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Circus comes to town

by Courtney Hunt, 8/31/2005

Circus Chimera is coming to Eureka and will hold a show today and twice on Thursday at the Bayshore Mall.

The circus, which is based out of Hugo, Okla., has been running since 1997 and performs more than 1,000 times each year.

Jim Judkins, the founder of Circus Chimera, said the circus is unique because it caters to children and adults alike.

"Around the turn of the century, circuses were the number one form of entertainment," he said. "But a lot of them were geared toward 3-year-olds and not toward adults. We try to not make it a chore for parents to bring their children (to the circus)."

Judkins, who has been in the circus business for 22 years, decided to start the circus after seeing circuses in other countries. The differences between performances in Europe, Asia and Mexico versus those in the United States astounded him.

"Circuses abroad are high-class shows," he said, adding that a lot of the shows that traveled around the United States at the time were boring and insulting to the performers.

Circus arts in Europe and Asia are similar to ballet and theater in the United States. European academies exist for people who desire to train for circuses, he said.

Judkins decided he wanted to start a circus that would combine the European-style circus arts with the tradition of Hispanic arts, which is multigenerational and is based on performers teaching themselves tricks.

Additionally, Judkins thought the performances should be affordable for everyone. He said that Cirque du Soleil, which had begun just a few years before, had such high prices that the average person could not afford to attend.

"We wanted to have a high-quality show with a reasonable price for families," he said. "Something so that people don't feel cheated when they go to it."

Circus Chimera costs \$10-\$16 per person, depending on which seats are available.

For a two-hour live performance, that's not bad, Judkins said.

Unlike many other circuses worldwide, Circus Chimera does not have exotic animal performances.

"One of the reasons circuses really started using exotic animals in their performances in the 19th century was to create an educational veneer for children," said circus publicity coordinator Patrizia DiLucchio.

With the increase in education and variety of animals in zoos across the country, traveling with exotic animals became unnecessary, she said.

The circus employs about 86 performers and requires 30 vehicles to haul the equipment across the country. From February to November, the circus holds performances in Western states like Washington, Oregon, California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma and Colorado.

Performances at the circus include juggling, trapeze and magic acts, comedy by a renowned clown and a contortionist act by a former Russian Olympic gymnast.

According to DiLucchio, the best part of the circus is not the production itself, but the individual acts.

"What you're watching is human skill and endurance," she said. "It's more about their abilities and talents than about the production grade. You really get to watch the performance and think about how they are doing that."

Showtimes are tonight at 7:30 and Thursday at 4:30 and 7:30 p.m.

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