



By Georgie Binks

**T**ension was building as Catherine Lawrence prepared Christmas dinner for her family a few years ago. So she took a deep breath – and stuck a rubber turkey on a platter. “I faked a freak-out,” she says. “I threw the turkey, which nearly hit my mother-in-law, and screamed ‘I hate cooking!’ Then everyone realized it was fake, and we had a ball.”

Rubber turkeys or chickens have been a necessity in Lawrence’s line of business for the past several years. Although the 43-year-old is a lawyer by trade, her briefcase contains laughing tapes, a few red clown noses and, of course, a “Survival of the Funniest” hat. That’s because Lawrence, who lives in Toronto with her husband and three children, spends her day giving giggle.

Lawrence signed up for a comedy workshop at the Avenue Road Arts School after practising law for eight years. Then she hit the comedy circuit – fashion shows, golf courses – performing as a funny gal and, while doing research for her sketches, stum-

Photo: Rick Charad

bled upon a worldwide laughter movement. In India, for example, people meet in parks for 20-minute sessions for the sole purpose of having a good chortle. In the U.S., there’s the World Laughter Tour (WLT), which holds hundreds of laughter club sessions every week.

WLT has certified Lawrence as a laughter leader (she jokes she can safely lead laughter sessions and no one will get hurt), and she ran her first laughter club last year, with a group of residents at a retirement home. “You start with a greeting laugh, then clapping ho-ho, ha-ha-ha. It’s artificial laughter that turns into real laughter,” she says. She speaks on the importance of humour to a wide variety of people, including investment bankers and lawyers, guiding people onto the laugh track.

Lawrence says her friends call her for a laughter fix when they’re feeling blue. As the captain of the first-ever Canadian women’s elephant polo team, which competed in Nepal in 1996 at the 15th World Elephant Polo Championships, she’s well-tuned to the health benefits of a

fun life. Laughter, in particular, has been described as inner jogging, she says.

California-based Dr. Lee Berk might agree. His studies at the University of California show that mirthful laughter diminishes the secretion of hormones cortisol and adrenalin, released when the body is stressed. So laughing helps your immune system to operate normally.

How can you exercise your funny bone? Start by picking up a journal and noting the people and things that make you laugh, to remind you what you need to get in the mood. “Do a humour litmus test,” says Lawrence. “Ask yourself, Am I having fun? Do I laugh? When do I laugh?” As Canadians, with comedians like Mary Walsh and Sandra Shamas a part of our collective consciousness, it’s our duty to laugh, she adds. It’s one of our greatest exports.

**Reading to laugh** Check out the following books: *Laugh for No Reason*, Madan Kataria, *Madhuri International*, 1999; *Humor at Work*, Esther Blumenfeld & Lynne Alpern, *Peachtree Publishers, Ltd.*, 1994; *Humor Works*, John Morrell, *HRD Press Inc.*, 1997. Or go to [www.laughterclubs.com](http://www.laughterclubs.com).

## THE HOT LIST OUT AND ABOUT

### SLIP SLIDING AWAY

Lace up your ice skates and enjoy a brisk family outing or a romantic spin outside – it’s a perfect antidote to high-strung holiday fare. Here are a few locales to take your breath away. Most are set-up for skating from now until March – weather permitting.

#### BRITISH COLUMBIA, Vancouver Grouse Mountain

Take a gondola to the top of Grouse Mountain where you can skate amidst the clouds, while taking in panoramic views of the city below. 604-986-6262.



Share ice time with sun-dappled sculptures at Lake Louise.

#### ALBERTA, Lake Louise Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise

In winter, Lake Louise takes on the storybook quality of an ice palace; the rink covers the entire lake and is open to the public, not just guests of the Chateau. 1-877-482-6555.

#### SASKATCHEWAN, Regina Wascana Park

A scenic, 1,000-metre stretch of Wascana Lake winds around Spruce Island to Trafalgar Pond, while the city’s festive lights twinkle in the background. 306-522-3661.

## THE HOT LIST WOMEN

# FUNNY BUSINESS

Catherine Lawrence tells why it’s important to take laughter seriously – especially during the hectic holiday season.