educator, storyteller, and systems steward who helps people make sense of complex landscapes, livelihoods, and institutions, and find ways to work together across differences. Her approach to peace through humor is deeply personal, inspired by her mother, Cookie, a single mother of six who filled their lives with warmth, laughter, and the steady

practice of finding joy in hard moments. Teresa's work explores how humans can act with greater accountability and care in the ways we live with land, water, and one another, especially at the scale of social-ecological systems where livelihoods, land use, and power are deeply entangled. She serves as a Sentinel Landscapes Support Advisor with LegacyWorks Group, teaches Design for Climate Justice at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, and holds a PhD in sustainability. Teresa lives on Lake Superior's North Shore with her partner and two red labs, where place, curiosity, and joy shape her daily practice.



Jackeline María Guerra Batista (Panama) is an internationalist from Panama dedicated to peacebuilding through education and creative expression. She leads Reconnectarte, an art-based peace education project in Panama's coffee lands working with Ngäbe-Buglé children, and collaborates with Buen Pelao in Panama City, facilitating workshops in communities

affected by violence. As a former UN Volunteer with UNFPA and UNAOC Young Peacebuilder, Jackeline combines monitoring and evaluation expertise with grassroots community work. Her thesis research examined transborder labor mobility and educational access among indigenous communities. A Rotary Peace Activator and storyteller, she uses writing to amplify underrepresented voices and foster intercultural dialogue. Jackeline believes laughter and creativity are powerful tools for healing social fractures, building resilience, and creating safe spaces where communities can envision peaceful futures together.



Yehuda Silverman (US) is a peacebuilding pracademic dedicated to fostering global connection and dialogue. He serves as Peacebuilding Advisor at Acquaint, supporting a network of 3,000+ volunteers across more than 100 countries through curriculum development, research, and technical exchanges. He teaches peace-related courses with Northwestern

University's Civic Education Project and works as a facilitator with Civic Synergy. Yehuda is also a Managing Editor at Convergence Journal, advising youth scholars through editorial guidance and mentorship. He holds a PhD in Conflict Analysis and Resolution and brings extensive experience in interfaith dialogue, education, and community-based initiatives. Passionate about reimagining peace, he explores how humor, connection, and inclusive dialogue can build resilience and understanding in an increasingly divided world.



Tham Tran Thu (Vietnam) is a peace educator with a Master's degree in Peace Education from the University for Peace. Based in Vietnam, they work to advance peace through education, community development, and play-based learning. They began their journey as a journalism student advocating for disability inclusion, children's rights, and climate awareness, later contributing to

nonprofit capacity-building at the LIN Center. Tham's experience with Save the Children's Positive Discipline program and the Play for Peace Global movement inspired them to focus on education as a pathway to sustainable peace. Today, they lead initiatives supporting children from domestic migrant and stateless communities, including those along the Vietnam-Cambodia border. Passionate about connection and creativity, they explore how play and humor can foster belonging, resilience, and more peaceful learning environments.

Returning Peace Fellows

[2026 Graduate] **Glenn "Jaypee" Oliva**, Philippines
[2026 Graduate] **Aravilla Tan**, Philippines
[Level 3] **Dana Kristiawan, Ph.D.**, Indonesia

[Level 2] **Kaamela Barvin**, Singapore
[Level 2] **Oshan M. Gunathilake**, Sri Lanka
[Level 2] **Rolando Pelicot**, Panama
[Level 2] **Ajmal Ramyar**, Afghanistan/Canada



Research Showcase

2026 AATH Humor Conference

Research Showcase: Friday, May 15 | 1:30 - 2:45 PM | Bayside Ballroom

Buxman's Theory of Humor in Nursing: A Contemporary Midrange Theory for Connection, Coping, and Care

What if humor were treated as a core clinical skill rather than a lucky instinct? This engaging presentation introduces Buxman's Theory of Humor in Nursing, a new framework that positions humor as a purposeful, ethical, and evidence-informed practice. Explore how awareness, intentionality, and context shape therapeutic humor - and how nurses can use it to strengthen connection, resilience, and patient care while maintaining clear professional boundaries.



