

2019 HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE

By Charles Conrad, Chair of the WJU Hall of Fame Committee

Charles Edward Ringling (1863-1926)



Charles Edward Ringling was one of the brothers who began with a traveling vaudeville-style show in 1884 and turned it into one of the largest circuses by the mid-1890's.

By 1887, the growing Ringling brothers' show was called Ringling Bros. United Monster Shows, Great Double Circus, Royal European Menagerie, Museum, Caravan, and Congress of Trained Animals.

One of the most significant moments in the history of circus music occurred in 1895 when the Ringling Brothers Circus brought in Alessandro Liberati and his famed concert band as a feature ensemble that combined

with William Weldon's circus band to create dazzling center ring concerts before each show.

Charles was directly involved in the production and artistic aspects of the show, and he was an important supporter of Merle Evans when the time came to combine the Barnum & Bailey Circus with the Ringling Brothers show in 1919. He was the one who offered the job and discussed the musical aspects with Evans, who said that Charles was the one who insisted on keeping the band the best in the circus world.

Ringling was greatly admired by his employees, who called him "Mr. Charlie", viewing him as a friend and counselor, as well as their employer. Charles was an early settler and developer of Sarasota, FL, donating land for a courthouse, founding Sarasota's third bank, and serving as President of the Sarasota Chamber of Commerce. Ringling Boulevard is named for him.

Charles Ringling was born December 2, 1863 in McGregor, IA, and died in Sarasota, FL on December 3, 1926, having celebrated his 63rd birthday the day before. He is buried in Manasota Memorial Park in Bradenton, FL. In the 1960s, his estate was purchased by New College of Florida.