

# Carden Family

**Brett Carden 43-C-0270**  
**Larry Dean Carden 43-C-0353 (inactive)**  
**Former George Carden Circus**  
**International 43-C-0025**  
**3901 W. State Hwy. O, Springfield, MO**  
**65803**

The Carden family operates several elephant and other animal acts and produces Shrine circuses across the country. Until 2015, George Carden operated the George Carden Circus International. Carden's sons, Brett and Larry, took over the business. Larry Carden's license was cancelled in 2022, leaving Brett Carden as the sole operator of the Super Shrine Circus, Inc., and Carden International Circus, Inc. The Cardens have failed to meet minimum federal standards for the care of animals used in exhibition as established in the Animal Welfare Act (AWA). The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has cited members of the Carden family for failing to provide adequate veterinary care, failing to handle animals properly, failing to have safe enclosures for animals, failing to provide animals with sufficient space, failing to provide tigers with proper nutrition, and more. At least two elephants exhibited by the Carden family have tested positive for tuberculosis (TB), and others have been barred from performing because of the possibility that they were carrying TB and could infect humans. Contact PETA for documentation.

**February 25, 2026:** The USDA issued Brett Carden an official warning for the September 29, 2025, citation for failing to handle animals as expeditiously and carefully as possible, which did not cause trauma, overheating, excessive cooling, behavioral stress, physical harm, or

unnecessary discomfort. (See the September 29, 2025, item.)

**September 29, 2025:** The USDA issued Brett Carden a direct citation for failing to handle Betty, a geriatric Asian elephant, in a manner that did not cause her trauma, behavioral stress, physical harm, or unnecessary discomfort. Inspectors observed "Betty, an approx. 56-year-old elephant, walking with a stiff gait, and Inspectors observed that this lameness increased when the licensee allowed members of the public to ride the elephant. Betty's walking speed decreased, and the stiffness was more clearly observed. The licensee told inspectors that the elephant's "stiffness" increases when she is ridden by members of the public, but that 'she warms out of it.' Allowing members of the public to ride her is causing additional lameness resulting in trauma, physical harm, or unnecessary discomfort."

In addition, the USDA cited Brett Carden for failing to provide Betty with adequate veterinary care. She walked with a stiff gait, and the right wrist flexed 10 degrees, while the left flexed 75 degrees. The stiffness worsened when Betty gave rides to the public, and though she was prescribed an anti-inflammatory medication to be used as needed, the lameness indicated that the licensee was not using the medication at a frequency and/or dosage effective for controlling and treating this condition.

**May 2025:** The City of Rochester, MN, issued a warning letter to Carden International Circus for failing to obtain a proper license to conduct a circus that exhibited captive wild animals within the city.

**January 2, 2022:** The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission issued warnings to Brett Carden for failing to obtain proper authorization to offer elephant rides

and failing to have a firearm of the minimum acceptable caliber to “capture, control, or destroy escaped or out-of-control animals” at a Wonderland of Lights & Santa’s Village exhibit in Auburndale, Florida.

**November 2, 2019:** The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission issued warnings to Larry Carden while exhibiting with the Garden Bros. Circus for endangering the public by walking elephants through a crowd without barriers and by failing to keep the animals safely contained backstage

**February 2017:** Fulton County Animal Services conducted a series of inspections during UniverSoul Circus’ visit to Turner Field in Atlanta. During one inspection, the following were noted: A camel named Emmett had a 3-inch-long laceration on his right hind leg, a camel named Larry had a swollen ankle and foot that needed to be treated and drained, a zebra had a wound or rub mark on his nose, and several horses had cracked and chipped hooves that were “in bad shape.”

Fulton County Animal Services officers also found that the elephants Betty and Bo had been given minimal hay, had no water, and were made to stand on concrete, despite having bruised feet. Bo had “Wonder Dust,” a gray powdered blood coagulant, on his chest, and during a performance, an officer noticed a “wet spot” on his left hind ankle. On a subsequent visit, the wound appeared to have “Wonder Dust” on it. PETA independently obtained video footage of the inflamed, pink wound with a small, circular lesion at the center.

**September 25, 2015:** Elephants Betty and Bo, exhibited by Larry Carden, were denied entry into the state of Michigan after PETA tipped off local officials and the state veterinarian to the fact that they were likely carrying TB, based on years of reactive blood tests.

**August 20, 2015:** Officials in Dallas County, Texas, barred elephants Bo and Betty from performing with Larry Carden and UniverSoul Circus at Southwest Center Mall. In a letter to the circus, Dallas County Health and Human Services Director Zachary Thompson stated, “Given the potential transmission and tuberculosis from elephants that carry the disease to arena and circus workers, members of the public, and other animals, we believe that these elephants should not be exhibited.”

