

World Laughter Tour History

How Do You Start An Epidemic Of Happiness?

[Steve Wilson](#) was already a well-established professional when he dedicated his life to teaching and promoting the health and world peace benefits of laughter. In addition to his family life (wife Pam, and five children), he had already achieved a successful college teaching career as a mental health educator, which was followed by a career as psychologist, psychotherapist, and founder of Ohio Professional Counseling Services. His students, through the creation of the Stephen H. Wilson Scholarship Fund and Grants-in-Aid Program, had honored him. He had already written and compiled several [books](#) and written more than four dozen [articles](#) on topics ranging from to humor, healing, and positive working environments, to how to have successful marriage and family relationships, and raising self-esteem. The National Speakers Association, which awarded him the designation of Certified Speaking Professional, had already recognized him, and he was serving on the Board of Directors of the National Association for Self-Esteem.

Depending on your point of view, all of this either merely preceded or directly led to the subsequent events. Many of the laughter lovers associated with WLT have often voiced the deep belief that the mission is imbued with remarkable synchronicity, such as Steve's being selected in 1997 by the Indus Foundation to lecture in India on the topic of "How to Create Positive Working Environments." While he was in India, of course, he met Dr. Madan Kataria, founder and president of Laughter Club International (LCI), and the rest, to paraphrase a cliché, is condensed in the history presented here.

How Do You Start A World Laughter Tour?

World Laughter Tour, Inc., is the brainchild of psychologist and "Joyologist" Steve Wilson, who describes his role as "Cheerleader of The Bored." The idea came to him during his 1998 lecture tour to India, after he had met Dr. Kataria and participated in the [Juhu Beach laughter club](#) at the Arabian seaside in Mumbai (Bombay). Laughter clubs were described as Hasya Yoga (a yogic laughter practice) for health and peace, and Dr. Kataria, who had achieved a high level of popularity in India, was attracting attention from media in other parts of the world. At that time, there were estimated to be more than 300 laughter clubs in India, and Dr. Kataria, in all his life to that time, had never been outside of India.

In January of 1998, as he was preparing his lectures for India, Steve was intrigued to learn that there was a physician in India prescribing laughter for his patients. After several failed attempts, Internet contacts finally produced a list of telephone numbers for people in India who were associated with the laughter clubs.

In March of 1998, Steve phoned Dr. Kataria and they had instant rapport, like a brotherhood based on a mutual sense of urgency to disseminate information about the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual healing powers of laughter. There followed a flurry of e-mail exchanges until East finally met West in person in April of 1998. There could be no doubt that they were energized to work together for the benefit of all people.

In Mumbai, Steve and Madan continued their conversations, asking and answering many questions about each other's work. Steve recognized the enormous potential that existed in a systematic routine for laughing without using jokes, under the guidance of a trained leader/motivator. He also knew that it would be important to assist Madan in taking the message

beyond India. Struck by a noble impulse, on the spot, in the Kataria's living room, Steve made a commitment that he would bring Dr. Kataria to the United States for lectures and demonstrations, and that he would help the doctor of merry medicine to spread the message of the power of laughter around the world.

In 1997, with strong support from his wife, Madhuri, Dr. Kataria invented World Laughter Day, which was then celebrated for the first time in Mumbai on January 10, 1998. In May of 1998, inspired to an even deeper level of commitment upon his return from India, Steve Wilson invented the World Laughter Tour. With the immediate support and encouragement of his wife, Pamela, and professional speaking colleague and nurse, [Karyn Buxman](#), and committing their personal funds to the project, WLT was launched in July of 1998, adopting the slogan, "Think Globally, Laugh Locally." WLT has since come to be recognized as a significant global influence in the practical applications of laughter and humor for health and world peace.

How Do You Get A World Laughter Tour On The Road?

It took one year for Steve and Karyn to put together what turned out to be a 14-city lecture tour for themselves and the Katarias. Thanks to the generous support and encouragement of Dr. Valeriana Moeller, president of [Columbus State Community College](#), the World Laughter Tour had a very successful kickoff on May 27, 1999, in Columbus Ohio, complete with an evening lecture and demonstration followed by a complete catered Indian dinner feast. The tone was set for a lasting collaboration and friendship, bridging continents and cultures, connecting two of the most colorful characters advocating for laughter.

For the next seven weeks this hearty laughing troupe crisscrossed the USA making appearances in cities such as Phoenix, New York City, Louisville, Minneapolis, San Jose, Philadelphia, Boca Raton, and St. Petersburg. When they weren't flying or driving to engagements the Katarias were houseguests of the Wilsons. This was a marvelous time for the two gurus of giggling to exchange ideas, information, and visions while deepening appreciation for each other's culture. Madan learned better English along with improved presentation skills, and Steve learned the ins and outs of Indian-style laughter therapy. For the Katarias it was an incredible introduction to the United States, and for Steve Wilson it was the beginning of a new career!

