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Performing Animal Welfare Society Praises Los Angeles Shriners For Replacing Animal Circus After 88 Years

Los Angeles, Calif. (March 24, 2014) – The Performing Animal Welfare Society (PAWS) is applauding the Los Angeles Shriners for going animal-free this year. The Los Angeles Shrine Circus reportedly has been held annually at the Shrine Auditorium since 1926. In lieu of the circus, the organization will present a three-day Shrine Carnival in April with amusement park rides, games and carnival treats. The Shrine Circus has been the target of animal welfare protests for years due to its use of performing elephants, elephant rides and tigers.

“PAWS commends the Shriners for making the decision to present a fundraising event that does not rely on the use of performing animals,” said Ed Stewart, president of the California-based PAWS and a former Hollywood animal trainer with more than 30 years experience caring for elephants and other exotic animals. “No matter the Shriners’ reason for deciding to go animal-free this year, it’s an important sign of the times. Animal circuses are inhumane, outdated and they should be a thing of the past.”

Based on decades of experience and investigations, PAWS has concluded that it is impossible for a wild animal to live a healthy, normal life while traveling and performing. Elephants, big cats and other performing animals spend most of their lives virtually immobilized in small cages, pens and transport vehicles; elephants can be chained for 17 or more hours a day. Brutal training methods are used to control the animals and insure they perform consistently. Many animals develop debilitating physical maladies due inadequate living conditions and the unnatural tricks they are forced to perform.

Circuses also pose a serious risk to human safety: On Saturday, three elephants broke out of the Moolah Shrine Circus in St. Charles, Mo., and ran amok in a parking lot for 45 minutes, damaging vehicles. Last year, a tiger escaped during a show at the Isis Shrine Circus in Salina, Kan., wandering into a public bathroom where a woman came face to face with the animal. In 2009, an elephant giving rides smashed into the loading platform, injuring at least 15 children at the Murat Shrine Circus in Indianapolis, Ind.

“I hope the Los Angeles Shriners will become a model for other Shrine organizations still presenting circuses in which animals suffer terribly for human entertainment,” Stewart concluded. “The truth is you can present a safe and entertaining, animal-free event for the public and still be successful in raising money for your organization.”

The Los Angeles Shrine Carnival will take place on April 11-13, 2014, at the Al Malaikah Shrine Center, located at Jefferson and Figueroa in Los Angeles. PAWS will be there to support it.

For more information about PAWS, please visit www.pawsweb.org.

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*Founded in 1984, the **Performing Animal Welfare Society** (PAWS) operates three sanctuaries in Northern California that are home to a large variety of species including 11 Asian and African elephants, African lions, tigers, and other exotic animals rescued or retired from circuses, zoos and the exotic pet trade.*

PAWS is licensed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. It is accredited by the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries, and is rated a four-star charity by Charity Navigator.

PAWS is celebrating 30 years of rescue, sanctuary care, education and advocacy.