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TIMES RECORD NEWS ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE



FLYING HIGH ON THE TRAPEZE

Performer served internship at Circus School

By Lana Sweeten-Shults

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Kaely Michels-Gualtieri doesn't do 9-to-5. Or suit-and-tie. Or corporate world machinations. A humdrum, ho-hum desk job, for her, might as well be an abstract thought.

The punch line to a joke.

Although, most people would think it was the other way around when Michels-Gualtieri's mom suggested she join the circus.

It didn't look like Michels-Gualtieri — a spark plug of a competitive gymnast growing up who seems to always be on the go — would follow in her parents' footsteps. Her mom works in publishing and her

IF YOU GO

What: Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey's "Built to Amaze"

Where: Kay Yeager Coliseum
When: Through Sunday. Show times are 7 p.m. Friday, 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. Saturday, and 3:30 p.m. Sunday

Tickets: \$15 to \$35, all tickets have a \$4 fee
Information: 716-5555 or wfmpec.com

father is a NASA physicist.

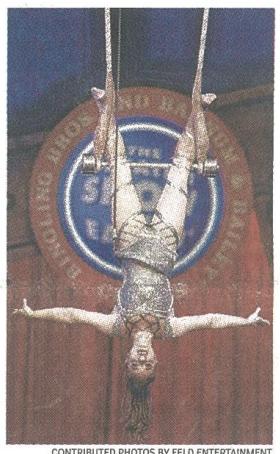
The Washington, D.C., native found that comment of her joining the circus to be a lightbulb-is-on moment. She found sense in it where others might think that would be the craziest idea ever.

Michels-Gualtieri attended the Field School, a nontraditional high school in Washington, D.C., that would close its doors for two weeks during the school year. In those two weeks, the students were expected to get a job or internship of some kind.

"The first year, I did McDonald's. The second year, I worked at a hospital and did photocopies for two weeks. I never EVER wanted to be bored like that again," Michels-Gualtieri said with a laugh from the road with the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, which will commit to a feat of daring or two at Kay Yeager Coliseum Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

So Michels-Gualtieri, who

See RINGLING BROS., 5B



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Trapeze artist Kaely Michels-Gualtieri went to a nontraditional high school in Washington, D.C., in which students took time off to explore different job options.

took third place in the Virginia gymnastics championships, took her mom's suggestion and went with it.

"I interned at the Circus School of San Francisco," she said, which didn't have an internship program. But they made one for her.

"My junior year, it became very clear ... I needed to find something else that made me happy ... so I packed my bags and moved to Italy."

She has discovered she has the utmost respect for those EMTs, and they for her, after she completes her EMT volunteer work and then goes back to her circus day job.

Michels-Gualtieri, who is just 25 years old, views

Michels-Gualtieri also doubles as an emergency medical technician after taking an accelerated class in D.C. one summer.

"I think this is an important skill that I have," she said, and she often volunteers with EMTs in whatever city she finds herself in as part of her circus job.

"This is a way to get to know the city at a different level."

She adds, "This is a way to move to Italy."

Administrators agreed.

"Six months in, I called Wellesley and said, 'Can I have a second year of deferral?' They were like, 'Are you kidding?'"

Not speaking a word of Italian, and circus employees not speaking much English, proved to be a challenge.

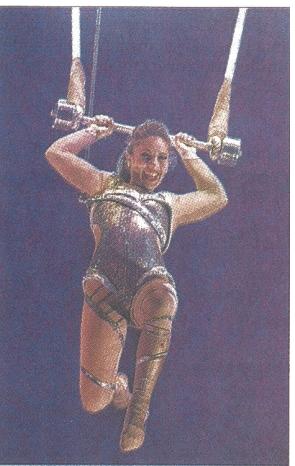
But she loves challenges. Plus, she said, she did not know enough to be scared.

"A lot of it, I was too dumb and young to know ... But I lived with Italian people ... It (the language) sort of seeps into you."

From there, it was off to the Academie Fratellini trapeze school in Paris, where she wrestled with her doubts even though she was the first American accepted into the school.

"A lot of them (former classmates) were going back to get degrees in different things ... I spent the last two years in circus school, wondering, 'Did I make the right decision?'"

What she realized was, "I got such a great education without knowing it ... like I know four languages now (French, English, Italian, Spanish)."



Kaely Michels-Gualtieri is in town with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey's "Built to Amaze." The Washington, D.C., native spent one summer in an office making copies and decided a ho-hum desk job wasn't for her, so went off to circus schools in Italy and Paris before joining Ringling Bros.

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