On the eve of his return to Mumbai, Madan said to Steve, "The world is a big place. I cannot be everywhere, and I cannot start all of the laughter clubs. Please take North and South America," Dr. Kataria suggested, "and see what you can do with them." Steve agreed that he would give the hemisphere his attention. Following an ancient proverb about cleaning up one's own backyard in order to make the world a better place, he decided that he would focus first on Ohio and North America, but simultaneously promote the message globally.

Then What Happened?

There has been no looking back since India and the USA lecture tour, mainly because there hasn't been time. After the USA lecture tour, WLT seemed to take on a life of its own, gaining momentum on a daily basis. With Pam always at his side, and Karyn being his strongest supporter, Steve had gotten the laughter ball rolling. Here are just some of the developments, and the people who helped, with apologies because we are bound to omit the names of important supporters in this short synopsis.

- With the fine talents and dedication of Donna Boiman, a web presence was established which, with the help of [Ceranet](#), has grown into the site you see today, attracting more than a quarter of a million page hits from tens of thousands of visitors every month.
- The first USA Laughter Club was established even prior to the lecture tour, by Jenni Reusser, at the YMCA in Orrville, Ohio.
- Steve and Pam taught the laughter club exercises to a Japanese theater troupe visiting Washington, CD, and became convinced that “laughter has no accent,” and that this method could be used worldwide, even among people with major language barriers.
- The first USA Laughter Club in a nursing home was established in Canton, Ohio, and then the first club in an elementary school in the same city, thanks to Peggy Stabholtz and Nancy Engle.
- With the help of a good friend and champion of mental health and world peace, Lenore Schneiderman, WLT created the only college-affiliated professionally accredited training program, which has produced a growing cadre of competent, trained, dedicated [Certified Laughter Leaders](#).
- Radio, television, and print interviews and appearance too numerous to mention.
- The inauguration of USA Laughter Clubs in cities across the country.
- The coordination and dissemination of laughter information around the world.
- The development, production, and distribution of books, tapes and other resources for laughter clubs.
- Thanks to the generously spirited and humorously talented head and heart of [Jacki Kwan](#), WLT created a Board of Directors, which will plan for a sustained operational mission well into the future.
- WLT created and produced the first-ever United States celebration of World Laughter Day, with support from Dana Flynn of the Laughing Lotus Yoga Center, and Stephan Wischerth, a therapist in New York City.

What Now? What Next?

We want to get YOU laughing, maybe even get you to organize or lead a [Laughter Club](#). What we are about is changing the face of the world, one smile and laugh at a time. There is a lot to do. This website opens the doors for you to learn about the amazing and amusing powers of laughter. Walk through these doors and you will achieve better health, find more compassion through the Spirit of Laughter and sensible living, and enjoy your life more. WLT is a dynamic, growing organization, helping to weave together a laughter movement whose time has come. We invite you to join us at whatever level is most comfortable for you. Then, tell your friends, families, neighbors, and co-workers, and let’s get the world laughing as never before.

Our Aims:

- To create awareness of new techniques of therapeutic laughter all over the world, by setting up Laughter Clubs and imparting practical training in various techniques of laughter. Thus, we can help to cultivate the spirit of laughter by understanding ways and means of sensible living and putting them into practice through laughter.
- To set up a Professional Advisory Committee from various specialties and systems of medicine, science, business, education, other professions & occupations, and public life to advise and guide the initiatives of WLT and to advise as to the validity of scientific studies and research work as to how laughter can affect the physical, mental, social and spiritual well being of the participants.

- To maintain a website as the international clearinghouse for information, ideas, and activities of interest and importance to the laughter movement.
- To understand how laughter therapy methods may have to be modified in order to be effective in various cultures, and to share that information.
- To recognize the websites of other individuals and organizations that support the aims and philosophies of WLT and LCI. We will do this through creation of a website award to be bestowed on deserving honorees.
- To publish books, manuals, newsletters, videocassettes, CDs and other information on Laughter Therapy.
- To bring people of various countries together and promote events that bring everlasting peace through laughter.
- To create a membership-based organization for the support of WLT as a self-sustaining organization.
- To disseminate accredited training around the world, and to develop models for advance training using traditional educational methods as well as modern technological innovations, such as distance learning.
- To develop a cadre of competent accredited trainers who will train and certify Laughter Leaders.
- To promote Laughter Clubs in public places that can be free and open to everyone.
- To promote the adoption of Laughter Clubs in every long-term care facility in the United States, as well as in schools, government, and workplaces, as an effective, reputable, professional program, on a fee-for-service basis wherever it is appropriate.
- To create a professional association for accredited Laughter Leaders and providers of therapeutic laughter programs, to enhance credibility, and spread the access to these methods around the world.
- To foster international conferences, meetings, and symposia on the therapeutic benefits of laughter, laughter methods, and to foster research and the sharing of research findings.