

# Circus returns to Central Oregon

By Jodi Schneider  
Correspondent

Get ready for the “Greatest Show on Earth” — Halloween weekend with the Venardos Circus when it returns to Redmond at the Deschutes Fairgrounds under the big top.

The stage will have live socially distanced audiences from October 29 through November 1, for the first shows in front of a live audience since COVID-19.

The circus has always been one of the most popular forms of public entertainment in the world. It’s hard to conceive of just how popular it was in its American heyday. America grew up with the circus. Whole towns shut down on that day — schools, shops, and offices — an occasion when everyone enjoyed the old-fashioned magic of the circus.

The Venardos Circus, a unique theatrical stage, animal-free performance, has been touring the nation since its debut at the L.A. County Fair in 2014. The production has revamped the American Circus tradition for a new generation with Broadway-style flair. Theater lovers and nostalgic circus fans will appreciate the intimate experience and sentimental way the show pays homage to circus traditions through the lens of high-quality entertainment for a modern family audience.

In 2000 the creator of Venardos Circus, Kevin Venardos, landed a job as ringmaster of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus from an open call audition in New York as a young actor.

Venardos said, “It was just a random audition when I was 22 and living in New York City trying to be a singing and dancing man.”

Venardos lived on the Ringling Bros. train, then the largest privately-owned train in the world, hauling elephants, clowns, tigers, props, tent-poles and trapeze artists from coast to coast.

He had found his calling. “I worked there for five years and performed live before more than 35 million people in that time,” Venardos explained. “Later, from 2009-2010, I wore the top hat at Big Apple Circus in New York City, but by then I didn’t know how much longer I could keep finding shows to hire me as the ringmaster.”

In 2014, Venardos took his talent for entertaining and set out to start his own circus show. He created the Venardos Circus, which he calls “the American circus with the heart of a Broadway show.”

“My first gig as a producer was at the L.A. County Fair with a 30-minute outdoor show,” Venardos said. “The next year added a date, the next a few more, and

eventually we learned to sell tickets to our own events. As of March 2020, we had transformed that tiny outdoor show into a 45-week, 30-city national tour across the United States.”

Heather Atherton, public relations person for the production, said, “Kevin’s message of following your dreams, loving one another, and general positivity is something we all could use more of right now. It’s always been a big part of the circus’ appeal (celebrating all types/talents) but he brings it into today’s context and it really resonates.”

She added, “Last summer when we were in Redmond at the Deschutes Fairgrounds in June for our first visit, Kevin fell in love with the area. He and his family returned there to quarantine in June, where they have continued to do livestream shows monthly. We are so excited to be able to start doing some in-person shows there. We really enjoyed the community last year and quietly being a part of it the past few months.”

When COVID-19 struck last March, Venardos Circus, like other performing arts and cultural organizations, closed their doors due to the virus.

Venardos said, “Everything stopped in March with the lockdown. It was also the moment my daughter, Andi



PHOTO PROVIDED

Juggling knives on the edge of a sword – Venardos Circus offers many such thrills in their first Covid-era live performance.

Lane, was born (*Friday the 13th of March!*) So, I’ve seen this pandemic through her eyes, and it has given me another measure of resolve to get out there and find a way forward.

“In May we launched our first livestream and had no idea what was technically involved in quality online broadcasting, a lot of trial and error followed. Even though we were only doing one show a month, we learned a lot, and because expenses were much lower with the tour not working, we turned our focus to the digital, and were soon drawing 1,000+ ticketed attendees to the online event.”

He added, “Now, after seven months, we’ll begin

layering in social distancing, and a reduced-capacity live event. We are working together with the digital revenue streams, and it will be a path forward for this ‘Little Circus That Could.’ We’re eager to help build some new fun memories with families who are seeking some normalcy in family traditions again.

“We’ll be at a much smaller seating capacity than before, no tent walls for now, masked, and in socially distanced pods. But we’ll be making ‘live’ magic again.”

What can Sisters attendees expect to see during the Venardos Circus? A beautiful

See **CIRCUS** on page 17

**LIVE EVENT**

# VENARDOS CIRCUS

**The Circus Is Back!**  
**The famous, Venardos Circus is back! Presenting a special Spooky Spectacular Halloween Show with socially-distanced seating for in-person enjoyment! It's time to go to the Circus!**

**BUY TICKETS ONLINE!**

**LiveYourCircusDream.com**

**Deschutes County Fair & Expo Center • Oct 29th – Nov 1st**  
**THURS Oct 29th 7pm • FRI Oct 30th 7pm • SAT Oct 31st 12pm, 3pm & 6pm • SUN Nov 1st 1pm & 4pm.**