

THE SHERIFF'S STAR



SHERIFFS TACKLE TEEN DRIVING

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A Circus and a PAL

By Michelle Rinaca
Sarasota County Sheriff's Office

It's no secret that Sarasota County Sheriff Bill Balkwill has a big heart for kids. In 2004, when he heard the Sarasota County School Board was faced with having to cut the long-running Sailor Circus youth program from its budget he decided to adopt it as one of the Police Athletic League's (P.A.L.) after-school programs.

Although it has found a new home, the Sailor Circus is not your ordinary P.A.L. activity. Started as a small high school gymnastics program in 1949, it has grown into a spectacular four-ring youth circus unlike any other. Sarasota County, with its deep circus roots dating back to the beginning of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus, has embraced it. The Sailor Circus is now the longest-running youth circus program in the United States. Through the years, more than 10,000 school-aged youth have performed before audiences exceeding one million. And each performance has its unique story.

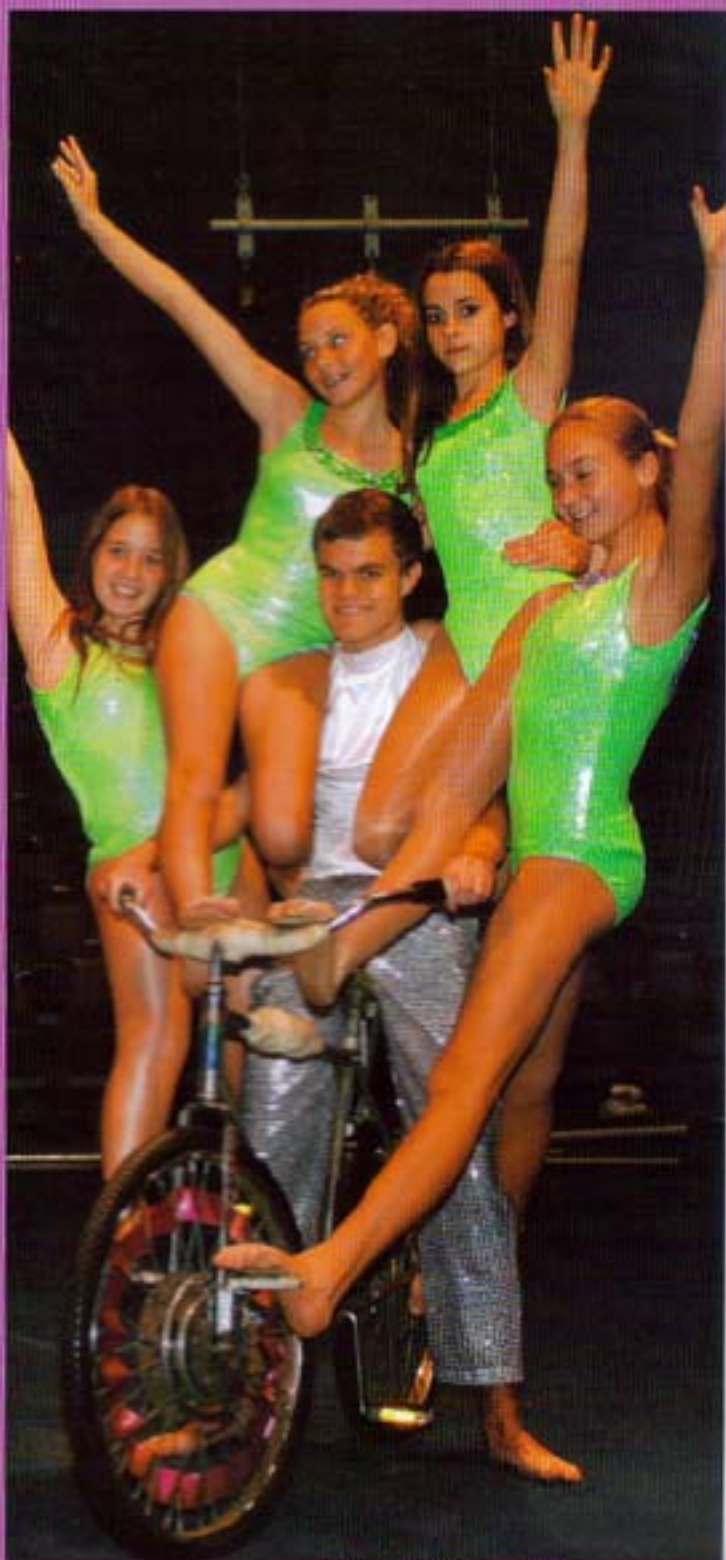
Circus attracts youth

The circus arts are used as a safe alternative teaching method and intervention program for at-risk youth in the community. You will find the students performing a mixture of traditional circus acts, such as high wire, juggling, hand balanc-

Eight years ago a 9-year-old boy with autism skipped his way into the Sailor Circus arena. He wanted to be a clown. Stevie Ray, who is now a senior in the program, has accomplished his goal and much more.

In the beginning, Ray and his coaches faced many challenges due to his condition. Each obstacle that he was able to overcome helped him gain a stronger sense of self-worth and confidence. With the help of his coaches and the loving support of his peers, he not only met his initial goals, but also was able to achieve a level of accomplishment that no one had considered possible. In addition to becoming a clown, he jumps off a pedestal to launch another performer from the teeterboard and rides the bicycle built for five. All of these feats of skill and strength take place in front of audiences of over 20,000 people each year.