**March 25, 2015:** After a tractor-trailer carrying three elephants who were to be used in a Shrine circus got stuck in mud on the side of a Louisiana highway, elephants Vickie and Jenny were forced to use their bodies to prop up the trailer. Photos from the incident show the handler carrying a bullhook.

**December 10, 2014:** According to blood tests performed by Chembio Diagnostic Systems, Inc., elephants Betty, Bo, and Patty tested reactive to TB antibodies.

**May 9, 2014:** The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection issued an official warning notice to George Carden Circus International for illegally entering the state without the required permit to import animals to be used in circus acts. The circus had planned to perform at the La Crosse Center.

**August 15, 2013:** The USDA cited Brett Carden for failing to have records of acquisition available for four dogs and failing to keep the floor of the transport vehicle, which held the primary enclosures used to contain the dogs, in good repair and structurally sound.

**June 28, 2013:** According to documents received from the USDA, elephants Bo and Betty tested reactive on blood tests for TB.

**May 7, 2013:** The USDA cited George Carden Circus International for failing to provide six adult tigers, who were confined to a transport cage, with sufficient space to allow them adequate freedom of movement. The tigers were allowed one hour each in the arena and spent the remainder of the day in the transport cage.

**April 9, 2013:** Carol, a 39-year-old Asian elephant owned by the Carden family, was hit in the shoulder in a drive-by shooting while traveling with Ringling Bros. circus. She was in an enclosure outside the BancorpSouth Arena in Tupelo, Mississippi, when she was shot.

**February 1, 2013:** According to documents received from the USDA, elephants Betty, Bo, Vickie, and Janice tested reactive on blood tests for TB.

**April 10, 2012:** The USDA cited George Carden Circus International for failing to provide tigers with proper nutrition. Eight of the 10 tigers were underweight, and their hip bones and backbones were prominent.

**March 16, 2012:** The USDA cited George Carden Circus International for having an inadequate perimeter fence that wouldn't prevent animals or humans from going through or under it.

**December 15, 2011:** According to documents received from the USDA, elephants Betty, Bimbo, Bo, and Tory tested reactive on blood tests for TB.

**March 17, 2011:** The USDA cited George Carden Circus International for a direct violation of the AWA for failing to establish and maintain a program of adequate veterinary care, after failing to use "appropriate methods to assess and treat the stiffness and gait issues" of three elephants. The inspector found that elephants Tory and Bimbo had severe stiffness of the front limbs, while Betty had

intermittent stiffness of the front limbs. The inspector noted that failure to diagnose and treat the animals "could affect the long term health and wellbeing of these elephants."

**March 16, 2011:** The USDA cited George Carden Circus International for a direct violation of the AWA for failing to ensure that elephants being used for rides remained under the control of handlers. The inspector wrote that there were too few handlers, that the handlers who were present were distracted, and that the elephants were seen walking around the rink while not under a handler's control.

**December 20, 2010:** According to documents received from the USDA, elephants Bo and Betty tested reactive on blood tests for TB.

**September 23, 2010:** According to National Veterinary Services Laboratories (NVSL) records, elephant Betty tested reactive on blood tests for TB.

**February 26, 2010:** The USDA cited Brett Carden for failing to have two elephants under the direct control of the handler at all times during a circus intermission when the elephants were being used to give rides.

**February 16, 2010:** The USDA cited Brett Carden for failing to have a responsible adult available to allow for an inspection.

**December 23, 2009:** According to NVSL records, elephant Betty tested reactive on a blood test for TB.

**November 18, 2009:** The USDA cited Brett Carden for failing to be available for an inspection and not having an itinerary on file to note his absence.

**June 25, 2009:** The USDA cited Brett Carden for failing to have a responsible adult available to allow for an inspection.

**February 24, 2009:** According to NVSL lab results of blood drawn on December 23, 2008, elephant Betty tested reactive on a test for TB.

**May 16, 2008:** The USDA cited Brett Carden for failing to have an attendant present during public contact with llamas, goats, and sheep and failing to maintain a transport compartment. It contained a bent metal panel with sharp edges that protruded into the area that would hold an elephant during transport.

**December 6, 2007:** The USDA cited Brett Carden for failing to supply adequate veterinary treatment to two elephants who were in need of foot care.

