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### Dome's leaks fixed in time for circus salute

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The 30-year-old Show Dome at Mitchell Park has been caulked, 120 windows have been replaced, and its web of metal rain channels have been repaired - so it won't rain on the little parade that will wind through the dome beginning Saturday.

The Show Dome's first show after renovation is "Big Top Express," a detailed miniature tribute to the Great Circus Parade and its annual summer train journey from Baraboo to Milwaukee.

Leakage from cracked windows and crumbling rain channels had been a problem in the popular dome, which hadn't had much maintenance since its opening in 1964, said conservatory director Kristine Ciombor. It had been closed down since June 28, when \$500,000 in major repairs were undertaken.

Another \$500,000 in repairs planned for next year should complete work on the Show Dome and the Tropical Dome, which was opened in 1967. A third year of repair work might be done, depending on the availability of funds, she said.

The condition of the third dome, the Arid Dome, hasn't been assessed yet, Ciombor said.

The absence of maintenance may have been based on the architect's pledge that he had built a dome that would be maintenance-free for 100 years. But that's not quite how it worked out, Ciombor said.

"After 30 years, some of the glass had cracked just from stress," Ciombor said. An engineer came in and began counting cracked panes, she said. "When he got to 100, we realized we had a problem." She said 120 windows were replaced in the seven-story Show Dome.

Six firms were consulted for the job, but only **Choice Construction** Cos. of Menomonee Falls came up with a way to gain access to the windows. "And I can't say enough good about them," Ciombor said.

Steelworkers accustomed to working at heights went up in 150-foot cranes and tried to use a rubber-ended stick to maneuver the old and new panes.

In the end, though, they put on rubber-soled tennis shoes, sat on the edge of the crane basket and used their feet to hold the glass in place, Ciombor said.

"Then they had suction cups they worked with to lift the glass out," she said.

Leaks and crumbling walls in the domes office also were repaired, as were single-pane windows in the office and bathrooms.

The lightning protection system on the Show Dome also was repaired. The ring of short lightning rods encircling the top third of the dome had been struck by lightning and internal components of the rods had fused, Ciombor said.



"These domes are seven stories tall. They do tend to attract some lightning," she said. The lightning protection system also needed updating, being 30 years old just like the rest of the domes, she said.

Susan Baldwin, county parks director, said she considered the work on the domes "a re-investment in this facility."

Baldwin pointed out that the county has not had the resources in the past to do this work. She credited County Executive Thomas Ament with putting funds in the 1996 budget for the work and again recommending funding in 1997.

"That facility is aging. As everything ages, it needs maintenance. The type of maintenance you need becomes more major," she said.

Visitors to the reopened Show Dome aren't likely to notice much difference, except if they had visited during a rain storm and felt a few drips, Ciombor said. "In heavy rain there was leakage in the dome," she said.

For the new show, two G-scale model trains (about four-inches tall) will chug among tiny big top tents, farms with miniature animals, covered wagons, circus trains and circus games, clowns, and a merry-go-round. Loads of mums are a big part of "Big Top Express" as well.

Mums of all sizes figure prominently in the show, according to horticulturist Mark Werth. The miniature Fleurette mum, a type never used in the domes before, is being used because it fits perfectly with the scale of this show, he said.

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"Big Top Express" will be in the Show Dome through Nov. 17. Admission is \$3.25 for adults and \$1.75 for children. Call 649-9800.

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