Karyn Buxman, RN, MSN, CSP, CPAE, CHP is a Hall of Fame speaker, TEDx presenter, and neurohumorist - an expert who lives at the intersection of humor and the brain. A pioneer in the science of applied and therapeutic humor, Karyn teaches coaches and leaders how to leverage laughter as a powerful business strategy. A former AATH president, she's also a Lifetime Achievement Award honoree. Through her signature program, *The Missing Piece: Strategic Humor for Coaches, Leaders & Folks Who Listen for a Living*, she helps professionals attract clients, build trust, boost resilience—and their bottom line! Author of nine books and recognized globally by organizations from the Mayo Clinic to the Million Dollar Round Table, Karyn proves that humor isn't just good medicine - it's serious business.

Implementation and Evaluation of a Mental Health App with Comedy Content for Women Living with Advanced Cancer

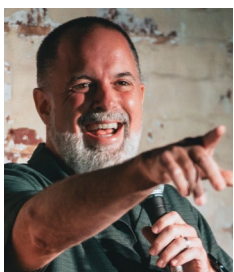
Can comedy improve mental health for women living with advanced cancer? This compelling research explores a novel, app-based intervention combining evidence-based tools with curated comedy content. Led by Saranne Rothberg and colleagues, the study highlights meaningful reductions in stress, anxiety, and depression, alongside increased self-efficacy and strong user engagement. Discover how humor, delivered through a digital platform, may offer an accessible, cost-effective pathway to emotional support and resilience in cancer care.



Saranne Rothberg Saranne Rothberg hosts the hit podcast series "Beating Cancer Daily," which is helping patients and survivors in 100+ countries with over 365 episodes blending healthcare strategies and humor. Rated as the "#1 Cancer Survivor Podcast of 2024," the series supports you daily to navigate life with laughter, play, and joy. As a stage IV survivor, Saranne has been cancer-free for 23 years. Her pioneering work includes research and digital and live global events, collaborating with organizations like the WHO, UN, NCI, and Fortune 500 companies. Saranne's groundbreaking studies, such as "The Mindset and Metastatic Cancer Research Study," used AI in 2019, and has changed the way we approach patient care. Featured on CNN, NBC, ABC, and PBS, she is also the founder of The ComedyCures Foundation, and a leader in healthcare, comedy advocacy.

The Proof is in the Laughter: How a Course in Stand-Up Comedy Helped Students Become Objectively Funnier

Can you really teach someone to be funny? This research challenges the myth that comedy can't be learned, presenting compelling evidence from a college stand-up course where students significantly increased laughter and applause over time. Discover how structured practice, feedback, and performance can transform beginners into objectively funnier communicators - and what that means for education and beyond.



Eric Shouse is a Professor of Communication at East Carolina University, a stand-up comedian with over 20-years of experience, and a professional joke writer. His jokes have been told on The Late Late Show, Laughs on FOX, and The Bob and Tom Show. Dr. Shouse hosts and produces The Comedy Pitt, a monthly stand-up comedy show in Greenville, North Carolina. He has performed at the Laugh Your Asheville Off Comedy Festival, The Oak City Comedy Festival, and The Cape Fear Comedy Festival. He is the co-editor, with Patrice Oppliger of Boston University of The Dark Side of Stand-Up Comedy, and has authored over 20 peer-reviewed articles on the subject of humor.

Research Showcase

2026 AATH Humor Conference

Research Showcase: Friday, May 15 | 1:30 - 2:45 PM | Bayside Ballroom

The Rapport of the Funny: How to Win Students

How can humor enhance classroom connection without crossing the line into over-familiarity? In this engaging autoethnographic study, Liz Sills explores the delicate balance between rapport and professionalism in teaching. Drawing on personal experience and communication theory, this session offers practical insights into using humor as a tool for immediacy, engagement, and student success—while avoiding the pitfalls that can undermine learning.



Liz Sills is an Assistant Professor of Communication at Indiana University Kokomo. She received her PhD from Louisiana State University and her M.A. in Communication Studies from the University of Montana. Her interests lie in rhetoric, philosophies, and cultural consequences surrounding comedy, humor, and any other catalysts of mirth that constitute The Funny. Other examples of her work may be found in *Comedy Studies*, *Empedocles: European Journal for the Philosophy of Communication* and in the 2013 Eisner Award-winning volume *Black Comics: Politics of Race and Representation*. She also enjoys teaching standup comedy skills to her students and hosting workshops that teach community members how to understand and make use of the funniness of their everyday lives. Sills is a past president of the Lighthearted Philosophers' Society and the Speech Communication Association of South Dakota.

