## -Unicycles

" (Continued from Page 19) with riding skill, when performing in the center ring.

"I think joining the troupe is the best decision I made in the 26 of my 27 years of life," said Wash.

"You see, Mr. Jerry is a self-taught man. He was in the streets all his life and we could relate to him. He gave us all a chance. He taught us the meaning of leadership, manhood and fellowship.

'Mr. Jerry used to tell us, always do something for the race, do something for the kids and build character.

"I guess Mr. Jerry started all this because he believed in Christian principles... Christian faith is definitely a part of this."

Leroy (Boscoe) Ross feels its a miracle being in the circus. When he joined the troupe in 1960, he said, "The ghetto was going downhill to nothing." He never thought they'd make the circus.

"A lot of youngsters don't have anyone to inspire them," he said. "Now we have the opportunity to be in the circus. We got a break and now other black kids can see that they can do it too. One day there might be a black circus.

"Black people can relate to us. They react to us. And, we enjoy that with the people. It shows that we're concerned about them."

Ross feels that parents are making a special effort to take the time and bring the kids to see the troupe perform.

When the King Charles
Troupe joined the circus they
were athletes not performers.
The only thing that made
them a circus act was the
unicycle.

The troupe began to put together one of the circus' most successful acts.

'The more we fooled around, the more we were liked' said Wash, "We were perfectionists. We had to work real hard and practice a lot. And, we brought the circus a brand new act."

are, not what they are. They saw that we were fighters, warriors and proud people.

"We learned a lot from them and they learned a lot from us," he added.

glitter-costumed wheel wizards zoom around the center ring twice a day, and three times on Saturday.

They perform a high speed hirlarious game of basket-ball, football, and believe it or not a boxing match. And, said Charles they try to add something new to their act every year.

The King Charles Troupe also performs in dance production numbers and participate in King Neptune's underwater circus spectacular during the two-hour-fifty minute production. The group's youngest member, 15-year-old Jerome Owens also

The King Charles Troupe claims responsibility for integrating the circus . . . and maybe they did. It took a while for the European performers to realize the stereotypes they had heard didn't apply.

The troupe is unique in the

circus world. Unlike the

European artists, they were

not raised in the circus

tradition. Many of the

Europeans are third and

fourth generation perfor-

mers. The Europeans had

also heard a lot of rumors

"No one was actually

speaking to us then," said

Wash. "There were 10 of us

"They had heard a lot about

us coming from the ghetto

and I guess some were not

Gradually, the other perfor-

"They realized how fair we

were. They saw that we

treated people by who they

mers realized that the troupe

was not like the stereotypes.

ready for the change, the in-

tegration of the circus."

and we made our own thing.

about black people.

performs with the gymnastic

Now the glitter and glamour hang in wardrobe trunks in the men's dressing room. The unicycles are mounted on racks. The balls and other equipment are put away.

Each show demands lots of smiles, energy and full concentration from each artist. Backstage after a show it's like a tomb with wandering bathrobed performers.

The 108th edition of the Blue Unit will take two years to criss-cross the United States. It's on the road 48 weeks a year. That leaves only four weeks for rehearsal and relaxation time.

"There's a lot of inspiration in the circus, especially when there are black performers," said Ross. "We try to reach as many people as we can. Some people can't afford to come out to see us."

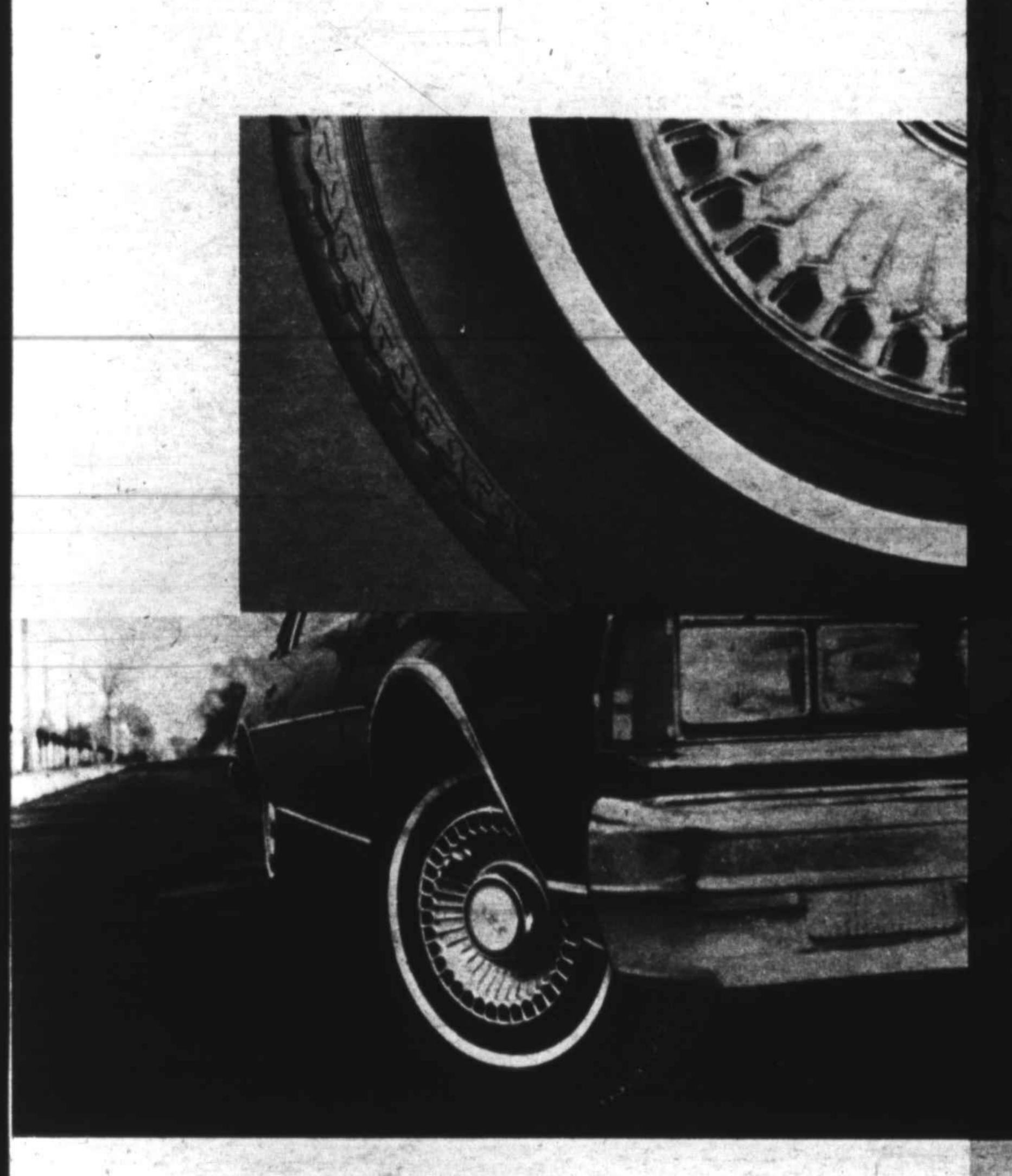
Sandwiched in between performances are demonstrations and lectures given by the troupe at area schools and community centers.

"We are people who are making a living," said Charles, "we're taking it out and we're putting it back into the community."



GLITTERING — Members of the King Charles Troupe are celebrating their 10th anniversary with the Ringling Brothers, Bar-

num & Bailey circus. They are attached to the Blue Unit, and don spangles and sequins for the big production numbers of the circus.





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