



## **PETA** Factsheet

---

### **Shrine Circuses**

2900 Rocky Point Dr., Tampa, FL 33607

**Shrine circuses do not possess their own animal exhibitor licenses from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The Shriners contract with outside companies, including Tarzan Zerbini Circus,\* George Carden Circus,\* Jordan World Circus,\* Hawthorn Corporation,\* Royal Hanneford Circus,\* Franzen Bros. Circus,\* and Circus Hollywood,\* so Shrine circuses are not subject to citations under the name “Shrine Circus.” Each Shrine temple produces its own circus, so animal exhibits will vary from temple to temple and from year to year. Exhibitors of leased animals at Shrine circuses have failed to meet minimal federal standards for the care of animals used in exhibition as established in the Animal Welfare Act (AWA). The USDA has cited Shrine circus exhibitors for failure to provide veterinary care, adequate shelter from the elements, nutritious food, and clean water. Exhibitors have also been cited for failure to handle animals in a manner that prevents trauma and harm to the animals and ensures public safety. Animals used by Shrine circuses have caused deaths and injuries. Contact PETA for documentation.**

**April 9, 2010:** An animal handler with the Hamid Circus was kicked and thrown approximately 20 feet by an African elephant named Dumbo between performances at the Irem Shrine circus in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. The handler died at the scene from multiple traumatic injuries. The elephant had been leased from Joe Frisco’s Wonderful World of Animals.

**April 4, 2009:** The USDA cited exhibitor Will Davenport, dba Maximus Tons of Fun, performing as the Hejaz Shrine circus in Greenville, South Carolina, with a direct noncompliance for failing to provide adequate veterinary care when all three elephants were found to be in poor body condition. All of the elephants had lost over 500 pounds each since the last time they were weighed and one elephant was so thin that the vertebrae in her spine were prominent and her face sunken.

**March 9, 2009:** While in La Porte, Indiana, four employees of the George Carden Circus, performing as the Orak Shrine circus, were arrested and charged with public intoxication following a physical altercation at a downtown bar.

**March 7, 2009:** At least 15 children and one adult were injured when an elephant who was being used to give rides at the Murat Shrine circus in Indianapolis, Indiana, became startled, stumbling and knocking over the scaffolding stairway leading to the elephant ride. People on the elephant’s back and others who were standing on, under, and around the scaffolding were injured. Their injuries were treated at the scene. The Shriners had leased the elephant from exhibitor Will Davenport, dba Maximus Tons of Fun.

**May 16, 2008:** The USDA cited animal exhibitor Brett Carden, performing as the Al Kaly Shrine circus in Colorado Springs, Colorado, for failure to properly maintain an elephant transport enclosure. The enclosure had a bent metal panel with sharp edges that protruded into the area that contained the elephant. Carden was also cited for failure to provide sufficient employee supervision during periods of public contact with the petting zoo exhibit.

**May 6, 2008:** The USDA cited Ari and Lana Steeples, dba Steeples Bears, performing as the Kosair Shrine circus, in Barbourville, Kentucky, for three non-compliances pertaining to their failure to provide adequate barriers between a six-foot-tall, 700-pound black bear and the public.

---

**People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals • 501 Front St., Norfolk, VA 23510  
757-622-7382 • PETA.org • Circuses.com**

# PETA Factsheet

---

**March 28, 2008:** The USDA cited Rosaires Bears, performing as the Zembo Shrine circus in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, for failing to have a handler in control of two bears during a performance nor barriers protecting the public from direct contact with the bears.

**June 26, 2007:** While in a position to have access to organization checking accounts, James Kenneth White stole about \$60,000 from the Osiris Shrine and International Order of Odd Fellows of Wheeling, West Virginia, according to the *Wheeling News-Register*. He was ordered to make restitution to the organization and to serve 30 days in jail, five years on supervised probation, and six months under electronically monitored home confinement.

**May 8, 2007:** According to a *Calgary Sun* report, a Shrine circus act featuring archers dressed in mock-Native American costumes and tapping their palms over their mouths offended Native Americans of the Crowfoot Nation who were attending the event. In response, the general manager of the circus said, "We have noted their concern and will be making our best efforts to modify as best we can ...."

**March 19, 2007:** A *New York Times* examination of Shrine records found that more than 57 percent of the \$32 million raised in 2005 through circuses, bingo, and other fundraising events went to Shriner activities and temple expenses, including parties, liquor, and travel. Only 2 percent of the Shrine hospitals' operating income comes from money raised by Shrine temples. The investigation revealed that "more than 30 temples had discovered fraud like theft of money and inventory, altered bank statements, padded payrolls, and fake invoices ...."