We gratefully acknowledge the **Illuminutty Research Committee**, consisting of Gurinder Bains, Karyn Buxman CHP, Michael Cundall CHP, Susan Duncan CHP, Tabatha Mauldin CHP, Patrick McNeil, Linda Gingold Seaman CHP, Emily Simmons, and Jim-Bob Williams CHP.

The Illuminutty

Because science is FUN-damental!



RESEARCH SHOWCASE

AATH Scholarships

2026 AATH Scholarship Recipients

Saturday, May 16 | 8:00 – 8:30 AM | Bayside Ballroom

Grins & Gratitude: Honoring Our Scholarship and Fellowship Recipients



Be Kind Scholarship

Unisa Igwike holds a Bachelor of Science in Biology from Dillard University and is a Licensed Practical Nurse with experience across diverse healthcare settings, including managed care, pediatrics, psychiatric care, substance abuse treatment, and home health. Her

broad clinical background has strengthened her adaptability, technical skills, and commitment to compassionate, patient-centered care. She is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Nursing to expand her scope of practice and advance her career. Unisa is dedicated to serving individuals and communities with professionalism, empathy, and a strong focus on overall wellness.



Beth Usher "BE THE Happiest" Humor Academy Scholarship

Marla Simlett, also known as Marvelous Marla, is a speaker, emcee, and Registered Clinical Counsellor (RCC) who helps people grow through laughter and insight. Blending counselling expertise,

HR experience, and humor, she created Laughter Intelligence™, a transformative approach that uses intentional laughter to build trust, wellness, and authentic connection. She leads corporate events, retreats, and counselling sessions with energy, warmth, and practical tools for lasting change. Marla's mission is to help people feel energized, connected, and ready to thrive in all areas of life. Outside of work, she enjoys biking around Vancouver, baking allergy-friendly treats, and thrift shopping for hidden gems.



Ed Dunkelblau Scholarship

Max Ninomiya is a Japan-based educator and founding CEO of Max Reading, an English speed-reading program for Japanese learners. His brain-based, playful approach—incorporating laughter yoga and gibberish—helps

participants read two to five times faster, often surpassing native speakers. Guided by his motto "Max Being," he focuses on maximizing human potential through brain performance, wellness, and humor. Max is a certified Laughter Yoga Leader and a new

Certified Humor Professional, and he actively brings humor into cross-cultural volunteer work. Outside of teaching, he has danced salsa at a semi-professional level for 18 years and enjoys surprising audiences with duet singing in both male and female voices.



Esther & Jack Hyatt "Senior Care" Scholarship

Garnet Chaney Chaplain Garnet R. Chaney, known as the Laughing Chaplain, is a Certified Laughter Yoga Trainer and sound healer serving seniors in nursing homes. After surviving two strokes and

weeks of recovery in medical care, he turned to humor as healing—lifting spirits through laughter circles, playful interactions, and meaningful connection. That experience deepened his commitment to using laughter to ease anxiety, reduce pain, and foster community. Today, he leads sessions for seniors, trains staff as Laughter Yoga Leaders, and shares his signature Laughter Bucks™ to inspire daily joy and faith. His mission is to bring regular laughter to 100,000 seniors.



Joyce Saltman Humor In Education Scholarship

Cornelius George J. Cornelius George is an award-winning educator, comedian, and founder of Laugh Your Class Off, LLC, where he helps schools enhance teaching through improv-based engagement strategies. A

fourth-generation educator with an Ed.S. in Special Education from the University of West Georgia, he created the Learning Through Laughter framework, blending research-based practices with humor. He has been featured on WSB-TV, named a 2025 Trailblazing Educator, and twice received the PBIS Film of the Year award for anti-bullying and suicide prevention films. With over 20 years in education and a decade in comedy, he delivers engaging, practical sessions that help educators build connections, reduce burnout, and create supportive, inclusive classrooms.

