



news release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

PBS Western Reserve to Premiere RINGLING, AKRON & THE 'BLUE HEAVEN' CIRCUIT

*Documentary explores Akron's role in relaunch of circus
following devastating 1944 fire*

Kent, OH — Aug. 8, 2023 — A new documentary, RINGLING, AKRON & THE 'BLUE HEAVEN' CIRCUIT, will premiere on PBS Western Reserve (WNEO 45.1 / WNEO 49.1) on Tuesday, Aug. 29, at 8 PM. Written and produced by local independent producer and veteran journalist Fred Endres, it tells the story of Akron's role in the relaunch of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey circus following a deadly fire in 1944.

The production finds Ringling Bros. in the aftermath of the worst fire in circus history, one that killed 167 people and injured hundreds more. The circus had lost its big top and much of its equipment. Where would it go to restart the 1944 tour? How would it perform without its massive, 19-ton canvas tent? Ringling officials needed to make decisions quickly.

"This is the fascinating story of how and why Ringling picked Akron to restart the season," Endres said.

Murray Powers, an editor at the Akron Beacon Journal — and a huge circus fan — had nicknamed the new tour "The Blue Heaven Circuit." That initial stand in Akron was for six shows over three days in August 1944, barely a month after the fire. It did not go particularly well, according to Endres.

"It was not the most successful appearance Ringling ever had," he said, "but it was really important for the circus to get back on the road to start paying off the hundreds of fire claims."

Students and staff from Kent State University and The University of Akron participated in the production. Veteran television broadcaster John Butte narrates the program.

For additional Ringling documentary air dates and times on PBS Western Reserve and Fusion (WNEO 45.2 / WEAO 49.2), and information on free viewing on demand following the premiere, visit PBSWesternReserve.org. A trailer for the production is available at <https://www.pbswesternreserve.org/luminus/ringling-akron-and-the-blue-heaven-circuit/>.

About PBS Western Reserve

PBS Western Reserve is the brand name of Northeastern Educational Television of Ohio, Inc., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation.

A trusted community resource, PBS Western Reserve uses the power of commercial-free television and related services to enrich the lives of people through high-quality programming and educational services that teach, illuminate and inspire. It serves the largest population of Ohio's eight PBS member stations.

PBS Western Reserve (WNEO 45.1 / WEAO 49.1), a service of the organization, is the only broadcast television service that reaches all of Northeast Ohio. It is available to 4.9 million people in the Cleveland and Youngstown designated market areas. In an average month, more than 1 million people tune in. The organization also operates two standard definition channels: Fusion (WNEO 45.2 / WEAO 49.2) and FNX (WNEO 45.3 / WEAO 49.3).

For more information about the organization, visit www.PBSWesternReserve.org or call 1-800-554-4549.

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