

**BUSINESS**

**BLACKS UNDER THE BIG TOP**

**UniverSOUL puts blacks in circus business**

*Special to Sentinel-Voice*

For centuries American society has been divided into two groups; whites and nonwhites.

Cedric Walker is capitalizing on the differences.

Walker, 43, is founder and president of the UniverSOUL Big Top Circus. It is the first circus in a century to be owned, operated and performed by African-Americans.

The UniverSOUL Circus is on a 10-city tour designed to give urban residents an opportunity to witness expressions of their culture and strengthen African-American input in the circus scene. Walker's troupe of 90 performers features 14 traditional acts, including aerial artists, a menagerie, acrobats and clowns.

Rather than the basic "hear ye hear ye," the high-stepping ringmaster Casual Cal greets crowds with "yo, yo, yo" and hip-hop dance movements spiced with a bit of James Brown.

The elephants - adorned in war gear reminiscent of Hannibal's army - enact the general's famous crossing of the Alps to victories in Europe.

Known as "Hip Hop Under the Big Top," the circus is a captivating and amusing style of family entertainment interwoven with state-of-the-art production, music, energy and the flair of today's urban

**Business Exchange**

By William Reed



pop culture. The circus is also a vehicle for entrepreneurship.

According to *TargetMarket News*, African-Americans spend \$2 billion each year on entertainment. Walker's traveling circus provides an

sponsorship from business giants AT&T, Burger King, Texaco, General Mills and Ford. The circus was such a big occasion in Washington, D.C. that area Ford dealers gave thousands of youth free tickets



opportunity for him to tap into those dollars.

To date, his circus has drawn tens of thousands in cities such as New York, Newark, N.J. and Washington, D.C. He has secured

and a unique "circus wagon" (a 1997 econoline van with special graphics) to ferry them to the big top.

More than 100 local people gain employment at each circus stop, Walker said. He said the

circus has also been a boon to local promoters, newspapers, radio stations, technicians and roustabouts.

Circus-type performances date back thousands of years. Acrobats and balance artists are depicted on wall paintings in Egypt that date back to 2500 B.C. One of the largest circus parades known to man took place in Egypt during the third century B.C.

Since 1793, Americans have grown up with the circus. Whole towns would shut down on circus day.

By the 1950s, circus appeal waned due to the introduction of television and the changing structure of cities. But, older circus-goers still remembered the fanfare.

Walker follows in the footsteps of men like Ephraim Williams. Born in Milwaukee in the mid-1800s, Williams operated several circus shows by his thirties. By 1893, Williams' Consolidated American and German Railroad Shows were a 15-car railroad circus.

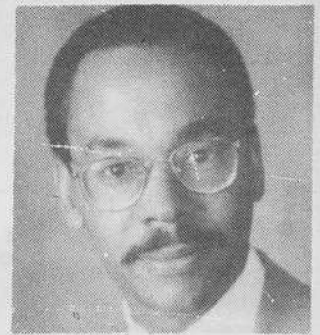
He fell from prominence due to white backlash from his hiring white employees and drawing white audiences.

Walker has all the pieces and sponsors in place. Expansion to venues year-round is possible if he can pair up with the right people.

He can be reached at Suite B-5, 2459 Roosevelt Highway., College Park, Ga. 30337 (404) 766-1988.

**Financial Report**

By Fred T. Snyder



**New tax laws create different IRA**

*Special to Sentinel-Voice*

For years it has been said that once you put money into an IRA, you cannot touch it, without a 10 percent penalty, until age 59-1/2.

Well, that idea has partially changed, thanks to new tax laws that create a new type of IRA and also help the regular IRA become more tax-friendly. These new laws may also help you do more with the money you save.

Here's how:

**• ROTH IRA PLUS.**

Starting in 1998 and named after Senate Finance Committee Chairman William Roth (R-Del.), the Roth IRA Plus differs from a regular IRA.

Roth IRA Plus contributions are not tax-deductible; however, earnings on your Roth IRA Plus investments grow tax-deferred — and can be tax-free if you follow the rules. Your contributions must remain in the Roth IRA Plus account for at least five years and you must be 59-1/2 years old. (Tax-free withdrawals are also allowed for special purposes, such as buying your first home up to \$10,000.)

The maximum annual contribution allowed to your Roth IRA Plus is \$2,000 and you may not contribute more than \$2,000 to any combination

of your regular IRA and/or your Roth IRA Plus. Eligible participants for a Roth IRA Plus must not have annual adjusted gross income exceeding \$150,000 for married couples or \$95,000 for individuals.

Though these benefits may help some investors with other financial needs, those of you who still plan to use your IRA as a retirement-saving's vehicle may find the Roth IRA very beneficial, depending on the performance of your investments.

How much can you benefit? Consider the following scenario: Let's say you are in the 28 percent federal tax bracket and make your \$2,000 maximum annual Roth investments average a 10 percent annual return. Your account can grow to about \$216,364.

In a regular IRA, any withdrawals made after age 59-1/2 would be taxed at 28 percent.

In a Roth IRA Plus, however, those withdrawals will be tax-free, allowing you to stretch out your retirement money for a longer time, and, unlike a regular IRA, you do not have to take mandatory withdrawals from your Roth IRA Plus at age 70-1/2.

**• Regular IRA.** Your regular IRA was also a winner in this new tax bill. The new laws will gradually increase the annual adjustable gross income limits for individuals and married couples eligible to make tax-deductible IRA contributions.

Starting in 1998, the annual income limits will progressively rise to \$50,000 for individuals by 2005 and \$80,000 for married couples by 2007. Your contributions will grow tax-deferred until you start making withdrawals that will then be taxed as ordinary income if you are at least 59-1/2.

No matter what your particular situation. You should see an increased advantage in using one or more IRA-type accounts. Your investment professional and tax adviser can provide you more details on how flexible these tax-deferred accounts can be for your needs.

This article was provided by A.G. Edwards & Sons, Inc., member SIPC, Fred T. Snyder, investment broker.

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