AATH Scholarships

2026 AATH Scholarship Recipients

Saturday, May 16 | 8:00 – 8:30 AM | Bayside Ballroom

Grins & Gratitude: Honoring Our Scholarship and Fellowship Recipients



Knox Family Peace Through Humor Scholarship

Renee Cohn Jones is a Clinical Psychologist and motivational speaker who helps organizations build cultures of connection, resilience, and humor-infused leadership. With a background

in emotional intelligence and inclusion, she's known for her ability to connect across generations, industries, and backgrounds. Her work bridges emotional insight with lively storytelling, energizing teams, inspiring leaders, and sparking meaningful change. Dr. Renee dreams of a world where humor is recognized not as a distraction from serious work, but as a powerful tool for doing it better. As "Jalapeña the Clown," Dr. Renee has spent over three decades helping people laugh, connect, and heal. She's performed for audiences of all ages and even traveled to Russia with Patch Adams, using laughter as a bridge across pain, language, and culture.



Margie Klein "Paper Plate" Scholarship

Nancy Yeamans, Ph.D. is a clinical psychologist specializing in the treatment of emotional and physical trauma. Based in Arizona, she has worked with diverse populations, including

injured workers, first responders, and healthcare professionals. Drawing on her background and personal experience, she integrates humor and laughter into her practice to build rapport and support healing. Nancy has also completed stand-up comedy training and applies humor strategies in workplace and clinical settings. She is passionate about using humor to foster connection, improve coping, and create healthier, more collaborative environments.



Lenny Ravich "Shalom" Scholarship

Kedma Ough is a Yemenite, Irish, American Jewish entrepreneur, speaker, and strategist who works at the intersection of culture, business, and humor. She has spent her career building companies, leading teams, and

engaging audiences with a direct, authentic style grounded in real experience. Kedma uses humor not as distraction, but as a tool to cut through noise, foster honest dialogue, and create meaningful connection. She works with leaders and communities seeking deeper, more human conversations beyond surface-level answers. Drawing on her diverse background, she embraces complexity and isn't afraid of uncomfortable truths, believing laughter can bring clarity, resilience, and a stronger sense of connection.



Teena Miller Laughter Blaster Cancer Thriver Scholarship

Frank Chindamo Frank Chindamo has dedicated his work to LaughMD, an initiative focused on the therapeutic power of humor. Research conducted in partnership with USC, Chapman

University, and A.T. Still University has demonstrated significant reductions in pain and stress among participants. A forthcoming study reports up to a 60% reduction in chronic pain. Through this work, Frank continues to advance the use of laughter as an evidence-based approach to improving well-being and quality of life.

2025-26 Humor Academy Students

Congratulations! The following graduates successfully completed the specific Humor Academy Level requirement.

Kudos to each of you!



Level 1 Grads

Kaamela Barvin
Brad Miller
Sarah Routman

Lisa Garner
Rolando Pelicot
Rei 'Lucy' Takahashi

Oshan Gunathilake
Caleb Posey
Pamela Young

Sharon Harrasser
Ajmal Ramyar

Level 2 Grads

Nanciann Horvath
Patrick McNeil, MA-ODL, ACC

"Spring" Chiharu Kogumasaka
Ann Pratt

Dana Kristiawan, Ph.D
Shozo Yamaguchi

Alan Lyon

Level 3 Grads

Vera Adell Dujmic
Glenn "Jaypee" Oliva

Rebecca Newby
Kenshiro Sato

Max Ninomiya
LoriBeth Bykerk-Smith

Rumi Ninomiya
Aravilla Tan

HA STUDENTS



Congratulations

to the **KIND, SMART, and FABULOUS**
2026 LEVEL 2 GRADS!



Nanciann Horvath



"Spring" Chiharu Kogumasaka



Dana Kristiawan, Ph.D



Pat McNeil, MA-ODL, ACC



Anne Pratt



Shozo Yamaguchi



Alan Lyon

*We're so proud
of you!*

- Mike & Nila

Humor Academy Projects

THREE CHEERS to the Level II Class of 2026! The following have successfully completed their projects and are now on their way to Level III. Congratulations to each of you!

Visit AATH.org for more details about their projects!