**November 20, 2007:** The USDA cited Brett Carden for failing to be available for an inspection.

**November 19, 2007:** The USDA cited George Carden Circus International for failing to provide an elephant—who had a lesion on a toenail, which a circus representative said was the result of a ruptured abscess—with adequate veterinary care. There was no documentation that the injury had been treated.

**October 13, 2007:** The circus refused to allow a veterinarian, two inspectors, and the operations manager with the Chicago Animal Care and Control Center to perform an inspection of the elephants during the circus's appearance at the UIC Pavilion. A circus representative said, "[W]e're not going to let you in."

**September 5, 2007:** The USDA cited Brett Carden for failing to be available for an inspection and not having an itinerary on file to note his absence.

**October 19, 2006:** The USDA cited Brett Carden for failing to have two elephants, who were being used for rides, under the

direct control of an experienced handler. The handler had walked away and turned away from the elephants to assist in another matter unrelated to them. Carden was also cited for failing to store an open bag of food in a manner that would protect it from deterioration, molding, or contamination by vermin.

**April 29, 2006:** The USDA cited George Carden Circus International for failing to have dangerous animals under the direct control and supervision of a knowledgeable and experienced handler. The inspector wrote, "Only one animal handler was available to manage two elephants providing rides to the public. There were times when both elephants were loaded with [members of the] public and the handler was not in the ring with the animals and could not have been in control of either elephant. No other knowledgeable and experienced elephant handler was available to assist this handler during public exhibition."

**March 16, 2006:** The USDA cited George Carden Circus International for failing to provide an elephant named Judy, who had three open wounds on her forehead and one on her left front leg, with veterinary care.

**August 17, 2005:** The USDA cited George Carden Circus International for failing to provide an elephant with adequate veterinary care. The circus hadn't consulted with a veterinarian about an irritated patch of skin on the elephant's right flank.

**October 12, 2004:** The USDA cited George Carden Circus International for failing to have written documentation to show that an Asian elephant named Duchess, who had a long crack in a toenail on a hind foot, was being provided with foot care. Foot problems and arthritis are the leading reasons for euthanasia of captive elephants in the U.S. Cracked nails can lead to foot

disorders that may result in serious disability or death.

**August 29, 2004:** An elephant with George Carden Circus International attacked an arena worker following a performance at El Maida Shrine Circus in El Paso, Texas. The elephant knocked the man down, threw him against a wall, and pinned him against a fence. He dislocated his shoulder, tore a rotator cuff, and sustained a nerve injury, which required surgery and resulted in more than \$16,000 in medical bills.

**February 25, 2004:** The USDA cited George Carden Circus International for failing to comply with its written program of veterinary care, including routine tests for parasites as prescribed by the attending veterinarian, and failing to maintain adequate records of animal acquisitions and dispositions.

**July 10, 2003:** The USDA cited George Carden Circus International for failing to provide an elephant named Janice with adequate foot care. The inspector wrote, "Failure to provide the appropriate foot care to this elephant may cause further deterioration of the cuticles and may result in pain and discomfort to the animal." The USDA also cited the circus for failing to have an adequate barrier to ensure the safety of the animals and the public and noted that TB testing for the elephants wasn't being conducted in accordance with the program of veterinary care.

**June 17, 2002:** While performing with the Shrine circus in Menomonie, Wisconsin, elephants Mary and Tory bolted out of a circus tent during a show, scattering crowds. Mary hiked 2 miles through town and was recaptured at the University of Wisconsin–Stout after trucks blocked her escape. A child was injured, and the elephants damaged a door at a park and caused \$600 in damage to a city truck. The

Shriners had contracted with George Carden Circus International for the event.

**2002:** According to documents received from the USDA, Bimbo, a 46-year-old elephant, tested positive for TB.

**May 1, 2001:** Two employees of George Carden Circus International pleaded guilty to cruelty-to-animals charges in provincial court in St. John's, Newfoundland, and each was fined \$200. The judge stated that the best sentence would be for people to stay away from the circus the next time it came to town. (See the July 1, 2000, item.)

**April 4, 2001:** The USDA cited George Carden Circus International for failing to store food properly, failing to have an exercise plan for dogs, failing to have records of dogs on hand, and failing to provide a llama with adequate space. The animal wasn't able to stand with his head in an upright position.

**2001:** According to documents received from the USDA, Bonnie, a 57-year-old elephant, tested positive for TB.

**July 1, 2000:** The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) charged each of two George Carden Circus International employees with five counts of cruelty to animals in Newfoundland, Canada. The alleged offenses included causing unnecessary pain and suffering to five bears, eight ponies, and three elephants and failing to provide the elephants with water and care. (See the May 1, 2001, item.)