**March 1-4, 2007:** The Al Chymia Shrine circus in Memphis, Tennessee, featured elephant trainer Tim Frisco who, in his capacity as animal care director for Carson & Barnes Circus, had been videotaped viciously attacking terrified elephants with sharp metal bullhooks and electric prods. Frisco had instructed other trainers to hurt the elephants until they screamed and to sink the bullhook into their flesh and twist it and had cautioned that the beatings must be concealed from the public.

**November 24, 2006:** Animal trainer Wade Burck was clawed by a tiger during a performance of the Hadi Shrine circus in Evansville, Indiana. Burck received hospital treatment, including stitches, for wounds to his left forearm and leg.

**October 19, 2006:** The USDA cited animal exhibitor Brett Carden, performing as the Al Menah Shrine circus in Nashville, Tennessee, for failure to keep two elephants under the direct control and supervision of a handler. The elephants were being used to give rides to members of the public. The inspector wrote, "The handler walked away from the elephants and turned away from the elephants to assist in another matter unrelated to the elephants." The USDA also cited Carden for failure to store food supplies in a manner adequate to protect them from deterioration, mold, or contamination by vermin.

**April 29, 2006:** The USDA cited George Carden Circus, performing as the El Jebel Shrine circus, in Denver, Colorado, for failure to have dangerous animals under the direct control and supervision of a knowledgeable and experienced animal handler. The inspector wrote, "Only one animal handler was available to manage two elephants providing rides to the public. There were times when both elephants were loaded with [members of the] public and the handler was not in the ring with the animals and could not have been in control of either elephant. No other knowledgeable and experienced elephant handler was available to assist this handler during public exhibition."

**March 25, 2006:** A *Montréal Gazette* article reported that a former Shrine circus clown was sentenced to three years in prison for sexually abusing his daughter and sister-in-law. He was found guilty of nine of the 42 charges filed against him, including sexual assault.

**March 16, 2006:** The USDA cited Hawthorn Corporation, an exhibitor performing for a Shrine circus in Springfield, Missouri, for failure to provide veterinary care to a male lion who had three lesions, including a 3-inch long open scrape on his right hip, and scabbed-over lesions at the base of his tail and on his left hip. The licensee said that these lesions were caused by the lion's rubbing against the bars of the enclosure.

**March 16, 2006:** The USDA cited George Carden Circus, performing as a Shrine circus in Springfield, Missouri, for failure to provide veterinary care to an elephant named Judy, who had three open wounds on her forehead and one open wound on her left front leg.

---

**People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals • 501 Front St., Norfolk, VA 23510  
757-622-7382 • PETA.org • Circuses.com**

# PETA Factsheet

---

**February 24, 2006:** The USDA cited Hawthorn Corporation, an exhibitor performing for the Arab Shrine circus in Topeka, Kansas, for failure to provide adequate veterinary care to three tigers who had sores and spots of missing hair on top of their heads and near their eyes. Hawthorn was also cited for failure to have “any weapons that could immobilize, tranquilize, or [euthanize] any of the [eight] tigers if escape occurred ....”

**February 24, 2006:** The USDA cited Jorge Barreda, an exhibitor performing for the Arab Shrine circus in Topeka, Kansas, for failure to maintain the sanitation of a transport trailer in which the inspector found “dried & caked elephant waste on the walls.”

**November 18, 2005:** According to a *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel* article, a volunteer clown for the Shriners was sentenced to four years in prison and eight years of extended supervision for using a computer to facilitate a sex crime. The man traveled from Kentucky to Wisconsin with the intent of having sex with a 14-year-old girl. The president of the Owensboro Shrine Clowns defended the man’s character.

**February 2005:** During a Shrine Treasurers Association of North America seminar, a Shriner commented that the temple’s circus committee was disguising the fact that the circus was losing money in a budget report.

**January 31, 2005:** An elephant trainer with Tarzan Zerbini Circus was trampled to death by one of the elephants as the animals were being loaded into a trailer following performances at the Mizpah Shrine circus in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

**November 26, 2004:** An ambulance was called to the Hadi Shrine circus at Roberts Stadium in Evansville, Indiana, after a circusgoer was bitten on the cheek by a chimpanzee belonging to Zoppe-Rosaire Chimpanzees while posing for pictures. The patron was treated at the hospital for a puncture wound.

**April 9, 2003:** The USDA filed charges against Hawthorn Corporation, a company that supplies elephants and tigers to Shrine circuses. The complaint alleges 47 violations of the minimum standards of care established in the Animal Welfare Act. Charges include using physical abuse to train, handle, and work an elephant; causing physical harm and discomfort; failing to provide veterinary care to an emaciated elephant; failure to provide veterinary care to an elephant suffering with severe chemical burns and a bacterial infection; failure to provide veterinary care to several elephants with potentially deadly foot problems; and unsafe public contact.

