

Circus *from A1*

PHOTOS BY DAMIEN SHERWOOD/COTTAGE GROVE SENTINEL

Performances included the Perez Family (above) pulling off a breath-taking balancing act on the Wheel of Destiny and jungle cat trainer Trey Key (right) convincing Francis the Lion to stick out his tongue.

erinary care” and allowed a tiger cub to be “hand-raised in a capricious manner that led to poor nutrition.”

“It’s not about getting rid of the circus,” said protestor Rylee Smelser. “It’s about getting rid of the animals and the abuse.”

McMahan also emphasized that, while she would love to see the circus, her concern was with animals being kept outside their natural environments.

“Horses, poodles, all of those domestic animals — good. Wild animals —

bad,” she said. “We would love to see these specific cats released to a sanctuary where they can live out the rest of their natural lives with proper veterinary care.”

Trey Key, general manager of the circus and performer and trainer of the big cats, played down the list of citations.

“It’s an embellishment of our USDA record,” Key said. “Those citations are civil offenses — they are not criminal offenses of animal cruelty.”

tions were demonstrably above board.

“If there were something wrong with the way they were being kept, don’t you think between the public seeing us every day and authorities inspecting us in a place like California ... don’t you think California would’ve found it by now,” he asked.

Acton added that the company is inspected regularly by state, federal and local authorities, including veterinary visits once every 30 days on top of random pop-ups.

“We always invite folks to come by in the morning for our tour and see for themselves the conditions the happy animals are kept in,” he said.

Despite the handful of protesters at the circus entrance, Key estimated nearly 1,000 people turned out for the production, which was good news for circus sponsor Coast Fork Kiwanis Club.

“Everyone seems to be having a good time,” said the club’s past president Don Gould. “We’re proud to bring the circus to Cottage Grove.”

The Kiwanis Club is also working in partnership with Court Appointed Special Advocates, a nonprofit which advocates for children in foster care. A portion of the proceeds from the circus ticket sales are funneled toward a Christmas event at the end of the year.

“This the third or fourth time we’ve worked with the Kiwanis Club,” Key said, estimating that roughly 98 percent of the towns they stop in provide similar local sponsorship.

Gould confirmed that fundraising this year was looking positive.

“It’s much more successful than previous years,” he said.



Key pointed to the company’s most recent citation as being a simple paperwork violation in which a signature was missing.

“You are not allowed to redefine ‘animal cruelty’ as ‘animals in entertainment,’” Key said. “If you disagree with it, that’s fine. Don’t go to the show.”

Of the two tigers and lion, Key said they were procured 14 years ago from a Texas zoo which had been neglectful of the animals.

“Those animals were born in east Texas,” he

said. “These are domestically bred animals. There’s nothing wild about them. They’re exotic, yes, but they are not wild.”

Key resented implications that his big cats were being mistreated.

“I don’t treat them like replacement animals,” he said. “They are as much family to me as my wife or mom.”

Key pointed to California as having particularly stringent rules in regards to animal welfare and, as the circus had just come through the state, condi-

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