

The circus is back in Livonia for annual Spree Festival

By Teri Bonas
staff writer

A "new and improved" Livonia Spree is the billing this year.

Livonia's annual summer birthday bash which this year marks 35 years of cityhood kicked off Tuesday when the circus came to town.

After a four-year absence, the Hanelford Family Circus is back. The circus will perform at 4 and 7 p.m. Thursday and Friday and at 3, 6 and 9 p.m. on Saturday and at 2, 5 and 7 p.m. Sunday in Veterans Park. The circus is free to Spree-goers — a plan organizers hope will boost attendance. Crowd figures had waned in recent years when the rodeo and its \$8 family-package ticket prices topped the entertainment lineup.

"We think it'll be a nice change, and it's an opportunity to provide free entertainment," said Maureen Paul, Spree publicity committee member.

She said the circus participants can expect to see clowns, performing dogs, elephants and a high-wire act. Everything except "lions and tigers."

Added Spree President Bill Jodway: "What we're trying to do is get more things into the Spree that don't cost money. For instance, there's more displays planned this year for people to just come out and look at."

RENEWED emphasis at the Spree this year is to return to its roots, em-

phasizing the family picnic atmosphere of the original Spree celebration 35 years ago. Since then, the Spree has grown to attract thousands of participants at the midway carnival at Ford Field, Farmington Road and Lyndon.

"We seem to be moving away from emphasizing the carnival, which everyone knows is there. What we want now is to re-emphasize down-to-earth family fun," said Paul. "It's gotten so big, we're trying to get back to the grass roots."

With the exception of the circus site at Veterans Park, on Lyndon, west of Farmington Road, the Spree site and midway is at Ford Field, Farmington Road and Lyndon.

New on the Spree program this year is a Family Pizza Theater opening for three performances at 6, 7 and 8 p.m. Wednesday in the Eddie Edgar Ice Arena. The cost is \$1.25 and includes Buddy's pizza plus entertainment by a traveling theater group from the Ann Arbor Parks and Recreation Department. The players will put on two plays and a magic show with audience participation.

Another example of the expanded family-emphasis will be at Family Day beginning 2 p.m. Saturday at Ford Field. Starting at 1 p.m. on the same day will be a "bike parade" with prizes for the kids. Two 10-speed bikes will be given out that day.

OTHER new programs include bike, sponsored by the Livonia Cultural

League, on Thursday with \$2,000 in cash prizes, \$500 of which will be awarded in the final game. Held at the Eddie Edgar Ice Arena, doors open at 5:30 p.m. The cost is \$1 and players must be at least 18.

A Las Vegas night is also planned from 6:30 p.m. to midnight Friday in the Eddie Edgar Ice Arena. The cost is \$10 and participants must be at least 21.

Some of the old favorites will be back, including a chili cook-off 2-6:30 p.m. Sunday at the Eddie Edgar Ice Arena. Worship services have been heavily attended in past years and are back Sunday with St. Alden's Church hosting the 8:30 a.m. service and the Lord's House hosting the 10 a.m. service at the showmobile.

Major sponsors for the event are Action Oldsmobile and Pepsi Co., which are paying for the circus and closing fireworks display. The fireworks extravaganza will close the six-day Spree starting 10 p.m. on Sunday.



ACCORDING to the organizers, the Spree is put on by "literally hundreds" of community volunteers. Spree has up to 20 standing committees for publicity, food vendors, security, construction, as well as a legal committee to check contracts and liabilities. They begin meeting as early as January to plan the summer Spree.

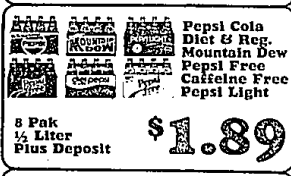
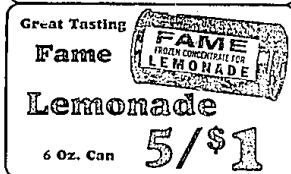
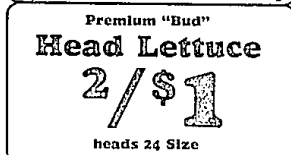
For many community groups, the Spree serves as a fund-raiser for their separate charities. The Livonia Firefighters, for instance, will sell pizza on the midway with donations going to St. Mary Hospital and the Ann Arbor Burn Center.

Last year, Spree took in more than \$71,000 and after taking care of expenses donated \$40,000 toward electrical improvements at Ford Field along with some charity contributions and a scholarship fund. This year's scholarship recipients are Marianne Lynn Beckman of Churchill High, Jennifer Jo Findley of Bentley High and Christopher Zywick of Clarenceville High.



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