

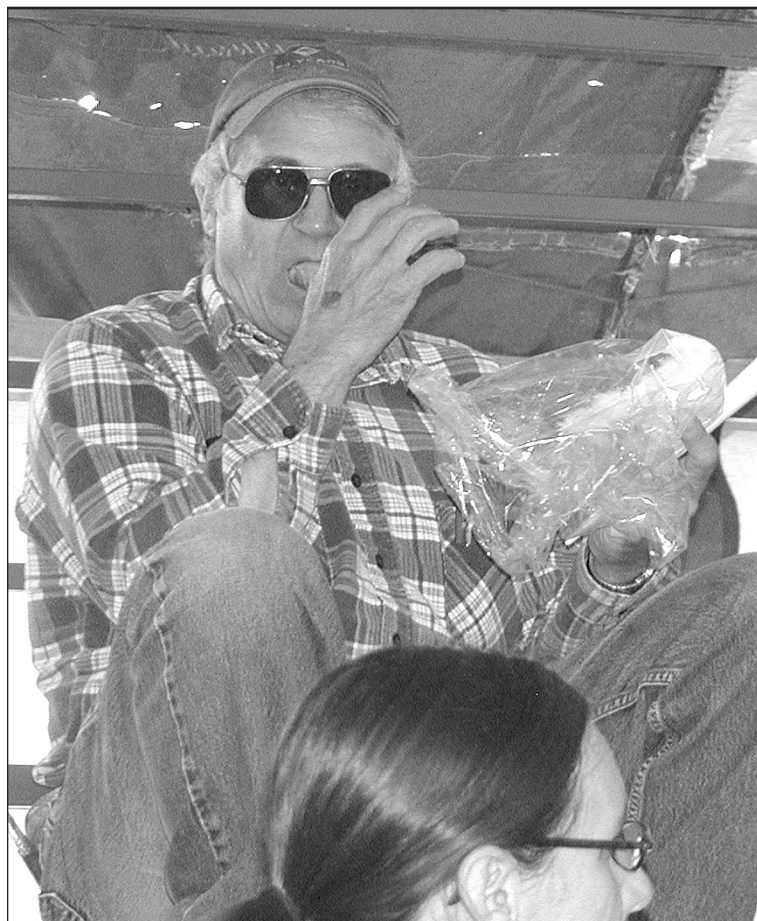


WITH THE ELEPHANTS eating in the background, a man with the Cullpepper and Merriweather Circus tightened a chain Thursday morning while he helped put up the Big Top.



DURING INTERMISSION, Melody Koerperich (above) got her face painted by one of the circus performers on Thursday. Animal trainer Sloan (right below) held a 5-week-old white tiger named Tubbs. At the first circus

show that afternoon, a man (left below) sat at the top of the bleachers and enjoyed cotton candy.



Circus entertains young and old

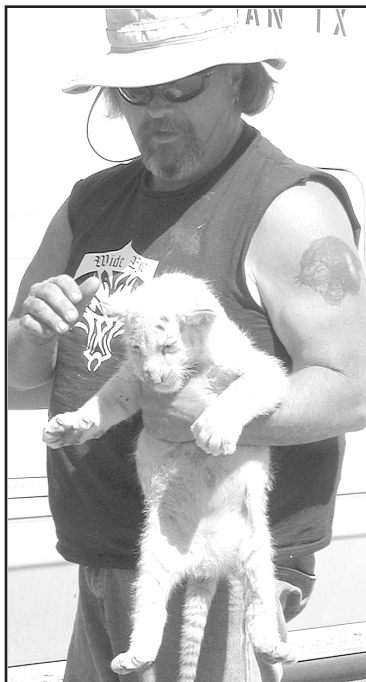
Boys and girls of all ages oohed and aahed as the back curtain opened, revealing the last part of the show.

The two African elephants were escorted in by Sloan, their trainer and handler. As the kids sat in the bleachers, their eyes big, they watched as the two female elephants showed off their moves during the Cullpepper and Merriweather Circus at the Decatur County fairground Thursday night.

Earlier in the day, around 16 of those kids had the chance to watch the two elephants and learn a little about them during the raising of the Big Top.

Brent DeWitt, one of the entertainers, showed the kids and their parents around as the fairground turned in the Circus fairway.

The elephants, he said, are 27 and 30 years old, though the bigger one is actually three years younger. The ladies eat six to seven bales of hay each day and drink 25 to 75 gallons of water a day, he said.



The ivory tusks of the elephants, said Mr. DeWitt, grow for the life of the animal. The bigger elephant, he

said, broke one of her tusks off while she was playing last year.

Actually, he said, the tusk is an extra tooth the elephants use to dig and for other things. At one of the circuses, said Mr. DeWitt, one elephant would sharpen her tusk and would use it to pop tires on the trucks. Now her tusks are cut down regularly.

The elephants weren't the only animals. The show kicked off with two tigers and one male lion showing tricks and moves, jumping from one pedestal to another.

Mr. DeWitt said they have a white tiger cub named Tubbs, but he's only a little over five weeks old and is too young for the show. Sloan, said Mr. DeWitt, has to bottle feed the young tiger every three hours.

The show also featured birds.

Sometimes, they have performing dogs, but this year the dogs are just free-loaders, he said with a laugh. The crew and performers, 26 in all, pulled into Oberlin on Thursday

morning, ready to set up for the big event. It takes about three hours to set everything up, said Mr. DeWitt, and about an hour and a half to tear things down.

The troupe is in a different town every day from March to October, he said, spending the winter in Oklahoma.

The Cullpepper and Merriweather Circus, said Mr. DeWitt, will celebrate 25 years next year. It started with three or four people traveling to trailer parks and doing shows, he said. The first owner saved his money and the circus grew. Now the circus is on its second owner, he said.

The idea, said Mr. DeWitt, is to offer some things that people's grandparents would remember about the circus and to entertain people. Things are fast-paced nowadays, he said, but the circus slows them down a little. The Oberlin Rotary Club sponsored the circus in Oberlin.