Poster Walk | Friday, May 15 | 12:00 - 12:30 PM | Bayside Ballroom



Nanciann Horvath

Title: YES AND...

The Goal of this project is to have others use the muscle of YES AND in their daily lives, including business, health, relationships and family. Once they see it's a daily muscle and gets easier as they use it, they will also discover that it's fun

and that we get healthier too! During this project I reached out to different groups and some were amazed they were not already using it, while others had heard of it but never tried it.



"Spring" Chiharu Kogumasaka

Title: The Power of Laughter; Exploring the Role of Laughter Exercise and Humor in Guided Tours

This project explores the power of laughter through both personal experience and guided tours. It examines how Laughter exercise and humor can

ease discomfort, lift mood, and bring people closer together. By introducing simple daily laughter exercises on tour, it highlights practical ways to create a warm, connected, and joyful experience for international visitors.



Dana Kristianwan, Ph.D.

Title: Learning English through Humor: Digital Storytelling for Social and Political Critique in Indonesia

This project helps university students learn English by creating humorous but meaningful digital stories about social and political issues in Indonesia. Through

satire, visuals, audio, reflection, and peace action, students build confidence in English, improve digital skills, and learn how to share critical ideas in a creative, respectful, and constructive way that encourages positive social change.



Alan Lyons, C.Psychol, Ps.S.I

Title: Fun(ny) Places to Work

The goal of this project was to examine whether workplace humor is associated with employee engagement. To do this, a single-item Humor Promoter Score (HPS)—modelled on the Net Promoter

Score—was developed to measure employees' willingness to recommend the humor climate in their workplace. HPS responses were collected from employees who had also completed a comprehensive engagement survey, and the study explored correlations between HPS results and overall engagement scores.



Patrick McNeil, MA-ODL, ACC

Title: What do you mean it's not accurate? I used Google!

Let's be honest — academic research can feel like reading a foreign language written by people who really love semicolons. This project bridges the gap between rigorous scholarship and

the rest of us, translating dense research into approachable, even enjoyable reads. Because the insights hiding inside academic journals deserve a bigger, friendlier audience — and you deserve a better map to find them.



Anne Pratt

Title: Hometown Humor Takeover

This project is designed to immerse my small hometown of Vincennes, Indiana in healthy/therapeutic humor, allowing them to learn about healthy humor solutions to situations they may encounter in their everyday life.

These four speakers will not only make our audience laugh on the day of the session, they will teach them how to use humor in their profession and in their lives to increase their happiness, productivity and sense of well-being.



Shozo Yamaguchi

Title: A Token of Thanks – A Picture Book on the Origin of Money

This project explores the fundamental question, "What is money originally for?" through a picture book aimed at financial professionals. The goal is to reframe money not as a tool for profit, but as a

"token of thanks" that represents human connection and mutual support. By using storytelling and gentle humor, the project seeks to inspire a more human-centered perspective in the financial industry.

Certified Humor Professionals (CHP)



Humor Academy graduates hold a unique and valued place in the heart of AATH. Their dedication to the study and application of therapeutic humor continues to elevate our professional community.

Upon completing the three-year Humor Academy program, participants are awarded a certificate of completion and become eligible to apply for the designation of **Certified Humor Professional (CHP)**. This respected title reflects a commitment to lifelong learning, meaningful service, and continued AATH membership.

To date, **127 individuals have earned the CHP designation** through a rigorous combination of academic study, practical application, and community involvement. Each represents the very best of what it means to bring humor with heart and purpose into the world. We are deeply proud of all who have achieved this certification.

We especially celebrate the following **2026 Humor Academy graduates**, who will be honored at the Awards Banquet as they receive their official **CHP pins**.

Vera Adell Dujmic

Rebecca Newby

Max Ninomiya

Rumi Ninomiya

Glenn "Jaypee" Oliva

Kenshiro Sato

LoriBeth Bykerk-Smith

Aravilla Tan

**CHP-CHP
HOORAY!**

We're so proud of each of our
**2026 Certified
Humor Professionals**



~ from the HA Leadership Team

AATH Awards

2026 AATH Humor Conference

AATH will be recognizing our 2026 Award winners from the podium during the Awards Banquet on Saturday evening. Congratulations!

