

Circus raises funds for non-profit groups

Switchboard brings performers to town

By David Brown
Of the Emerald

"Come on! What are you? A man or a mouse!" squawks the irritating man from his perch inside the dunk tank. For 50 cents you can buy three softballs and three chances to silence the man's arrogant antagonism.

There may be drier fund-raising methods, but Switchboard wanted to sponsor something that would lift morale for the entire non-profit community, says Kathy Ricciuty, Switchboard's circus coordinator.

And the Pickle Family Circus wanted to play Eugene. "They love to play in Eugene," says Marie Fink, Switchboard Director.

So the internationally-known circus presented four open air shows as the main attraction last weekend. Twelve area non-profits and public services hosted an "old fashioned circus midway of food and game booths," courtesy of Switchboard, Eugene's information and referral service.

Larry Pisoni, from a vaudeville family, founded the Pickle Family Circus after studying circus arts at New York University and touring the East Coast with his juggling act. He wanted an old time circus in touch with the people, Ricciuty says.

The extravaganza generally caters to non-profit fund raisers.

The arrangements "took just a phenomenal amount of work. Even though this is a fund raiser, people are so broke that they don't have the energy or the money to make money," Ricciuty says.

"People are moving out of town. A lot of businesses are closing. We feel that we have to take some kind of positive action," Ricciuty says.

"A mortality rate" threatens non-profits, Fink says. Educational services and outreach programs which keep people informed as to what an agency has to offer are the most frequent casualties. "When an agency's survival is threatened, it pulls in its forces," Fink explains.

"We just got news that we will no longer be receiving the Lane County Board of Commissioners Agenda of meetings" because of county budget cuts, she notes.

The effect of the current economy has been "tremendous" on Switchboard's budget. "At one point we had six staff people," Fink says. Following federal CETA cuts, Switchboard now has two full-time and one part-time staff people.

Donations from private institutions also decreased because less money now circulates to private institutions and churches, Fink says.

Uncertainty about the economy may also be a great factor in the reluctance of private institutions to donate to non-profits, says Raymond Albano, program director of the Amity Foundation.

Amity, which hosted a booth at the circus, has been "pretty dependent on grants from the federal department of



Photo by Erich Boekelheide

A youngster enjoys a pony ride sponsored by the Cascade Valley Waldorf School at a Switchboard-coordinated fundraiser. The ride took in \$35 Saturday and Sunday.

energy. There are no more grants for us there," Albano says.

Contributions from businesses have fallen since numerous organizations began turning to business as an alternative to losses of government funds, Albano says.

good resource for non-profits, they do not replace "solid dollars," Albano says. They do not replace research and materials used in projects such as Amity's solar green house.

The green house creates an environment in which plants filter air for fish which supply waste fertilizer for vegetable starts in return. The system's inputs are sun, fish food, water and seedlings. The output is transplant-sized starts.

Rather than continue similar projects independently, Amity hopes to cooperate with other organizations on fund raisers like the circus and various projects.

"Maybe that (cooperation) is one of the positive things that's happened out of Reaganomics," Albano adds.

Frugality, ingenuity and expanded fund raising comprise the major part of new survival tactics for the Cascade Valley Waldorf School, says LeeAnn Ermandes, the school's fund raising coordinator. The school's pony ride had raised \$35 towards the end of the circus's first of two days.

The school depends on parents' contributions and tuition, she says.

Despite "tremendous financial strains, the school just keeps on going because of parent support," Ermandes says. She says parents feel strongly towards the school's philosophy and wouldn't want their children going to school elsewhere.

The school "educates the whole child" rather than "just the intellect," she explains.

But many parents have lost their jobs,

Ermandes says. "We are looking real hard for tuition assistance for parents."

For outside income, the school currently approaches private foundations through personal friends in those organizations. In the past, they approached businesses for donations. But there is less money available through business sources.

Doing a little business of their own, organizations participating in the circus invested their "unrestricted funds" to make those funds grow. Unrestricted funds are money that organizations raise on their own rather than receive through "earmarked" donations, explains Fink. Switchboard generates unrestricted funds through the sale of their "Human Services Guide" for "cost plus a little bit" and slight charges for their ride share service, says Fink.

The menu for Switchboard's midway booth included corn on the cob, fruit, juices and baked goods. They also hosted the dunk barrel.

One of Switchboard's biggest returns from the circus project has been working with the cooperation of Eugene Parks and Recreation and the Downtown Association. This cooperation opens the door to further correlation between the city and non-profits, says Fink.

A recent letter from Mayor Gus Keller reads, "As Mayor of Eugene, I am pleased to support the efforts of local and public service agencies to bring the Pickle Family Circus to this community."

For the future, Fink plans more extensive community net-working and a volunteer member drive.

EUGENE SWITCHBOARD INC

VINTAGE TELEPHONE CIRCA 1947

Logo courtesy of Switchboard

Amity now tries to develop local support. For example, Albano says Amity has submitted a proposal to the community BLOCK grant program to develop an organic marketing co-op. The co-op supplies a market outlet for local organic farmers who are members.

Even though volunteers represent a

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