

From high school to high wire

Area students perform under the big top in Sarasota's Sailor Circus

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MANATEE - Just because she's on a holiday week doesn't mean Monica Carrington is taking a break.

The Manatee High School senior has invested hours practicing for the Sarasota Police Athletic League Sailor Circus' 58th annual holiday show - "The Grinch Who Stole Christmas" - starting Thursday night.

Knowing she didn't have a lot of upper-body strength when she began her training with the circus, she worked extra hard, staying after regular practices to work on it.

It paid off.

"I'm proud of myself," she said. "I felt like I've improved."

She'll be performing on the Spanish Web, where she'll pull off pretty poses while suspended in mid-air on a spinning, cloth-covered rope.

Three other Manatee students also trained hard for "The Grinch Who Stole Christmas."

Emily Guiardno will perform on the Spanish Web, as well. Brothers Jason and Alec Bryant will perform on a unicycle and an old-fashioned bicycle.

"It's sort of like a play, but with circus acts involved," said Jason, a Bayshore High 10th-grader.

The show's put on by more than 100 students, fourth- through 12th-graders, who participated in the after-school circus program in Sarasota. Monica, Emily, Jason and Alec are the only students from Manatee.

The Sailor Circus used to be operated by the Sarasota School Board and was only open to Sarasota students. Since it was sponsored by the Sarasota PAL four years ago, the enrollment has been open to students from both counties.

The program opens for enrollment twice a year, said Susan Loeffler, assistant director of the circus. At the end of the four-month session, the students put on the show.

Courses are taught by retired circus pros and the Sailor Circus alumni, including Loeffler.

Students get to learn everything from clowning to juggling to trapeze and high-wire acts.

"Only thing we don't have are animals," Loeffler said.

The program requires 20 to 30 hours of training a week and attracts students with backgrounds in gymnastics or theater, Loeffler said. Those who signed up for the program must maintain good grades to continue training.

"It's a healthy thing for them to do," said Claudia Bryant, Jason and Alec's mom. "They have a homework trailer and there is a tutor in there. So there's no reason for bad grades."

What: "The Grinch Who Stole Christmas" by the PAL Sailor Circus in Sarasota

When: 7 p.m. Thursday and Friday; 11:45 a.m. and 7 p.m. Saturday

Where: The Sailor Circus Arena, 2075 Bahia Vista St., Sarasota

Tickets: Reserved seating is \$12 for children 10 and under, \$15 for adults. General admission is \$10. For tickets, call the Sailor Circus Box Office at 361-6350.