

Local circus couple loves life under the Big Top



Ringmaster: Barry DeChant yearned to be a part of the nomadic circus lifestyle.

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER
loconnor@ecce.com.net

When her husband would ramble about running off to join the circus, Karen DeChant had the standard spousal reply to such flights of fancy.

Wait until we retire, she'd say.

Boire last summer, Karen stepped down as a special education teacher in the Redford Union district. This summer, she's dressed in clown makeup and standing underneath the circus big top, her second home. Her husband Barry is ringmaster.

"I didn't think it would actually happen," said Karen, who performs as "Kari" the clown in the Kelly Miller Circus.

The traveling circus performance in Farmington Hills and Plymouth during the weekend. With the DeChants in tow, the circus heads to Canada for the next few weeks.

Since March when the Livonia couple joined the outfit, they've only had two days off.

"We're having fun," said Karen, who is a member of Clowns Around Redford. "We know it was work. Now we know it's hard work."

While Barry, dressed in a red and gold trimmed coat and top hat, follows out "Ladies and gentlemen ..." Kari the Clown hops and skips around the center circle.

Small children to adults look on wide-eyed, mesmerized by all the dazzling color and sounds.

Barry, who has performed as a clown for a number of years, yearned to be part of the nomadic circus lifestyle. After Karen retired, they sent resumes and videos to circuses

around the country.

Kelly Miller Bros., which is based in Hugo, Okla., hired the pair as clowns. A few days into the tour, the outfit's ringmaster left. Barry, 61, a former TV sportscaster, stepped in.

After four months touring the South and Midwest, the romanticism has been diluted by the road's reality.

"It's a different perspective from this side," said Barry, 61, behind the big top between performances at Farmington Hills Founders Sports Park. "You see all the glamour from the audience end. You see all the hard work and sweat on this end."

Barry admits there's not a lot of money. For others in the 25-member crew, the circus is a full-time job, if not a lifetime pursuit.

The DeChants, who might've been viewed as interlopers at first, had to prove themselves among the circus performers.

Karen has gone the extra step, helping teach six children in the traveling show's school program and baby-sitting a horse trainer's 1-year-old daughter.

"I feel real welcomed," Karen said.

So has Barry, who is friends with members of the acrobatic Perez Family. Recently, they let the retired Ameritech employee take a twirl on the trapeze during idle hours.

The DeChants travel in a trailer while someone is staying in their Livonia home. They have a TV satellite dish and a laptop computer in the 35-foot caravan.

Karen also keeps pictures of their four grandchildren nearby to remind her of home. One of her granddaughters was going to see a performance

■ 'We're having fun.'

Karen DeChant
—AKA Kari the Clown

during the weekend.

The couple met at Ward Presbyterian Church and has been married five years.

"I met him at church and I had no idea he was a clown," Karen said. "Then he invited me to something ... and he had this other side to him that I didn't know about."

As a clown herself, Karen is experiencing the joy on the makeup's other side. Looks on children's faces are unforgettable, she said.

"Some of them just stare. They're in awe," she said. "Then there are the smiles. Some of them have the cutest smiles. It touches my heart."

Karen and Barry appeared before Rose Biedron's third grade class at MacGowan Elementary as they set out for the circus. Karen writes to the class to keep students updated.

Many of her former teaching colleagues and members of Clowns Around Redford stopped by the Farmington Hills show to say hello. Karen and Barry have also met neighbors during the recent circus stop.

Barry marvels at Karen's willingness to be part of the experience, which ends in October.

"She's just a good wife who wanted to go along. She wanted me to see my dream come true," he said.

Said Karen, "It's like conquering something, like a dream come true."



Kari the Clown: Karen DeChant has a busy lifestyle with the Kelly Miller Circus.

Volunteers wanted to help spruce up park

Every Sunday in August, the Jewish National Fund is adopting the Elizabeth Gordon Sachs Greening of Detroit park on East Jefferson between Rivington and St. Aubin in downtown Detroit.

Lila Lazarus, good health editor of WDIV-TV channel 4, is chairwoman of this event.

