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111th Circus Works Its Magic, Brings Some Tarheels Home

By NICHOLAS HANCOCK
Editor

It's billed as "The Greatest Show On Earth" and it was happening right in the heart of Asheville this past weekend. And, nearly 38,000 western North Carolina residents forgot about a depressed economy, El Salvador and other problems to trek to the Asheville Civic Center to let the 111th Edition of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus work its magic on them from Friday through Sunday.

Spectators packed the arena for each of the seven 2½ shows as over 100 performers presented 25 acts that were designed to amuse and titillate "ladies and gentlemen and children of all ages."

The acrobats, the bears, clowns, tigers, trapeze artists and show girls all seemed bigger than life itself once the lights went up and the band struck up the first number.

IF YOU HAD an ounce of kid left in you at all, you were hooked and you let the spectacle carry you away to a fantasy land of sparkling colors and exotic sounding names. La Tosca, the Flying Farfans, and The Parvanovi bedazzled the senses with their aerial acts and teeter board catapults.

But then there was Charlie Frye and Keith Green and Bobby Batchelor — all a part of the exotic extravaganza, but at the same time, very much a part of "down home" North Carolina.

Batchelor was a school teacher in Franklin before he began playing drums in the circus band. A native of Greensboro, he got his start with the show a few years ago when band director Keith Green called him in Franklin to come over and sit in with the group while the circus was in Asheville.

Batchelor became hooked, the drummer's slot became open, and now he and his wife, Diane, travel permanently with the show. Diane, also a Greensboro native, works as a show girl in the production numbers.

GREEN'S STORY is similar to Batchelor's, except that he was thrust into

being music conductor for the show almost before he was ready for it, in his opinion.

Green, 36, grew up in Asheboro where he established a reputation as a hot trumpet player in the high school band. After graduation, he studied music in Boston and then worked with several orchestras in New York.

"I returned to Asheboro and did some road work with a band for a while, and then one day I received a call from the band director of the red unit who asked me to play with the show in Greensboro one weekend," he said.

"After Greensboro, they asked me to play the next show in Fayetteville. Then in Raleigh. So I said 'sure.' When we got to Raleigh, the band director had a heart attack and died, and they wanted me to become director. I told them 'no way.' I wasn't about to go out there and make a fool of myself," Green said.

But he agreed to stay with the show and learn the routines, while the organist directed the group. In nine months, he took over the director's job.

THAT WAS NINE years ago, and Green said he still loves the work and enjoys the people associated with the show.

"It's like a Broadway show — with animals. It doesn't seem like it's been 10 years, it's gone by so fast," he said.

Green and his wife, Michelle, live in an apartment in one of the circus train cars.

"We're at home wherever we go. They haul my car on the train for us to use in towns — I feel like we've got it made," he said.

One slight drawback from touring 85 cities in ten months is not knowing where you are, he admitted. "I'll call my parents in Asheboro, and they'll ask me where I am and half the time I don't know. I just tell them 'some city,'" he said.

CHARLIE FRYE is a clown. He's just in his third year with the show and critics are already saying Frye is going to be the next "really great clown."

Frye is from Clemmons, near Winston Salem, and he said he began clowning thirteen years ago with his father and grandfather.

"They were semi-professional clowns who would get bookings for nearby events and I would go along as a kid. I did that for about 10 years, then I went to the circus' Clown College in Florida to study before I got on the show," he said.

NOW IN HIS mid-twenties, Frye works the show along with the clown group, but he also has a solo spot during the show in ring number one where he demonstrates his juggling and balancing skills as well as comedy.

Backstage, he was personable and witty as he prepared the props for the next clown act. And, he took a few minutes to talk with Joel Knisley of Mars Hill about Clown College and the art of clowning.

From the vantage point of backstage, the larger-than-life performers become the whole persons that they are.

The young boys of the Parvanovi, Dukovi and Kovatchevi families from Bulgaria played tag and conducted mock karate fights while they waited to enter the rings to perform double somersaults with full twists to the top of a four-man tower. The little girl, about six or seven years old, who performs a perfect double somersault from the trapeze 30 feet above the arena floor was really just a very little girl.

LOU JACOBS, the veteran master clown, became a kind old gentleman who showed some weariness after nearly 60 years behind the makeup. Walking down the corridor, sans makeup and in street clothes, he could have been anybody's grandpa.

But Jacobs and the little girl and the school teacher from Franklin, and all the other cast members of the "Broadway show with animals," became a special part of the magic of the circus when ringmaster Kit Haskett intoned, "Ladees and gentlemen..."

Just ask anybody who was there with cotton candy on their face. They'll tell you.



