

Former director finds there's life after education

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John Fraser was never the retiring kind.

In 15 years as director of education of Peel's public school board (1973-88), Fraser established a reputation for a vigorous intellectual rigour and a flamboyant personal style.

Now, almost 15 years into his alleged "retirement", Fraser has parlayed his penchant for performance into a blossoming career in acting.

It would probably come as a shock to the 1,400 students who attend John Fraser Secondary School to find that the man for whom their school is named portrays Gummo The Clown on a frequently-seen promo for Showcase Television.

In one of the vignettes commissioned by the network, Fraser plays an inept clown who can't even make a decent balloon animal.

To satisfy his audience, he takes out his dentures and chases a group of kids, clacking his false teeth at them.

Fortunately, this has been a lot better year for Fraser than for Gummo.

After a half-dozen frustrating years during which he tried out for television roles, but rarely secured any, the 69-year-old has landed a bundle of work.

He's been seen in a series of Wiser's Whiskey ads, a North-American wide pitch for Glade Air Freshener, a "feel-good" post-Sept. 11 regional ad for Radio City Music Hall and a pitch for Distributel long-distance services, among others.

After auditioning for numerous jobs and rarely getting picked, the long-time Cooksville resident took to heart the Peel Board's motto of life-long learning last year. He enrolled in professional workshops on how to audition for commercials, attended a comedy acting school at Humber College (Chevy Chase was a guest instructor) and took Second City courses on improvisation.

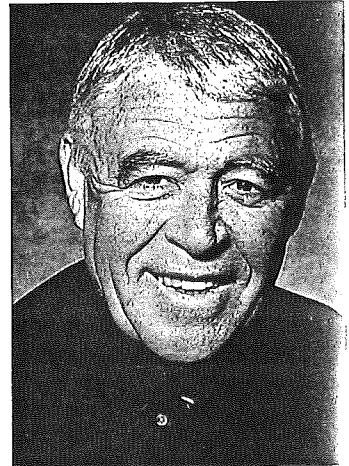
He'll use his comedic skills at the 14th annual RBC Seniors' Jubilee coming up Aug. 19-23 at Roy Thomson Hall.

"I'll be doing stand-up (comedy)," Fraser said in an interview. "It's extremely stimulating working without a net. The band plays, the spotlight picks me up and I'm on that huge stage in front of 2,500 people who expect me to make them laugh."

After post-educational careers that included a stint with a recruitment newspaper for teachers and staging summer community theatre, the former educator seems to have found his niche.

He does lots of charity work as an after-dinner speaker and master of ceremonies at service clubs, golf tournaments, fundraisers etc.

"I don't see life as a spectator sport," he says. "Life is to be lived. I look for things that are stimulating, challenging



John Fraser, the popular former education director for the Peel public school board, has carved out a new career in show business.

and interesting." And that are funny enough to be included in the evolution of life's ongoing stand-up comedy routine.