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missed. Today, quaint circuses compete with — and often get obliterated by — video games and TV.

The circus' nostalgic value still endures, though.

"The big tops were much bigger than this," said Howard Gray, of Farmington Hills, who used to see circuses on Oakman and Grand River and at the State Fairgrounds. "My wife (Beulah) got me out of bed this morning and said, 'We're going to watch them put up the tent.'"

With an antiquated Argus camera in hand, David Boulton, 55, intently watched the one ring circus before him under the big tent.

The Farmington resident had seen his share of circuses at the State Fairgrounds. This was different, he said.

"It's much more intimate. Instead of the three rings, this is just one," Boulton said. "You can see so much more and it's right on top of you."

Horses pranced, clowns goofed and acrobats stumbled, all for the entertainment of several hundred who attended two performances Saturday afternoon.

With no air conditioning in the canvas tent, Microsof's Bill Gates would've clamored for the snow cone concession. Despite the heat, children watched with mouths agape while parents wiped their brows and clapped.

Kids thrilled over the horses and elephants and giggled at the clowns. Parents — mainly dads — liked the adroit maneuvers of contortionist and rope master, the Fabulous Stephanie.

"I think this is great," said Jan Rose of Farmington Hills, who was joined by her 75-year-old mother Evelyn and 9-year-old son Matthew. "I like the other circuses,

too. But I really enjoyed this one."

Dick and Lucille Moan brought the grandchildren, who are visiting from Wisconsin. "It was cool," said Ben Pekarski, 9.

"Kids are supposed to like the circus, right?" said Dick Moan, who lives in Livonia. "I've seen a few circuses myself. That was a long time ago ... a very long time ago."

Outside the big top, visitors could see large snakes, take pony rides or jump in a moon walk.

For \$3, Viola the elephant took people for a lumbering jaunt on her back. The cash helps fund her sizable snacking habit, which includes three meals of hay and 25 pounds of grain a day washed down with 76 gallons of water.

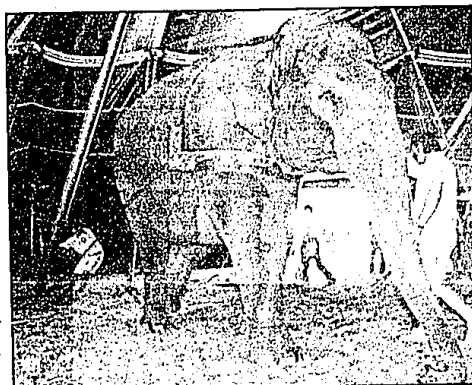
Animal care allows the circus to survive, said one veteran.

"If we didn't care for the animals, we wouldn't have a job; They'd shut us down," said Myrna Silverlake, 71, who has been with the circus for 62 years. "The animals come first."

Silverlake handles the Spitz dogs who perform and oversees the snake exhibit.

She joined the circus at 9, doing "everything" from being an aerialist to an acrobat. She worked as a waitress and manager at Red Lobster and other restaurants, but circus life is too ingrained for her to give up.

"When you get a job like that, you're stuck in one place," she said about 9-to-5 life. "I can't stay in one place, at least not



Heave ho: Early on Saturday morning, Viola the elephant helps the crew raise the big top for the circus at Founders Sports Park in Farmington Hills. Viola and the crew created miracles and the circus was opened the same day.



Yum: Mike Trus Jr. enjoys his cotton candy as his friend Zack Browne watches the show. Dads Doug Browne and Mike Trus watch the show and their kids.

for very long."

She gets a disdained look on her face when talking about others who become enraptured and want to run away with the circus.

"Everybody thinks it's fun and

games," Silverlake said. "They're only here a day or two and they wonder when they are going to get a day off."

"They find out they don't, and they don't like it."

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Running: Former Farmington Hills City Council member Ben Marks is seeking election to the Oakland County Commission.

ber stamp for Patterson, who is backing some challengers in this year's election.

He likens the county executive to a CEO and the commission as a board of directors.

"The commission dictates policy and Brooks Patterson has to take it and run with it," he said. "He has to bring some ideas for the commission to digest. The ultimate power should be and is with the commission."

"I think it's great there is a difference of opinion because that means someone is thinking."

On that theme, Marks recalls disagreements with council members and proponents alike during his terms as an elected officer to illustrate his play-no-favors style. He lost in 1992 because he didn't campaign hard enough, he said.

Since then, he's erased Longacre House's substantial debt and turned the meeting place around.

"I'm proud of what I've done," he said.

Marks dismisses the notion the commission is mired in bipartisan politics and is a rub-

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If elected to the county board of commissioners, Marks said he won't be the type to pick and choose issues to champion. "If you do that, you're not serving your constituents," he said.

He fires off views on community health, 9-1-1 service and drain issues facing the county.

Marks favors going to an independent authority for mental health services. Such an operation would have to be monitored by an oversight board, though, he said.

The county currently oversees the \$165 million operation.

"I'd rather see money spent on professional help rather than administration," Marks said.

In terms of money spent, he doesn't want the county to institute a 4-percent surcharge on telephone lines to upgrade 9-1-1 service unless there is a vote of the people.

The fact the county cannot hold advisory votes on issues already within its powers — such as levying a 4-percent surcharge — doesn't phase the truculent Marks, who served on a 9-1-1 ad-hoc committee.

"There are many ways of skinning a cat. If you put 4,001, you can take it to a vote," Marks said. "I just won't support any new taxes without a vote of the people."

Marks is similarly staunch in supporting County Executive L. Brooks Patterson's plan to set up a fund by cutting taxes to help communities affected by the 12 Town Drain issue. Tax delinquent money would also be used.

He's leery of a plan proposed by another commissioner, which would set up a countywide fund for cities to tap into for unfunded mandates.

"It's too loose for me," Marks said. "There's no control and no accountability. They say there is, but I don't see it."

He commends Patterson and the commission for keeping a tight rein on spending. The county had a \$11 million surplus last fiscal year.

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Save a life: Give blood

Every 20 seconds someone in southeastern Michigan needs blood. Thanks to volunteer blood donors, the gift of life has been given to thousands of people who would have otherwise died without the donation.

The city of Farmington Hills will host a blood drive for the American Red Cross 9 a.m.-9 p.m. Thursday, August 6 at Fire Headquarters, on Orchard Lake and 11 Mile.

Blood donors must be in good health, at least 17 years of age, and weigh at least 110 pounds.

All donors must also pass a simple physical and health history examination.

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