

# A night at the airport big top: The circus in Mt. Vernon

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MT. VERNON — The circus is coming to town, thanks to a decision made in February by the Mt. Vernon Airport Authority Board of Commissioners.

A motion passed to bring the Kelly Miller Circus, an Oklahoma-based traveling circus founded in 1938, to Mt. Vernon Outland Airport on April 19, the day before Easter. There they will use the asphalt to display their showcase of animals and performers. Two shows will be held that day, one at 2 p.m. and one at 5 p.m.

"It is a family-oriented show," said Chris Collins, airport director, "and of course that's what we're all about, offering different activities for the citizens to come to. Since it's family oriented we thought it might be a good fit. As far as I know it's the first time we've ever hosted a circus at the airport. Like everything else, we want to give it a try and see if it's successful. If it is, we'd like to do it again."

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Submitted Photo

**JUNGLE CATS** — Ryan Holder of the Kelly Miller Circus performs an act featuring jungle predators, the tigers. Holder's favorite part of the day is allowing his "tigers to be tigers," enjoying their play time until it is showtime and performing in front of audiences.



Submitted Photo

**ELEPHANTS ON THE MOVE** — Armando Loyal specializes in performing with elephants. His circus roots trace back nine generations to the late 1700s in France and Italy. His grandparents came to the United States in 1932 with the Loyal-Repensky Riding troupe.

# Circus:

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Dave Williams, a representative from the circus, discussed the technicalities of the company's performance. The airport would need to provide a venue for the circus as well as water. According to Williams, everything else is taken care of by the company.

"We've learned how to do our show without electricity," Williams said. "We try to be as self-contained as possible."

Animals included in the act are elephants, tigers, camels, llamas and zebras. Attendees will be given the opportunity to ride the elephants and camels.

Other acts include clowns, a band, juggling, dancers, various acrobats and a fire breather.

Because the circus will be in Mt. Vernon on the Saturday before Easter, and later traveling to a Monday show in Carmi, the board asked Williams if the circus staff would be willing to stay in King City through the Easter holiday. As Williams noted, "they all eat food, need to use the laundromat, and many go see movies on their downtime."

Board members agreed the staff of more than 100 people using Mt. Vernon facilities would be a great boost to the city.

"It's pretty all inclusive," agreed Collins. "The circus people pretty much come in and set up and do everything, and tear down and leave. We just have to provide a 350 foot by 350 foot space for them. All they requested from us is water. They have their own power generation and set up crew. They'll bring dumpsters and porta potties and we just host and give them water access."

Though Williams is a representative of the company, he was unable to make a decision during the night of the meeting without a supervisor, but he stated that he liked the idea and would take it under advisement.

The following month, Collins informed the board during their Tuesday night meeting that the circus had agreed to stay the extra day.

"They're gonna do their circus on Saturday and take Easter off," explained Collins, "and then go to Carmi. So in lieu of charging them an appearance use for the grounds, the board came up with a good idea in having them stay in Mt. Vernon and leave Monday morning. That way they would be in our city spending their money here rather than being somewhere else."

According to Williams, animal care is important to the circus. The Kelly Miller Circus website states, "Eleven members of our company are employed strictly for the care, comfort and welfare of our animal partners. These professionals are dedicated to their care and well-being,

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making sure they get the most nutritious food, grooming and plenty of human interaction. Time is made for exercise both mental and physical and for play. Every 30 days our animals receive a veterinary exam."

The circus is regularly inspected by the United States Department of Agriculture under the Animal Welfare Act.

Before the Mt. Vernon performance, the Kelly Miller Circus will be performing in Nashville April 16 and in Carlyle April 17, with both days having shows at 4:30 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.

## CONCERNS ADDRESSED

The board initially brought up reservations in March regarding the contract with the circus, which asked the airport to locate all utilities. They believed the contractor and any party digging on the grounds should make those inquiries, not the grounds owner. This concern was agreed to be brought to the attorney's attention as well.

At the meeting, Collins stated that "the only thing on the contract that I'm unsure on is that they want us to do a locate of the utilities. It doesn't cost any money but that's a phone call and a little bit of coordination. That's the only thing that I see, but I want to send it to an attorney and get his blessing on it."

In April as the day drew closer to the circus performance, Collins indicated that previous concerns are no longer an issue. "What I did was I took the contract and put our concern on there. What [the board] was referring to was [the circus] mentioned in the contract that they want to have some utility locates done ... that pretty much is on [the circus]. If I called JULIE (Joint Utility Locating Information for Excavators) they would ask who is the one doing the work and of course it's the circus... I put it on the contract that if they wanted that done, they would have to coordinate it."

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