

Shrine Circus denied fair site

State's rebuff may
doom 103-year-old
event, club says

BY FRANCIS X. DONNELLY
The Detroit News

Another page could be torn from the history book.

Like the 160-year-old Michigan State Fair, the 103-year-old Shrine Circus may be missing from Detroit this year.

The event, which is the oldest Shrine circus in the nation, lost its home last year when the financially crippled state closed the fair.

Detroit Shriners asked Gov. Jennifer Granholm to allow them to continue using the fairgrounds for the circus, but a state spokeswoman said Thursday that it wasn't possible.

Megan Brown said the state was looking for ways to use the site for a "job-creating project." She declined to elaborate.

"During tough economic times government can't be all things to all people," she said.

Circus Director Chuck Baer said he couldn't understand the governor's thinking.

The circus wouldn't cost Michigan a dime and would put \$40,000 into depleted state coffers through rental fees, he said. At the same time, it serves as one of the biggest fundraisers for the Shriners, who help pay the medical costs of poor children.

"It's beneficial to us, beneficial to tens of thousands of people who attend, beneficial to vendors, and beneficial to the state," he said.

The Shriners enlisted the support of the Detroit City Council, which unanimously approved a resolution Tuesday asking the governor for help.

The group also created a Web site Thursday asking people to call the governor's office and sign an online petition. By early evening, 135 people had signed it.

"Homeless in Detroit," read the title of the Web page. "World's first and oldest circus may now be homeless."

Begun in 1906, it was the first Shrine Circus ever held.

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Associated Press

Detroit Shriners have created a Web site seeking public support for the organization to hold its circus at the state fairgrounds.