Volunteers will meet at the park at 10 a.m. and work with an urban forester from the program to do mulching, planting, and learn about ecology, similar

but on a smaller scale of what the Jewish National Fund does in Israel.

There will be projects for children and the day will culminate with a picnic at 1 p.m. Lunch will be provided by the Jewish National Fund.

There will be no cost nor solicitation. Bring a pair of garden gloves.

For reservations or more information, call the Jewish National Fund office at (248) 657-6044.

Aug. 17 golf outing will help Forgotten Harvest program

Forgotten Harvest, metro Detroit's mobile food rescue program, is hosting a Tee Off For Forgotten Harvest charity golf outing sponsored by Sterling Bank & Trust.

This annual event will be held on Tuesday, Aug. 17, at Bay Pointe Golf Club. Forgotten Harvest will be celebrating with a 1 p.m. shotgun start day of golf.

The \$200 per golfer outing will include lunch, 18 holes of

golf with a power cart, dinner with an open bar and a live auction. The first hole-in-one wins a new BMW from hole-in-one sponsor Bavarian Motor Village, Eastpointe. Dinner only is \$75 a person.

For golf and dinner reservations, information on available business sponsorships or donating a prize, please contact the Forgotten Harvest office at 248-350-FOOD. Major credit cards accepted.

VCA
Public Service Announcement

99¢

Rabies Vaccines

Adult Dogs

GETTING STARTED • 1 YEAR
PLAYS • KENNEL COUGH
• CORDON

Adult Cats

GETTING STARTED • 1 YEAR
FELINE LEUKEMIA
• FIP

VCA Farmington Hills
Animal Hospital
21200 West 11 Mile Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48334
947-4444

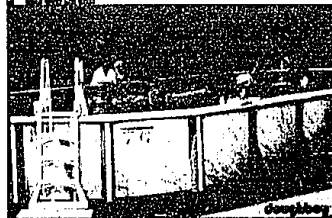
VCA Animal Hospital
of Royal Oak
851 South Park Street
Royal Oak, MI 48067
392-1234

VCA Animal Hospital
of Eastland
17200 West 11 Mile Road
Eastland, MI 48334
947-4444

POOLS & SPAS A GO-GO SUMMER HEAT BLAST SALE

ALL POOLS & SPAS IN STOCK MUST GO!
EVERYTHING 90 DAYS SAME AS CASH!

POOLS



doughboy

DOUGHBODY POOL PACKAGES

STARTING AT

\$1083

16' ROUND
48" DEPTH

VOGUE

VOGUE POOL PACKAGES

STARTING AT

\$1486

18' ROUND
52" DEPTH

EVERY POOL PACKAGE INCLUDES FILTER, LADDER, VACUUM, AUTO SKIMMER, HAND SKIMMER, THERMOMETER, CHLORINE, 100T BATH, TEST KIT, POOL CARE BOOKLET.



THIS WEEK'S SPECIAL • BIOGUARD 16LB 3" PUCKS \$34.99
MANY OTHER SIZES AND STYLES ON SALE ALSO.

SPAS



Coleman & Sons

We're Michigan's largest Coleman Spa Dealer

Journey
\$2499

save \$600
72" x 26"
1 HP PUMP
5 JETS

Cougarage 185
\$3699

save \$700
74" x 85" x 34"
1.5 HP PUMP
10 JETS

Spectrum 258
\$5399

save \$800
90" x 85" x 34.6"
TWO 1.5 HP PUMPS
1 HP BLOWER
18 JETS

VALUABLE COUPON

RECEIVE A \$100 REBATE IF SPA IS
TAKEN OUT OF STOCK BY AUGUST 5, 1999

Hurry in while savings last! 90 days same as cash. Financing available.

DELIVERY

SERVICE

PRICE

Pools, spas, chemicals & accessories.

WWW.POOLANDSPASAGOGO.COM

Prices good through July 28, 1999

*WITH APPROVED CREDIT **PRICES GOOD FOR IN-STOCK SPAS ONLY



ROCHESTER HILLS
3100 S. ROCHESTER
248-852-0800

DEMLAY
2750 WEST 13 MILE
248-294-4077

OTICA
48270 VAN DYKE
810-736-8333