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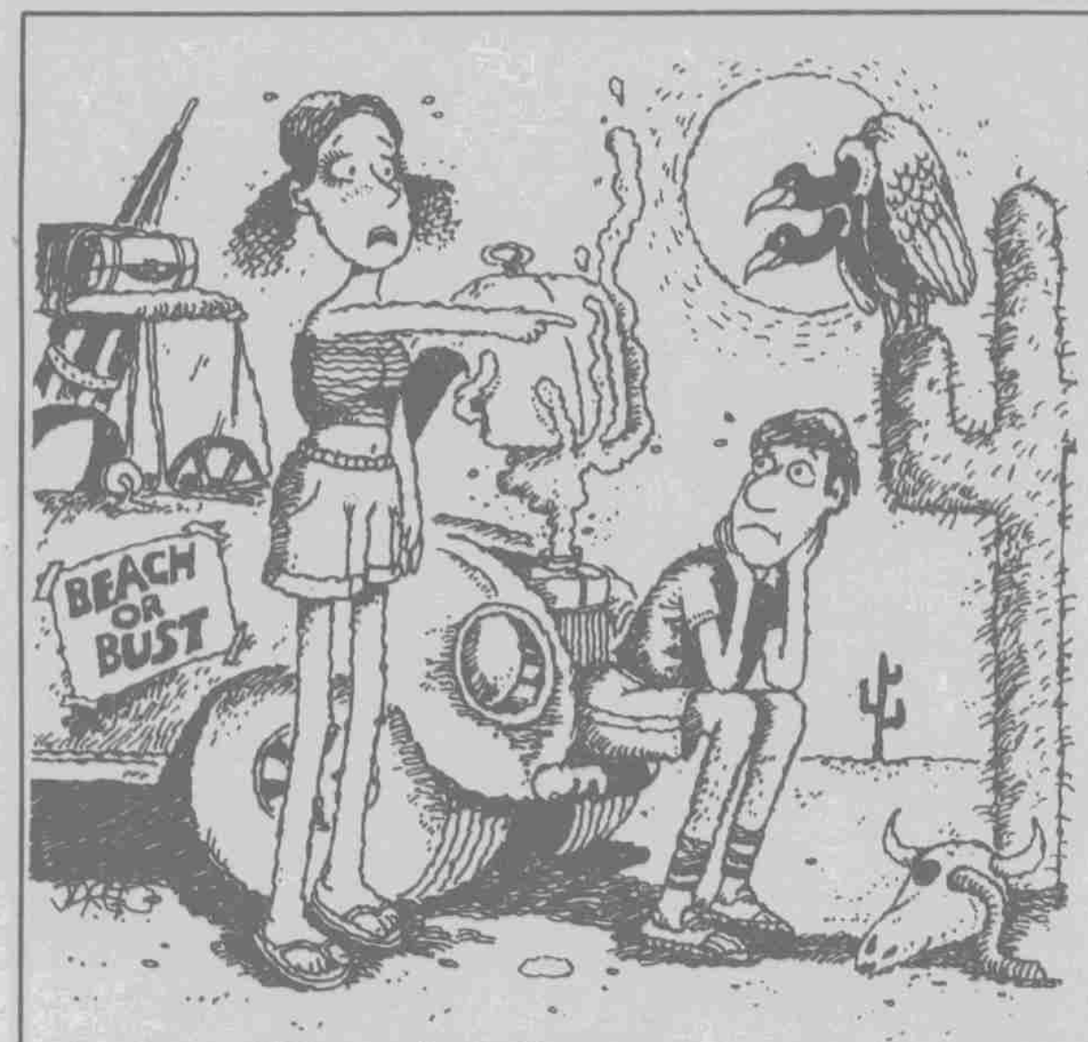

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Lions, tigers and bears! Shrine Circus in Lincoln

La-a-a-dies and gentlemen! Boys and girls of all ages! The circus is in town!

Preparations began Sunday night to transform the State Fairgrounds Coliseum into a three-ring Big Top as the 38th edition of the Lincoln Shrine Circus rolled into the capital city.

The circus officially begins this afternoon at 3:30 when the traditional circus parade makes its way down O Street.

This year's circus features 19 acts, all new except for the elephants and the elephant-riding leopards, circus producer Grace McIntosh said Monday.

McIntosh, who has produced the Lincoln Shrine Circus for the last 15 years, said this year's show will feature all of the most popular circus acts including trapeze artists, high-wire walkers, lions and tigers and bears, balancing acts and clowns.

The Shrine Circus is being brought to Lincoln by the Sesostris Temple, more commonly known as the Shriners.

Jim Mulder, a Shriner and the circus director, said the main reasons for presenting the circus are to entertain children and handicapped people and to raise money for future Shrine programs.

These programs include public relations efforts to contact crippled children that need to go to the Shrine Children's Hospital in St. Paul, Minn., and providing funds to transport such children and their families to the hospital.

Mulder said the Shrine organization pays about $100,000 to bring the circus to Lincoln each year. But the circus grosses about $160,000, and the $60,000 profit is used to finance other Shriner projects.

Attendance for the circus's 12 performances will be about 30,000 people, Mulder said. The Fairgrounds Coliseum seats about 3,800 people. Last year's total attendance was 33,015.

"If we get 3,000 at each performance, we'll be real happy," Mulder said.

The Shrine Circus is organized as a collection of acts from around the country. McIntosh said she contacts the acts she wants for each year's circus, organizes the acts and produces the show for the Shrine organizations around the state.

McIntosh, who has been producing circuses for 20 years, said she also produces shows around the country for other groups like police associations and the Kiwanis Club.

Her circuses always are built around the most popular acts, like the wild animals, trapeze acts, clowns and acrobats, she said. Other acts are added to complete the show.

Acts featured in this year's show will include Jack Cook's Comedy Car clown act; The Stanek's pole-balancing act; the flying trapeze act of the Great Valencias; the Maraden Duo's high wire act; lions and tigers trained and presented by Joseph Marcan; the Shrine Circus Elephants trained and presented by Bill and Barbara Woodcock; and the Quassars, who perform acrobatic acts around a rocket ship hanging high above the floor.

McIntosh said the Lincoln facility has more of a circus atmosphere than some of the other places her circus performs.

"I like this place. It's more circusy," she said. "The people are closer. They enjoy the acts more when they are closer."

Mulder called the Shriners' involvement in presenting the circus "a pretty big effort by a lot of people." He said 50 to 70 Shriners volunteer to work as ushers, ticket and concession sellers and to help decorate the coliseum. About 700 to 800 people may be involved in working on the circus project from October, when the planning begins, until the April show, he said.

The circus will feature evening and matinee performances. Evening performances are at 7:30, Tuesday through Saturday. Matinee performances are at 2:30 Wednesday through Friday, noon and 3:30 on Saturday and 1:00 and 4:30 on Sunday.

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