

## Circus World- More than a State Historic Site

Baraboo applauds the proposed General Purpose Revenue (GPR) funding in Governor Walker's Budget for Circus World and we look forward to a sustainable future for our State Historic Site within our community.

It is certainly true that when you think of the Ringling Brothers and their magnificent Circus, you are drawn to Baraboo, its home. The Circus has left an indelible mark on who we are and on our local history and economy.

"As the glory days of the great railroad circuses began to fade, John M. Kelley, personal attorney for the Ringling brothers, who had retired to Baraboo, saw the need to preserve the colorful history of the circus. To this end he joined forces with members of the Gollmar Family, first cousins to the Ringlings and circus owners themselves. The team incorporated Circus World Museum as a historical and educational facility in 1954. Following Circus World's opening on July 1, 1959, the site was deeded debt-free to the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

What began in 1959 with less than an acre of land, six old circus wagons and a boatload of passion, has now become an internationally recognized and respected institution encompassing 64 acres, 30 permanent structures, seven winter quarters buildings along Water Street, plus the Ringling Bros. Circus Train shed complex". (Circus World website)

But there is so much more here than the Circus World State Historic Site.... Baraboo's official Historic Downtown was home to several offices that the Ringling's occupied in the early years, we are home to the Al Ringling Mansion, the Charles Ringling Mansion, the Al Ringling Theatre and the International Clown Hall of Fame, as well as the annual Big top Parade and Circus Celebration. To say that the Ringling Brothers and their Circus is part of the DNA of Baraboo would be an understatement.

Our State Historic Site and our Circus history are integral to our local economy, as it attracts people from around the world. Sixty to Eighty thousand visitors a year come to Baraboo specifically for the circus legacy we have. In fact, the April 2013 edition of *Smithsonian Magazine* named Baraboo the 4<sup>th</sup> Best Small Town in America to Visit! The recent announcement of the closing of the Ringling Brothers Circus after 146 years has given the Baraboo area international exposure by being interviewed by the BBC, Wall Street Journal, The Economist, Associated Press, USA today, NPR, reaching an audience of over 93 million people. This news exposure also greatly benefits Sauk County and the State of Wisconsin.

This July, Baraboo will host a homecoming for Ringling Circus personnel to come and join us for our annual circus celebration and participate as our honored Grand Marshalls of our Big Top Parade. An extended weekend of festivities is being planned and we expect participants and visitors from all over the United States and overseas to attend. Many of these news outlets that have recently contacted us concerning the Ringling Show closing are also expected to be here to cover this historic gathering.

Circus World Foundation's Board of Directors is committed to having our State Historic Site be a vibrant historic, educational and entertainment asset to Baraboo and Sauk County. As we move

forward with our county-wide place-making initiative, Circus World is a cornerstone of that effort. We look forward to continuing a strong relationship with the State of Wisconsin, the State Historical Society and appreciate the Governor and State Legislators support of our community.

Michael Palm is the Mayor of Baraboo and is a Board Member of the Circus World Foundation. He can be reached at 608-355-2715.