Lobeck juggles for joy

by Henry Netherland
Mail Staff Writer

With circus schools closed and gigs canceled internationally because of COVID-19, Salida Circus training manager Joe Lobeck decided to train outside his Chicago, Illinois, apartment, where he soon attracted attention from numerous passersby and local media.

He practiced about four hours a day for a couple of days on Logan Boulevard. His training included juggling balls, clubs, cigar boxes and hats. He also performed handstands and other contortions on a handmade bar.

Lobeck originally trained outside as a way to isolate himself, but he soon began noticing that he was acting as a good distraction from the intensity of the disease.

After receiving a tip from a neighbor, Chicago publication photographer drew attention to Lobeck. He called Lobeck to perform for an article titled “Circus Performer Juggling on Logan Boulevard to Spread Joy During Coronavirus Outbreak” by Mina Bloom, which was posted Monday. He said he was surprised to have been featured because he did not intend to receive media coverage.

Lobeck said he also received an interview request from ABC 7 Chicago, which was “weird” because he just wanted to train outside. As of Wednesday, it had not taken place yet. Although he appreciates the media coverage, he said he is worried the exposure will cause people to criticize him for creating mass gatherings, which he said was not his intention at all.

Multiple families throughout his training period sat in the grass to watch him perform. Self-quarantined neighbors watched him from their windows.

Lobeck estimates that about 100 passerby interacted with him in total, but that includes simple greetings from passing cars. He said he personally met between 10 and 15 people during his performances.

While in no way supports the effects of the virus, he said he believes nature is taking its course and humbling society. He believes in maintaining “a resilient and indomitable spirit,” having a positive attitude even in times of crisis and choosing a lifestyle that makes others smile.

Although he has been living in Chicago for the last few months to train, he is currently en route to Salida to touch base with family. He has been a Salida resident for five years.

“In a time like this — my family is out there and I think it’s a good idea to be with family, stay inside, do art, do music, do circus — just get in touch with community more,” Lobeck said in his Block Club Chicago interview.

He said he was not surprised Salida Circus closed its 2020 Spring Break Camp considering circuses all over the world were canceling performances.

Staff and a customer at 50 Burger practice social distancing while filling an order for milkshakes Wednesday and is still open for carry-out and is planning to add delivery to customers during COVID-19 precautions. From left are owner Jeff Schweitzer, server Michelle Bailey and customer Sam Berglund of Salida.

Police arrest two juveniles after chase

Cotopaxi’s Coffee Cart program for special needs

Local restaurants adapt to COVID-19 outbreak

by D.J. DeJong
Mail Staff Writer

With precautions taken by the county regarding restaurants and bars serving only delivery, local eateries and watering holes have had to modify their methods of doing business while doing their best to provide entertainment from the intensity of the disease.

Jeff Schweitzer co-owner of 50 Burger, 445 E. U.S. 50, said he has talked to other restaurant owners, including those in Buena Vista, about the situation, and everyone is trying to do takeout and many are hoping to add delivery to their service.

Schweitzer said he and his partners plan to start making deliveries using their private vehicles soon to provide that option to customers.

If able to work out the details of that plan, 50 Burger will deliver to Salida, Poncha Springs and Pitkin Hills.

“What’s most important is to be able to keep employees working,” he said.

To keep employees at the restaurant busy during the stay-at-home order, Schweitzer said he has been doing deep cleaning in addition to preparing carry-out orders.

Schweitzer said he’d rather do the cleaning when they are closed or after hours, but he wants to keep his staff occupied.

“We’re trying to be as positive as possible and see what the future brings,” he said.

Schweitzer’s other business, Uptown to Go, will only be open for takeout business on weekends.

“With no ski season, no sit-down dining and no alcohol sales, it’s a challenge,” he said.

He estimates a drop in business of about 80 percent compared to last year’s spring break patronage.

“We must keep this up for as long as this lasts,” he said, adding once a restaurant closes it’s hard to get the capital to start up again.

Schweitzer said he is sure Salida won’t have as big a problem as big metro areas and he thinks it’s his responsibility to help flatten the curve.

“With no ski season, no sightseeing or delivery, local eateries and watering holes have had to modify their methods of doing business while doing their best to provide entertainment from the intensity of the disease.”

Our health care system would be sorely taxed if many people get the virus. We are taking it on ourselves to do the right thing and not just try not to sneak around,” he said.

The restaurant’s regular menu, absent alcohol, is available, including Scanga ground brisket burgers and milkshakes.

Schweitzer said he has spoken to Salida Mayor P.T. Wood about the possibility of offering alcohol to-go sales.

“New York City is doing that,” he said.

To-go alcohol would be bottled beers to-go cups and boozy shakes in to-go cups, Schweitzer said.

“Salida has a vibrant bar and restaurant scene, and we need to keep it going for when the pandemic is over. A boost in cash flow such as alcohol sales is helpful,” Schweitzer said.

Wood said he didn’t believe the city had the authority to do that, nor what it would look like to regulate and enforce, although he agreed it would be good for local businesses if it could happen.

Schweitzer said he doesn’t agree with the county’s decision to ask visitors to leave and/or stay home from visiting Chaffee County, but allowed he hasn’t heard the reasons for making that decision.

“It won’t be to my benefit,” he said.

He cited activities such as fly fishing and mountain biking that would encourage social distancing but said the county commissioners may have a rationale that overrides economic well-being.

“Things are changing so fast,” he said.

Patrons can find the 50 Burger menu online at 50burger-salida.com and can phone in an order at 719-207-4905, or they can come in to order as long as no more than five customers are inside at a time.

He said they have their times for orders down to about 11 minutes or 13 minutes for well-done.

“We’re trying to stay as positive as possible. Everyone is in the same boat,” Schweitzer said.