



Photo by Pat O'Malley

The lady and the tiger (above) are both popular with circus audiences. The circus is supposed to be fun for children of all ages, but it is the younger children (below) who seem to enjoy it most.

## Under the big-top

By **SUSAN HOPKINS**

Battalion Reporter

A man becomes a boy again when the circus comes to town. He sees the bright lights, the midnight blue big top tent and the colorful costumes that have transformed a cold, yellow-striped parking lot into a fantasy land for "children of all ages," and he remembers immediately the sights, smells and sounds of his childhood.

Crowds mill about the grounds, dazzled by souvenirs and thrilled by rides on elephants, or smiles of clowns. They gather around stands which send out aromas of hot dogs, pop corn and cotton candy, and before even the oldest or most sophisticated individual enters the Circus Vargas Big Top Tent, he is enthralled in the youthfulness of the circus that is over 150 years old.

Clifford E. Vargas, president and producer of Circus Vargas, set out to preserve the big top circus (founded in 1815), after Life Magazine predicted the end of this American tradition in 1956. Vargas was successful.

Over 300 employees came to Bryan/College Station Monday and Tuesday to share a show full of stunts, animals, music and laughs that have been developing and entertaining people for 15 years. About 20,000 people were exposed to one of the circus' four performances in the parking lot of Townshire Shopping Center.

Under the 90,000-square-foot canvas, the "child" in everyone enjoyed acts that included trained dogs, trapeze artists, juggling mesmerizers, liberty and dressage horses, high wire histrionics, contortionists, aerial artists, lions and trainers, clowns, cloud swingers, trick horseback riders and a parade of elephants.

Oohs and aahs from the crowd indicated that aerial artistry was a favorite act, although it was not until the fourth try that a mid-air triple somersault was completed by the performers.

Bright, spotty lighting, long, hard-to-see acts, and expensive food prices took away a bit of the sparkling fantasy one expects at the circus. But Circus Vargas did bring a life and temporary excitement to Bryan.

And, after all, that is exactly what Vargas was striving for when he undertook the job of reviving the old and dying tradition of the circus big top.



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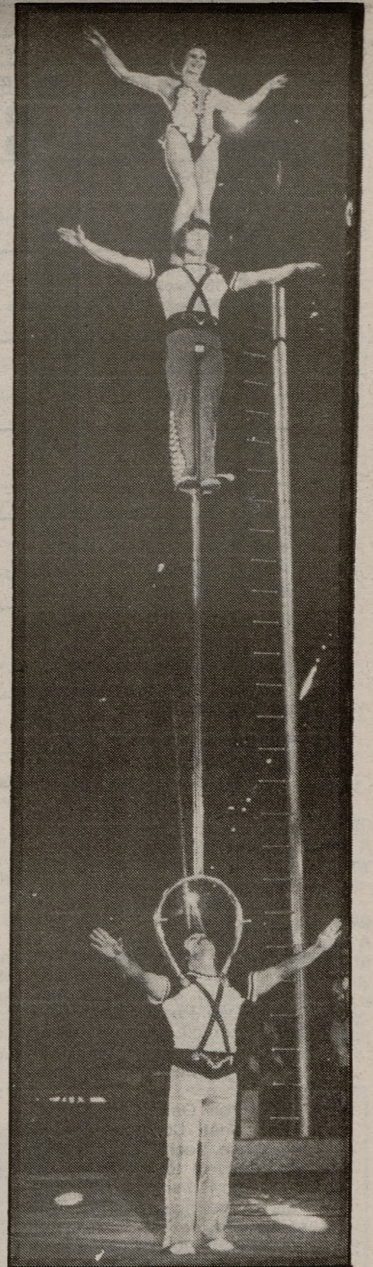


Photo by Pat O'Malley

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