

## Clowns And More Clowns

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The Russian American Kids Circus will swing onto the Garde Arts Center stage on Saturday, performing acrobatics, synchronized unicycling, tightrope walking, juggling, aerial feats and balancing acts.

Before they take to the stage, though, roving jugglers and clowns on unicycles will prime theatergoers with gravity-defying feats.

Six clowns from ARTFARM, a non-profit, professional theater troupe based in Middletown that focuses its clowning on making the planet a better place, will mingle for an hour before the 4 p.m. show.

The troupe has been around since 2001 and for the past two years has produced "Shakespeare in the Grove" in Middletown and Eco Festival at Middlesex Community College. It is also developing a program called "Circus for a Fragile Planet," which uses clowns to teach schoolchildren about alternative energy sources, recycling and individual responsibility to the earth.

"Using techniques of the circus, we focus on global climate change and species extinction and get people to think about the Earth," says Dic Wheeler, executive director of ARTFARM. "The idea is to bridge arts, a sustainable living and social justice."

Five clowns from the group who are "unnamed but not generic," according to the Wheeler, will be riding unicycles and juggling water bottles. Wheeler says that, while juggling with water bottles, the clowns can talk about the resources that go into producing a bottle of water versus turning on the tap in your house.

They will also teach juggling to those who are interested.

The main shows, at 1 and 4 p.m. Saturday, are by the Russian American Kids Circus. Many of the performers are children of circus performers. From a core of about 60 performers, about 15, who are between ages 6 and 16, will appear on stage.

They can play ring-around-the-rosie on unicycles, pedal metal rings across ropes, and swing 10-feet off the ground on dangling cords. The show includes elements of circus art, theater, dance, music and comedy.

The Russian American Kids Circus was founded in 1994 by former Moscow Circus star Alex Berenchein, and his wife, Regina, and mother-in-law Olga Partigul, as the non-profit New Way Circus Center. The center encouraged children of all ages and backgrounds to learn artistic self-expression and teamwork. The advanced students went on to perform as the Russian American Kids Circus.

The Kids Circus has been performing for more than a decade, appearing at Walt Disney World's Millennium Celebration and on MTV. The performers have also been featured on "Good Morning America" and "Reading Rainbow."

**Russian American Kids Circus, 1 and 4 p.m. Sat., Garde Arts Center, 325 State St. New London, \$15-\$20; clowns from ARTFARM will be on hand at 3 p.m., prior to the 4 p.m. show; 444-7373, gardearts.org.**

*Regional*

Total 2 images.



• *Members of the Russian American Kids Circus.*

