

Big Top on the Bayou

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Thirty years ago, John Pelton lived a childhood dream and ran off with the circus.

At 13, he left Beaumont and toured Texas and Louisiana for a summer, a "big adventure for a kid," he said Sunday, waiting for the afternoon show of Circus Gatti.

Now, at 47, he has worked full time with the circus for 20 years, training lions, ponies and elephants for work in the three rings.

And it hasn't lost its magic.

"I'm pretty lucky," Pelton, a burly man with a blond mustache, said before the show at the Beaumont Civic Center. "I've gotten to see a lot."

At 6 p.m., the lights went down and the circus began. Ringmaster Justin Loomis walked out in a top hat and a tuxedo with tails and began to croon, "Run away and join the circus with us."

Then the transformation show began, with Elena and Jeremy Hernandez performing magic tricks. They pulled flowers from a hat, while Elena instantly changed outfits with a swipe of a hoop.

Leo the clown drove through in his tiny car, no more than 3 feet tall.

It was 31-year-old Delilah Johnson's first circus. Her parents could never afford that type of entertainment, she said, so she wanted her three children to see the show, especially the elephants.

"I sound like a big kid, but it's OK," she said.

On the Roman rings hanging 15 feet from the arena floor, Monica Zerbini swung and spun from her hands and by her feet without a net.

So much of the crowd was waiting for the elephants.

"They're so big and they're fun," said Lyndsey Rubero, 9, of Vidor, who was seeing her first circus.

Read the rest of this story in Monday's Beaumont Enterprise