Doug Fletcher Lifetime Achievement Award

2026 Honoree: Gina Barreca, PhD



AATH proudly presents the 2026 Doug Fletcher Lifetime Achievement Award to Gina Barreca, PhD, an internationally recognized humor scholar, author, and speaker. Dr. Barreca, a Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor at the University of Connecticut, is the author of ten books and editor of seventeen, with widely acclaimed works

exploring humor, culture, and women's lives. A sought-after voice in media and academia, she has appeared on PBS, CNN, NPR, and The TODAY Show, with writing featured in The New York Times, Harvard Business Review, and more. Her work reflects the spirit of this year's theme, On the Edge: Humor in the Hard Places, demonstrating how humor can illuminate, connect, and heal. Please join us in celebrating Dr. Barreca's extraordinary contributions and lasting impact on the field.

AATH Outstanding Service Award

2026 Honoree: Andrew Tarvin



The AATH Outstanding Service Award, selected by the President, recognizes exceptional leadership and sustained service to the organization.

This year, we honor Andrew Tarvin for championing International Humor Month with creativity and impact. As Director for the past two years, Andrew has expanded the initiative's reach through

daily humor content, global engagement, and a vibrant community of participants.

A speaker, author, and CEO of Humor That Works, Andrew—known as the world's first Humor Engineer - has helped organizations around the world harness humor for connection, resilience, and effectiveness. His passion and leadership reflect the very heart of AATH's mission.

Lee S. Berk Outstanding Academic Achievement Award

2026 Honorees: Don & Alleen Nilsen



This award recognizes individuals who have made significant contributions to advancing the understanding of humor and its many roles in our lives. Through their scholarship, leadership, and dedication to the field of humor studies, the Nilsens have helped shape and elevate academic inquiry in this important area. Their work exemplifies

the spirit of this award, and we are honored to celebrate their lasting impact on humor research and education.

Wilde About Humor Award

2026 Honoree: The Happiness Center™



Founded by Dr. Jeffrey L. Gurian, The Happiness Center™ is dedicated to transforming lives through the power of humor. Blending careers in dentistry, comedy, and motivational speaking, Dr. Gurian uses humor as a tool for healing, resilience, and connection. Through keynote presentations, media, and work with patients and professionals, he

demonstrates how humor can reduce stress, shift mindset, and enhance wellbeing. From healthcare settings to global audiences, The Happiness Center™ exemplifies the spirit of the Wilde About Humor Award - proving humor is not just entertaining, but truly transformative.

Humor Academy Leadership

2026-2027 Humor Academy Instructional Leadership



Karyn Buxman CHP
HA Director, Level III Advisor



Nila Nielsen CHP
HA Director, Level II Advisor



Holly Anderson CHP
Level 1 Advisor



Alison Landoni CHP
Level 1 Advisor



Kathleen Luhn CHP
Level 1 Advisor



Tabatha Mauldin CHP
Level 1 Advisor



Heather Walker CHP
Level 1 Advisor



Michael K. Cundall, Jr. CHP
Level 2 Advisor



Martha Kusakari CHP
Level 3 Advisor



Mary Laskin CHP
CHP Coordinator



Kathy Laurenhue CHP
CHP Coordinator



Rebecca Newby CHP
Recruitment Advisor



Stephanie Knox Steiner
Knox Fellowship Support



Mary Kay Morrison CHP
Founder



AATH LEADERSHIP

AATH Leadership

2025-2026 AATH Board of Directors

Our board members are the heart of AATH's direction and energy. They help shape our vision, offer guidance on key initiatives, and lend their insight to keep us moving in the right direction. In short, they help keep us on track, with wisdom, perspective, and just enough humor to keep things interesting.



Todd Hart, CHP
President



Patrick Harris
President Elect



Megan O'Mahony, CHP
Secretary



Gurinder Bains
Treasurer



Roberta Gold, CHP
Past President



Karyn Buxman, CHP
Director, HA Liaison



Michael K. Cundall, Jr., CHP
Director At Large



Mary Jo Neil, CHP
Director At Large



Katy Maag, CHP
Director, Conference Chair



Briana Rogers
Advisory Board, Legal Counsel



Michele StClair
Executive Director

With Gratitude for Their Service

Thanks to our outgoing board members for their dedication and leadership.

