

CFA AWC Report May 1, 2013 through April 30, 2015

Sarah Conley, Chair

The human-animal bond is the foundation and core of circus. Without it, circus might never have been invented. It is this heritage and love that the CFA Animal Welfare Committee (AWC) fights to protect. Our core group of committee members are on the frontlines of fighting the animal rights extremists, but we are not the only ones fighting (nor should we be). Many CFA members have done their part, and we encourage everyone to join in. **Silence will only hand victory to our enemies.**

In December 2013, former Chairman Gary Payne asked me to take over as Chair of the AWC. Being fairly new to the group, I weighed it carefully but decided it was important that as Gary transitioned into his new role in CFA that the AWC not miss a beat. I could not have been more right. Almost immediately the circus world was inundated with new anti-circus, anti-elephant, and anti-elephant guide legislation. Honestly, it hasn't let up since.

To help bolster our efforts and add more levels of expertise to our committee, we added new members **Monica Welde** and **Cindi Cavallini**. Both have circus animal backgrounds, but so much more. Monica is a proud bear mama and shares her family's bears across the country as well as at their home, Bearadise Ranch in Florida. Cindi went to Moorpark College's Exotic Animal Training and Management Program (EATM) and then ran away and joined the circus, eventually spending years with Carson & Barnes. She now does animal outreach with Pacific Animal Productions in California. Both women have been indispensable assets in our fight. Thanks to Cindi, we are starting to implement new methods of reaching the citizens who have no idea their circuses are being taken away. She's figured out how to utilize social media to really get the word out in local communities. The main battleground in our fights, besides in council chambers and hearing rooms, is on the internet, so *if you aren't on Facebook or Twitter, sign up now and join the fight.*

The threat level against circus is RED. If you've been checking the CFA Grassroots website (<http://grassroots.circusfans.org/>), you know the crazy level of activity that has gone on. Right now we have pending legislation in New York City; Plymouth, Massachusetts; Providence, Rhode Island; Austin, Texas; Grand Rapids, Michigan; and the entire State of California. Some of these are "wait and see" but some, like **SB 716 in California is of the utmost urgency.** SB 716 would eliminate the ability to have elephants in human care except for forever stuck behind bars. By outlawing the elephant guide, SB 716 would put an end to circus elephant acts, elephant rides, elephant conservation, breeding programs, and outreach. If you only jump in on one fight, please jump in on this one and help us defeat it.

Over this past term we've had our share of wins. We successfully stopped anti-circus and anti-performing animal legislation in Dalton, Massachusetts; Willowick, Ohio; New York (SB 5971); Rhode Island, and Hawaii. Many of these victories are due to local CFA members actively stepping in and taking point, like Dan McGinnis did in Dalton. There is no substitute for eyes on the ground, keeping watch, and getting the truth out there to counter the well-funded radical animal rights machine.

Yet, we also had some crushing losses. Mexico banned all circus animals, while keeping rodeos, bull fighting, cock fighting, marine mammal shows, and more. The California cities of Oakland, West Hollywood, and Los Angeles all passed bans on elephant guides, performing animals, or both. I believe it was these big losses that factored heavily into the Feld Family's decision to eliminate elephants from their Ringling Brothers Barnum and Bailey Circus. In the fallout of the Feld announcement the city of Eureka Springs, Arkansas chose to reverse itself and pass a ban we had previously defeated. Richmond, Virginia followed shortly thereafter, stating that since their elephant guide ban phases in after Feld's 2018 deadline that it really has no impact.

Besides hostile legislation, we are fighting animal rights extremist infiltration of organizations, like the California Democrat Party. Jess Durfee, Chair Emeritus of **the San Diego County Democrat Party** has introduced a resolution for the party platform that would officially state that Democrat lawmakers should "enact laws and policies to prohibit the use of exotic and wild animals in traveling circuses and traveling exhibitions." This kind of foundational opposition to circus and the human-animal bond is the most threatening of all because discussion will stop being about the truth and facts and start being about following blind political edicts.

Another big fight we are just starting in with is the movie *Tyke: Elephant Outlaw*. Developed with the intent of being the "*Blackfish* of the circus," this movie pretends to be a documentary about elephants in circus. In reality it's an anti-circus propaganda movie trying to further the radical views of the Performing Animal Welfare Society (PAWS), In Defense of Animals (IDA), and PETA. They scheduled their premier for the Sarasota Film Festival and Monica Welde, along with a great group of pro-circus experts and supporters (including Kaye Rosaire, Laura Herriott, and Felicia Frisco) protested and discredited their claims, causing PAWS' Ed Stewart to withdraw from the scheduled Q&A.

The White Tops has continued the AWC's "Preserving Animals in the Circus" column in every issue. We tackle everything from the idea that training is natural to the fact that zoos are more similar to circuses that they might like to admit. Instead of being a litany of legislation, the column aims at bringing new information and new perspectives so that we can all be more equipped to write letters, speak to our friends, and have our voices heard. As my own personal touch, I include a different photo of me with a trained animal in each article to highlight the kinds of interactions we are fighting to preserve.

Jumbo thanks to everyone who has written a letter, made a phone call, gone to a meeting, handed out a flyer, counter-protested, or helped in this fight in any way. We need you, and so do the animals. If you haven't spoken out, do so now! You can also lend support by contributing to the **CFA's National Circus Preservation Society (NCPS)** and earmark the Animal Welfare Committee (all contributions are tax deductible).

The circus needs all hands on deck. Your CFA AWC is fighting; please fight along with us. <http://grassroots.circusfans.org/>