**March 24, 2003:** The Associated Press reported that a Shetland pony at a Shrine circus in Lincoln, Nebraska, was chased by police officers and stopped traffic in the downtown area after bolting from the circus tent.

**March 13, 2003:** An editorial in the *Calgary Sun* stated, “Three years ago, I attended the Shrine Circus with my then 2½-year-old twin boys and vowed then that I’d never attend another circus that used wild, exotic animals for entertainment. ... [T]he animals were miserable and terribly treated, and ... the routines ... were, frankly, extremely boring.”

**March 10, 2003:** According to *The Edmonton Sun*, a local Shriner admitted that statements made by club members may have misled the public into believing that circus profits would help sick kids and fund hospital operations when in fact the circus funds are used for administrative costs.

**March 2, 2003:** A 9,000-pound African elephant performing with Jordan World Circus at a Shrine circus in Muskegon, Michigan, escaped from a tent shortly before a performance and was recaptured 15 minutes later in a busy downtown area.

**October 25, 2002:** According to the Associated Press, the former executive director of the Osman Temple Shrine circus in Minnesota was found guilty of embezzling more than \$300,000 from the organization. A jury found Robert L. Janecek guilty on 21 counts of mail fraud, four counts of tax evasion, three counts of failure to file tax returns, and one count of filing a false tax return.

**August 2, 2002:** According to *The Halifax Herald Limited*, three elephants performing in Shrine circuses and giving rides to children were quarantined in Ontario and removed from Canada on July 13 after Canadian authorities were alerted by the USDA that the elephants had been in prolonged contact with a tuberculosis-positive elephant.

---

**People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals • 501 Front St., Norfolk, VA 23510  
757-622-7382 • PETA.org • Circuses.com**

# PETA Factsheet

---

**June 17, 2002:** Two elephants, named Tory and Mary, performing with a Shrine circus in Menomonie, Wisconsin, bolted out of a circus tent during a show, scattering crowds. Mary hiked 2 miles through town and was recaptured at the University of Wisconsin–Stout campus when trucks blocked her escape. One child was injured, and the elephants damaged a door at the park and caused \$600 in damage to a city truck. The Shriners had contracted with George Carden Circus for the event.

**May 29, 2002:** According to *The Detroit News*, attendance had declined 10 percent at the 2001 Metro Detroit Shrine circus.

**April 3, 2002:** According to the Associated Press, the former executive director of the Mendota Heights-based Osman Temple in Minnesota was indicted for allegedly stealing more than \$300,000 from the nonprofit organization and using the Midwest Shrine Circus Committee to launder embezzled funds.

**April 13, 2001:** A letter to the editor published in the *Chicago Sun-Times* stated, “I escorted a group of schoolchildren, including my 8-year-old daughter, to this year’s Medinah Shrine circus. ... When the elephants were brought behind the curtain, the trainer began verbally abusing and hitting the elephant. We watched in horror as he swung a stick with all his force and struck the elephant in the back of the leg. This must have hurt because the elephant let out a scream that could be heard throughout the UIC Pavilion. The kids were frightened and asked me why the man was hurting the elephant.”

**January 31, 2001:** Four hundred Shriners were entertained by nude lap dancers and public sex acts at the Winnipeg Khartum Shriners VIP “Gentlemen’s” Dinner.

**May 29, 2000:** The *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* reported that Shriners’ membership had dropped to 528,000 by 1999, from a peak of 940,000 in the 1980s.

**April 29, 2000:** The Tebala Shrine in Rockford, Illinois, reneged on assurances that it would not use exotic animals in the circus. Elephants, tigers, and lions were featured.

**April 13, 2000:** An elephant named Tina used in Shrine circuses was quarantined after testing positive for a human strain of tuberculosis.

**February 11, 2000:** The Albuquerque, New Mexico, shrine reneged on a promise to use an animal-free circus. The shrine featured numerous animal acts, including a killer elephant named Misty.

**January 26, 2000:** A 4,500-pound female African elephant named Kenya, who had been featured in Shrine circuses, attacked and killed a circus worker in Florida. The 18-year-old elephant knocked the woman to the ground and crushed her.

**December 2, 1999:** According to *The Evansville Courier*, attendance was dropping at the annual Hadi Shrine circus; there were an estimated 3,200 fewer audience members present this year than there were the previous year.

**October 15, 1999:** The *San Antonio Express-News* reported, “The money coming from this weekend’s [Alzafar Shrine] circus proceeds does not go toward the 22 children’s hospitals in the United States, Mexico, and Canada.”

**April 29, 1999:** As a result of sustaining multiple injuries from an elephant while performing for a Shrine circus in Duluth, Minnesota, an animal handler was hospitalized in serious condition.

