

Report of the CFA Media and Public Relations Committee

2015-2016

Submitted by: Mort Gamble, Chair

As in the recent past, much time was devoted to advocating for circus animals via the CFA website and Grassroots information line, as well as through personal efforts to argue against harmful legislation and other actions. Results are decidedly mixed, but I feel there is no alternative to keeping up the pressure in the “court of public opinion.”

We also clearly need to align ourselves with partners. A strong example is the Pittsburgh Shriners who turned out in force for a recent City Council hearing there to consider an ordinance banning animals for entertainment. The coalition of circus people and fans and the Shriners was impressive and no doubt contributed to the stalling out of this legislation (it remains very much alive, however).

Increasingly, I have relied on Facebook to encourage CFA membership and activism. I also worked extensively with my wife M.E., a volunteer consultant on integrated marketing and social media, to assist her presentation to OABA in February 2016 at Showfolks Club in Sarasota. Her day-long training of circus professionals in social media was very well received, and she continues to follow up with selected

members of the circus community to assist them in messaging and branding.

I continued my regular column in *The White Tops* and assisted the circus industry whenever possible. For example, Dan Kleintop and I hosted an information table at the Hampton, Virginia, appearance of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey earlier this year. In conjunction with that event, I developed a media release template for local use elsewhere which is now posted on the CFA website. Additional “members’ tools” will be forthcoming for that link.

I also participated in the Kelly Miller BBQ in Hancock, Maryland, during Memorial Day Weekend, following up with Facebook postings, and spent much of the Christmas holiday in Sarasota advocating for CFA and circus people and animals. It is apparent that our organization is fighting a smaller battle among some circus people who feel our organization is not doing enough to assist them. I disagree with their assessment, but again this demonstrates how quickly opinions become hardened surrounding the whole complex and emotionally charged issue of “animal welfare” vs. “animal rights.”

I addressed the distinction during a campus presentation at Virginia Wesleyan College, my new employer, during the recently concluded spring term. The panel discussion focused on animals in captivity, and I offered a pro-animal, pro-circus perspective. My discussion was well received by a

diverse audience of students, faculty, and the public, including zoological professionals.

Goals going forward are to continue to strengthen the CFA website and its interactivity, and to focus increasingly on social media to fight the battles we need to fight. Our adversaries early on hit upon the value of creating emotion via Facebook; we need to be responsible and fact-based in using social media, but it is a tool we must master to build membership for our organization and support for the circus industry in general.