Ray has grown into a fine performer and a confident young man who is successful in school and maintains a part-time job. His success in the Sailor Circus has helped him develop into an asset to the community and a source of pride for his family. He is an inspiration to the program and motivates all who are involved to make sure the Sailor Circus continues to be The Greatest "Little" Show on Earth.



ing and aerial acrobatics with the more modern Cirque-du-Soleil type

acts. It is truly a stunning show that is enjoyable for all ages. Students

receive constant support and encouragement while attending the Sailor Circus program, but the support extends much further. Graduating seniors are rewarded for their positive behavior and hard work with college scholarships encouraging their continued success in school.

Sheriff Balkwill and P.A.L. are fully committed to ensuring this program's long-term future. Shortly after assuming responsibility for the Sailor Circus in 2005, an advisory committee was formed to study the existing facility and make recommendations to Hoyt Architects. The advisory committee includes circus professionals as well as local business owners. Among them: Scott Osgood, head of rigging for Cirque-du-Soleil; Debra Walk, curator of the Ringling Circus Museum; Phil Mancini, Michael's on East Restaurant; John Saputo, Gold Coast Eagle Distributing; Pete Adams, president-elect of the Circus Fans of America; and Jon Swift, president of Jon Swift Construction and current P.A.L. board president.

After several months of careful evaluation and discussions with community and government officials, P.A.L. has launched a Capital Campaign to completely renovate the existing arena and grounds. The

current facility, which is not climate controlled, is utilized by the public only 14 days a year. The goal of this campaign is to raise \$6 million for the complete transformation of the property into a multi-functional community facility. Upon completion, it is anticipated that the new facility will be used between 60 and 70 days a year for events that will serve the community and generate revenue that will fund P.A.L. programs. Funds will go to the Sailor Circus Foundation Endowment to ensure the long-term future of the Sailor Circus in Sarasota County.

The primary function of this new facility will be to serve as the permanent home of the Sailor Circus youth program and headquarters for the Police Athletic League in Sarasota County. The planned renovations include a new roof, floor, seating structure and complete climate control systems for the performance arena. The rigging for the circus shows will be redirected to the ceiling instead of the floor, there will be star dressing rooms and a green room will be added to the arena. A catering kitchen will be constructed to facilitate events requiring food service. All of the old outbuildings will be replaced by the new Educational/Activity Center, which will house a gymnasium, the

Sailor Circus Museum, new restroom facilities and administrative offices.

With the renovation of the existing facility, the community will have a 31,000 sq. ft., climate-controlled arena located in a prime midtown location that will be able to host concerts, artistic performances, trade shows, community fairs, galas and other revenue-generating events. Additionally, the gymnasium facility, located in the new Educational/Activity Center, will be available as a 7,800 sq. ft. meeting or events hall that can be rented out to the business community for meetings, parties or other revenue-generating events.

The success of the capital campaign will rely heavily upon donations made by individuals or corporations. The Sailor Circus is looking for donors that support programs which motivate young people to channel their energies into activities that build character and self esteem, and those who want to see the continuation of the Sailor Circus as a Sarasota institution.

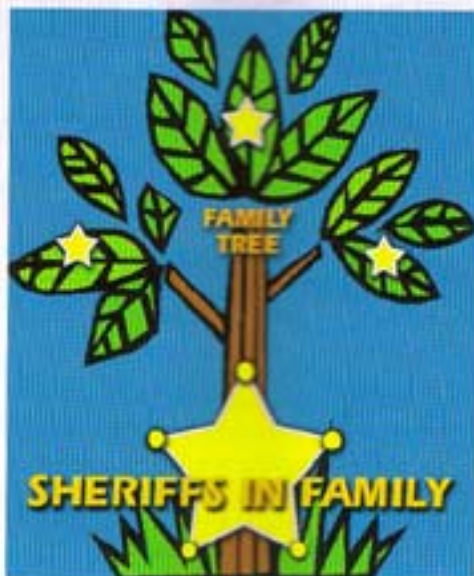
If you are interested in contributing to the future of the Sailor Circus please contact Lt. Keith Muncy at (941) 316-8108 or visit online at www.sailorcircus.org. ☉

Is There A Florida Sheriff In Your Family Tree?

Regular readers of *The Sheriff's Star* magazine may recall the excerpts we have been publishing from "The Encyclopedia of Florida Sheriffs," which is being compiled and edited by Victor R. Silvestri.

Silvestri recently wrote to FSA to announce the "final call" for information so he can focus on getting the book published. If you have information on active Sheriffs, retired or former Sheriffs and families of deceased Sheriffs, he wants to hear from you.

The encyclopedia will include a



comprehensive list of Florida Sheriffs, including condensed biographies, family genealogies and history of their service, from 1821 to 2006. The projected date of availability is December 2007.

If you haven't yet responded, send information no later than August 2007 to: Victor R. Silvestri, Editor, 561 Tall Oaks Road, Defuniak Springs, FL 32435-8972, or e-mail him: summers@gdsys.net. His phone is: 850-892-6962.

Please note that this project is independent of the Florida Sheriffs Association, although we support Silvestri in his efforts. Be sure to correspond directly with him (not FSA) for timely consideration. ☉