Jana Greco, CHP
2021-2025

Michael K. Cundall, Jr., CHP
2023-2026

AATH LEADERSHIP

Association Management

AATH is professionally managed by **V2 Marketing & Management**, an association management company co-owned by Michele StClair and Stacy McGuire.

Celebrating 11 years of partnership with AATH, V2 provides operational leadership, administrative support, and strategic guidance to help advance the organization's mission.



AATH Home Office

6845 Weaver Rd, Ste 300, Rockford, IL 61114 | 815-708-6587 | info@AATH.org | AATH.org

CE LANGUAGE

16.25 Hours Conference, 5.75 Hours Humor Academy

Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor

2026 AATH Conference & Humor Academy Annual Meeting | May 14 -17, 2026 | San Diego, CA

Accreditation Statement



JOINTLY ACCREDITED PROVIDER™
INTERPROFESSIONAL CONTINUING EDUCATION

In support of improving patient care, this activity has been planned and implemented by Amedco LLC and Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor (AATH). Amedco LLC is jointly accredited by the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME), the Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE), and the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC), to provide continuing education for the healthcare team.

Nurses (ANCC) Credit Designation Amedco LLC designates this activity for a maximum of **22.0** ANCC contact hours.

Social Workers (ASWB) Credit Designation



As a Jointly Accredited Organization, Amedco is approved to offer social work continuing education by the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) Approved Continuing Education (ACE) program. Organizations, not individual courses, are approved under this program. State and provincial regulatory boards have the final authority to determine whether an individual course may be accepted for continuing education credit. Amedco maintains responsibility for this course. Social Workers completing this course receive **22.0** GENERAL continuing education credits.

The following state boards accept courses offering ASWB ACE credit for Social Workers: AK, AL, AR, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DC, DE, FL, GA, HI, ID, IL, IN, IA, KS, KY, LA, ME, MD, MA, MI, MN, MS, MO, MT, NC, ND, NE, NH, NM, NV, OH, OK*, OR, PA, RI, SC, SD, TN, TX, UT, VT, VA, WA, WI, WV*, WY
*** WV accepts ASWB ACE unless activity is live in West Virginia, an application is required.**

The following state boards accept courses offering ASWB ACE credit for Counselors: AK, AR, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DC, FL, GA, IA, ID, IL, IN, KS, MA, MD, ME, MO, ND, NE, NM, NH, NV, OK*, OR, PA, TN, TX, UT, VA, WI, WY

AL/Counselors: Activities not providing NBCC approval may be approved by the Board for individual licensees upon receipt of acceptable documentation prior to the activity. Please send course details to your licensing board for approval BEFORE the event. No approvals afterward by the board.

MI: No CE requirement

The following state boards accept courses offering ASWB ACE credit for MFTs: AK, AR, AZ, CA, CO, FL, IA, ID, IN, KS, MD, ME, MO, NC, NE, NH, NM, NV, OK*, OR, PA, RI, TN, TX, UT, VA, WI, WY

MA / MFTs: Participants can self-submit courses not approved by the MAMFT board for review.

MI: No CE requirement

*** OK accepts ASWB ACE for live, in-person activities. For all ethics and/or online courses, an application is required.**

The following state boards accept courses offering ASWB ACE credit for Addictions Professionals: AK, CA, CO, CT, GA, IA, IN, KS, LA, MO, MT, ND, NM, NV, OK, OR, SC, WA, WI, WV, WY

Psychologists (APA) Credit Designation



AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION

This course is co-sponsored by Amedco and Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor. Amedco is approved by the American Psychological Association to sponsor continuing education for psychologists. Amedco maintains responsibility for this program and its content. **22.0** hours.