Photo by N. Hancock

CIRCUS ARRIVES — Many kids dream of running away to join the circus, but Buffy Gebel, 11, would have to run away to get out of it. The son of famous animal trainer, Gunther Gebel-Williams, helped unload the

animals from the circus train Friday after the Red Unit of the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus arrived in Asheville for a three-day engagement.

Mars Hill Public Housing Units Get Tentative Approval



Photo by N. Hancock

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT — Members of the Madison County Housing Authority Board discuss plans for 40 new units in Mars Hill with County Commissioners Chairman James Ledford (third from left) at the Housing

Authority open house Friday. Board members are (l-r) Garland Woody, Emery Wallin, Maynard Cody, Sam Parker and David Caldwell.

The Madison County Housing Authority has received tentative approval from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development for 40 public housing units in Mars Hill. The announcement was made by Housing Authority board members Friday during an open house at the authority's offices in Marshall.

The \$1.8 million housing project will begin on Jim Jarvis Road next to Madison Manor Nursing home once final approval arrives from HUD, Sam Parker, director of the Housing Authority, said.

The housing development will include 12 units of three-bedroom houses and 28 units of two-bedroom quadruplex apartments, Parker said. Two units will be designed for handicapped occupancy. Also included in the development will be

paved streets and parking areas, street lighting and a play area for children.

Parker said site development work is expected to begin sometime this summer.

Friday's open house was held to acquaint residents with the activities and services of the Housing Authority. The agency was established in April 1980 for the purpose of providing adequate housing for the citizens of Madison County, Parker said.

The Housing Authority currently operates a Community Development Housing Rehabilitation program and a Section 8 Rental program.

Current board members are Emery Wallin, chairman; Garland Woody, Maynard Cody, Dr. Don Anderson and David Caldwell.

Hot Springs Health Program Kicks Off Building Fund Drive

The Building and Fund Raising Committee of the Hot Springs Health Program announces the start of their drive to raise \$50,000 for the new Hot Springs Health Center. During the 19 day event, scheduled to begin on Friday, March 26, volunteers will be soliciting door-to-door throughout the Hot Springs, Spring Creek area.

According to Garland Woody, Chairman of the Committee, "In addition to taking donations, the volunteers will be distributing information pamphlets concerning the services offered by the program."

The proposed facility will be located next to the Madison

County Ambulance Service office in Hot Springs. The building will contain approximately 3,700 square feet of space to be used for three examination rooms, a minor trauma room, radiology, laboratory, pharmacy, two dental operatories, and associated offices, storage, and waiting areas.

Ground will be broken in April, with occupancy expected in November of this year.

The projected cost of this new facility including construction, site purchase, and professional fees is \$350,000. Funding for the facility will come from three areas: a grant from the Appalachian

Regional Commission; a loan from the Farmers Home Administration of the USDA; and from the upcoming fund drive.

Contributions of any amount are being accepted. Any person, family, or business donating \$100 or more will have their name inscribed on a plaque in the waiting room of the center. Persons donating \$50 or more may have door plaques inscribed in honor of, or in memory of a relative or friend. During the past fundraising drives in Laurel and Marshall-Walnut various family members contributed together, and offered their donations in memory of their parents.

The Hot Springs Health Pro-

gram is a community-based organization founded in 1971 to improve both the quality and availability of health care in Central and Western Madison County. The Program currently offers a wide range of primary medical services in its three locations in Hot Springs, Laurel, and Marshall-Walnut.

During the past year the program has provided for over 15,500 encounters in the medical, dental, and home health areas. Its staff includes physicians, a dentist, a pharmacist, mid-level practitioners, a health educator, and clinical, dental, and pharmacy assistants.

FBEMC Waiting For Dam Project Approval

Another step has been taken in the process of renovating the Capota Dam in Marshall to provide hydroelectric power for French Broad Electric Membership Corp.

An environmental impact report has found no significant impact from the proposed project on the French Broad River or surrounding area, ac-

cording to Charles Tolley, general manager of FBEMC.

To date, all preparations for the proposed \$7.5 million renovation project have been completed and FBEMC is "sitting around waiting" for the Rural Electrification Administration to give final approval for the project, Tolley said.

The existing dam and powerhouse will be renovated and connected to the Marshall substation by a two-mile-long powerline. The renovation will include regrouting the existing dam and adding a splash block and new sluice gates. In addition, the existing powerhouse will be demolished and a new building with two 1.5 mega watt turbine units will be constructed, Tolley said.

If REA approves the project soon, initial construction could begin as early as this fall, Tolley said. He projected a late start in the spring of 1983.