**July 23, 2000:** According to *The Daily News*, the Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources forced George Carden Circus International to leave the province and levied a fine against it because it had brought bears with it, in violation of an ordinance prohibiting bears in circuses. The circus was forced to cancel 10 remaining

performance dates and was also fined for failing to have a wildlife import permit.

**June 26 and 27, 2000:** A Canadian SPCA inspection of the George Carden Circus International found eight ponies and three elephants confined to a poorly ventilated trailer for more than seven hours without water. A chain around the leg of one of the elephants lacked sufficient padding to prevent injury, and inadequate space “forced one elephant to take an unnatural posture.” Prior to being loaded into the trailer, the elephants exhibited “extreme signs of abnormal and stressed behaviour.” Five bears were confined to very small cages for 23 hours a day, and no water or bedding was present. In a cage that held two bears, their food was contaminated with fecal material. One bear exhibited signs of “abnormal and stressed behaviour.”

**June 16, 2000:** According to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the chief of the Stephenville, Newfoundland, fire department said that it was unlikely that the department would have George Carden Circus International back again, because of controversy over the treatment of animals.

**June 13, 2000:** According to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, representatives of the provincial diabetes association in Grand Falls–Windsor, Newfoundland, said they would ask to have the organization’s name removed from advertising posters for George Carden Circus International because the group wasn’t endorsing the circus.

**June 12, 2000:** According to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the city council of St. John’s, Newfoundland, voted not to give a license to George Carden Circus International for a June 23 and 24 booking at Memorial Stadium after viewing video footage of how animals in circuses are trained.

**July 25, 1998:** The USDA cited George Carden Circus International for failing to handle animals properly. The inspectors noted that a “groom” named Shaun Skinner “picked up the prod and began forcefully and repeatedly poking the animal [a tiger] through the cage bars.” The report went on to say, “The animal was again subjected to another session of abusive prodding by Mr. Skinner. . . . This unprofessional and abusive behavior on the part of the groom is unacceptable.”

**April 22, 1998:** The USDA cited George Carden Circus International for failing to have a plan of veterinary care, records of the animals, and records of acquisition, disposition, and transport available for review.

**March 26, 1998:** The USDA cited George Carden Circus International for failing to have a complete written program of veterinary care.

**June 20, 1997:** Veterinarian W.H. Chisholm observed the following while George Carden Circus International was in Nova Scotia, Canada:

After unloading three elephants from their trailer, the trainer was in the process of cleaning them when he ordered one of them (Janice) to stay in place. When she did not comply, he used his ankus (a pole with a pointed end and a hook on its side) to grab her inside the mouth and firmly jerk her face toward him as he hollered at her to obey. Next he ordered her to lie down, at which point she began to urinate (a common stress response in animals). He continued to order her to lie down and roll over on her side in her own urine as she was still in the process of urinating. After he finished hosing her off, he ordered her to get up. Again, she did not

comply to his satisfaction, and he subsequently kicked her in the face with force equivalent to what I would use to kick a soccer ball. . . . When the elephants were performing in the ring I observed the trainer repeatedly driving the pointed end of the ankus into the tissue above the foot of one of the elephant's left hind legs. He continued for at least 8-10 times .... This was done with both hands on the shaft of the ankus and his full body force thrown into the movement. ... I witnessed the tiger trainer use his black whip on at least 6 occasions to hit the tigers in the face when they were not performing appropriately in the ring.

**January 4, 1997:** According to an internal USDA document, animals owned by George Carden Circus International might have been exposed to elephants from the Hawthorn Corporation who tested positive for tuberculosis.

**October 16, 1996:** The USDA cited George Carden Circus International for failing to provide animals with adequate veterinary care. There were no veterinary records present that documented whether an elephant named Cindy, who had a history of weight loss, had received treatment. And a pygmy goat, who had a large swelling on the lower neck and needed to be examined, hadn't received veterinary care. The circus was also cited for failing to keep the enclosures holding tigers in good repair.

**May 23, 1996:** The USDA cited George Carden Circus International for failing to have an updated program of veterinary care.

**October 6, 1994:** The USDA cited George Carden Circus International for failing to provide the dogs with safe enclosures. The USDA inspector stated that "nails are

protruding from the top of enclosures housing dogs on top level."

**June 20, 1990:** An elephant named Carol, who was owned by the Carden family, knocked down a handler and stepped on him, crushing his chest. He died as a result. The incident occurred as the elephants were being prepared for a performance with the Hanneford Family Circus at the Thunderbird Swap Shop in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.