**March 1999:** An evaluation by the Council of Better Business Bureaus determined that the Shriners did not meet its standards, which recommend that at least 50 percent of a charity’s income be spent on programs directly related to the organization’s stated purpose. According to the evaluation, Shriners had spent only 24 percent on program services.

**February 1999:** During a risk management presentation to the Shrine Treasurers Association of North America, the Shriners learned that they had been provided by a circus’ insurance agent with a fraudulent certificate of insurance on a policy that did not exist after an attendee was injured at a Shrine circus.

---

**People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals • 501 Front St., Norfolk, VA 23510  
757-622-7382 • PETA.org • Circuses.com**

# PETA Factsheet

---

**November 26, 1998:** In an interview conducted during a performance of the Hadi Shrine circus and published in *The Evansville Courier*, Hawthorn tiger trainer Othmar Vohringer recalled a serious attack that had occurred during his career: "A lion took my arm off. It was just hanging there. It had to be reattached."

**November 13, 1998:** The same tiger used in Shrine circuses who killed a trainer on October 8, 1998, attacked and killed his owner in Newberry, Florida. The tiger was shot dead.

**October 8, 1998:** A tiger attacked and killed a trainer in Newberry, Florida. The tiger, who had been featured in numerous Shrine circuses, grabbed the trainer by the throat.

**May 15, 1997:** A transient who came to Omaha, Nebraska, with a Shrine circus was convicted of second-degree murder. The victim's partially nude, badly decomposed body was found on June 16, 1995. She had been beaten to death with a chunk of concrete.

**April 13, 1997:** A spooked elephant performing at a Shrine circus in the city of Calgary in Alberta, Canada, slapped a handler with her trunk and bit him on the head and back, causing injuries serious enough to require hospitalization.

**March 18, 1997:** A bear with a Shrine circus in Grand Rapids, Michigan, bit off the tip of a 2-year-old child's finger. There were no safety barriers around the bear cages, and 30 other children had been petting the bear.

**September 5, 1996:** According to the *Commercial Appeal* in Memphis, Tennessee, "a former bookkeeper for the Al Chymia Shrine circus has filed a \$1 million sexual harassment lawsuit against the organization."

**February 6, 1995:** An employee of Tarzan Zerbini Circus was stepped on by an elephant while loading the elephants into a trailer at the Mizpah Shrine circus in Fort Wayne, Indiana. The employee suffered a crushed pelvis and was in critical condition.

**August 20, 1994:** An elephant named Tyke who had rampaged at an Altoona, Pennsylvania, Shrine circus on April 21, 1993, killed a trainer while performing in Honolulu, Hawaii, stomped on a circus groom, and injured a dozen spectators.

**April 1994:** Three children were injured when an elephant who was being used for rides at a Shrine-sponsored circus in Muskegon, Michigan, fell into the passenger loading platform, spilling the riders and bending the platform.

**August 8, 1993:** A Tucson, Arizona, Shrine circus clown was arrested on charges of molesting three girls, ages 6, 7, and 10, whom he had met at the circus.

**April 21, 1993:** An elephant named Tyke charged through an arena entryway during a Shrine circus performance in Altoona, Pennsylvania, ripping away part of the wall and causing \$10,000 in damage. More than 3,000 children were in the audience, and one young girl was injured.

**October 15, 1992:** A handler was hospitalized for a leg injury when an elephant grabbed him with her mouth while giving rides to several children at a Shrine circus in Bloomington, Minnesota. One child suffered a minor leg injury.

**July 8, 1990:** A 600-pound tiger terrified hundreds of children and their parents when he ran loose for 15 minutes at a Shrine circus at Mississauga's Square One mall in Ontario, Canada.

**February 17, 1990:** According to the *Capital Times*, a woman alleged that "her foot was crushed by an elephant as she dismounted the behemoth she and her son had been riding at the Zor-Shrine circus at the Dane County Exposition Center" in Madison, Wisconsin.

**March 5, 1988:** A Detroit elephant trainer was treated in the intensive care unit of a Montréal hospital after being stomped on by an elephant during a performance of a Shrine circus. The trainer required emergency surgery for multiple abdominal injuries, including three cracked ribs and a damaged liver.

**1978:** A Hawthorn Corporation elephant performing in Chicago with a Shrine circus picked up a trainer with her trunk and threw him into a pillar, killing him.

---

**People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals • 501 Front St., Norfolk, VA 23510  
757-622-7382 • PETA.org • Circuses.com**

# ***PETA*** Factsheet \_\_\_\_\_

\*Factsheet available

---

**People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals** • 501 Front St., Norfolk, VA 23510  
757-622-7382 • [PETA.org](http://PETA.org) • [Circuses.com](http://Circuses.com)

Shrine Circus Factsheet – Page 6 of 6 – Updated March 25, 2011