The following state boards accept courses from APA providers for Counselors: AK, AL, AR, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DC, DE, FL, GA, HI, IA, ID, IL, IN, KS, KY, MD, ME, MO, NC, ND, NH, NE, NJ, NM, NV, OK*, OR, PA, RI, SC, SD, TN, TX, UT, VA, WI, WY

MI: No CE requirements

The following state boards accept courses from APA providers for MFTs: AK, AR, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DE, FL, GA, IA, ID, IN, KS, MD, ME, MO, NE, NC, NH, NJ, NM, NV, OK*, OR, PA, RI, SC, SD, TN, TX, UT, VA, WA, WI, WY

The following state boards accept courses from APA providers for Addictions Professionals: AK, AR, CO, CT, DC, DE, GA, IA, IN, KS, LA, MD, MO, MT, NC, ND, NE, NJ, NM, NY (outstate held), OK*, OR, SC, UT, WA, WI, WY

*** OK accepts APA credit for live, in-person activities. For all ethics and/or online courses, an application is required.**

MA / MFTs: Participants can self-submit courses not approved by the MAMFT board for review.

The following state boards accept courses from APA providers for Social Workers: AK, AR, AZ, CA, CO, DE, FL, GA, ID, IN, KY, ME, MN, MO, NE, NH, NM, OR, PA, VT, WI, WY

CA Nurses Amedco is approved by the CA Board of Registered Nursing, Provider #CEP13683, for **22.0** contact hours.



www.TheHumorInfusion.com

The Humor Infusion explores the science, psychology, and practical application of humor across the full spectrum of human experience. From understanding how humor affects emotions, thinking, physiology, and relationships, to applying it in parenting, education, the workplace, psychotherapy, crisis, grief, technology, and resilience, this book reveals humor as far more than entertainment—it is a powerful tool for health and well-being.

Blending research, clinical insight, personal stories, and practical exercises, Dr. Sultanoff demonstrates how humor strengthens emotional regulation, deepens connection, expands perspective, and builds psychological resilience. Whether navigating everyday stress or life's most difficult moments, readers will discover how intentional, empathic humor can lighten burdens without minimizing seriousness—and how humor, wisely used, becomes both medicine and meaning.

This is not a book about telling jokes. It is a guide to living—and healing—with humor.

For sale on Amazon

In *The Humor Infusion*, Dr. Steven Sultanoff brilliantly explores humor's healing power. Blending science, stories, and clinical wisdom, this engaging book reveals how laughter, mirth, and wit boost physical, emotional, and social well-being. Packed with practical insights and amusing examples, Sultanoff's work entertains as much as it informs. The book is a must-read for anyone interested in the science of wellness and the art of laughter.

Dr. Peter McGraw, author of *The Humor Code*, Professor, University of Colorado Boulder

... and ...

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LIFETIME MEMBERSHIP

IN AATH

The following members chose to formally acknowledge their commitment to your community through Lifetime membership and enjoy the benefits of our highest level of membership and never again require renewal.

*Members in attendance

Fatima Ahmed CHP
Holly R. Anderson CHP*
Addison Arthur
Gurinder Bains*
Bea Bincze CHP
Karyn Buxman CHP*
Kermit Cole CHP
Belinda Criddell*
Michael Cundall, Jr CHP*
Debbie Derflinger CHP
Susan Duncan CHP
Ed Dunkelblau*
Brenda Elsagher CHP
Roberta Gold CHP*
Jana Greco CHP
Heidi Hanna CHP*

Todd Hart CHP*
Christine Hayes
Nicholas Hoesl
Jennifer Keith CHP
Alison Landoni CHP
Kathleen Luhn CHP*
Chip Lutz CHP
Katy Maag CHP*
Tabatha Mauldin CHP*
Teena Miller CHP
Becky Newby*
Nila Nielsen CHP
Obasesam Okoi CHP
Jaypee Oliva*
Paul Osincup CHP*
Mary C. Parker

Amy Riederich
Amy Robbins
Diane Roosth CHP*
Erika Ruiz CHP
Joyce Saltman CHP
Stephanie Knox Steiner*
Sue Stevenson CHP*
Steve Sultanoff CHP*
Aravilla Tan*
Andrew Tarvin*
Roland Thompson
Kathy Velasco
Jim-Bob Williams CHP*
Steve Wilson
Laurie Young CHP*

Disclaimer: Lifetime members do not have to wear "I'm a lifer" on their conference badge or report "life sentence" on background checks.

Interested in this opportunity of a lifetime?

Talk to one of the lifetime members or stop by the registration desk for more information.

