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## Catch a dream

### Ringling Bros. invites your imagination to join the circus

By Wendi Whitmore

August 3, 2006

You don't have to be a child to appreciate the explosion of colors, glitter and fantastic feats that make up the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey circus. The circus – opening in San Diego Wednesday at the ipayOne Center at the Sports Arena – hopes to inspire everyone to dream, the theme of this year's show.

The 136th edition will mark the most radical change made to the show in 50 years. The traditional three-ring format is gone in favor of an open arena with no rings or boundaries. The show's creators are hoping to compete with today's high-tech video game and Internet glam.



Ringling Bros.

Nicole Feld, the 28-year-old co-producer of the Ringling Bros. show owned by Feld Entertainment, said it was time the show was re-imagined.

Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey is back in town with all the lights, music, excitement and entertainment you've become used to, with a few new twists in this edition of the show.

"We talked to the audience, and from their feedback we realized we needed a format change. We wanted to target everyone, and we realized that the audience was telling us they wanted a more focused experience. We think the new format will let them focus on certain aspects of the show and make it more enjoyable for them."

The heart of the new format includes a story line following a family as each member follows a dream of performing in the circus.

The show has taken some modern steps with a 24-foot diameter LED video screen and a booming sound system that allow audiences to get closer to the action. Jennifer Fuentes – former "American Idol" finalist – plays a ringmaster and circus songstress.

Of course there will be clowns, magic, trapeze artists and animals. You'll see the endangered Asian elephants the circus is known for,

### DATEBOOK

#### Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus

*ipayOne Center at the Sports Arena; Wednesday through Aug. 13: Wednesday and Aug. 10, 7:30 p.m.; Aug. 11, 11 a.m. and 7:30 p.m.; Aug. 12, 11 a.m., 3:30 and 7:30 p.m.; Aug. 13, 1:30 and 5:30 p.m.; \$12-\$81.50 plus \$10 parking;*

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but while there will be no big cats, dogs and domestic cats will perform.

[www.ticketmaster.com](http://www.ticketmaster.com),  
[www.ringling.com](http://www.ringling.com) or (619)  
220-TIXS

Although a popular attraction, the use of Asian elephants in the Ringling Bros. shows has been a source of conflict for years. One issue is whether the animals face stress traveling 50 weeks a year. Such organizations as the Humane Society of the United States, ASPCA and PAWS have come out against the use of any animals in circuses and have sued Feld Entertainment over their care.

Ringling Bros. offers an up-close look at the animals before the show. Arrive 90 minutes early to see them in the parking lot. "People can see for themselves how healthy our animals are and how much they love to perform," Feld said. "You can see how much we love our animals."

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■ Wendi Whitmore is a San Diego writer.

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