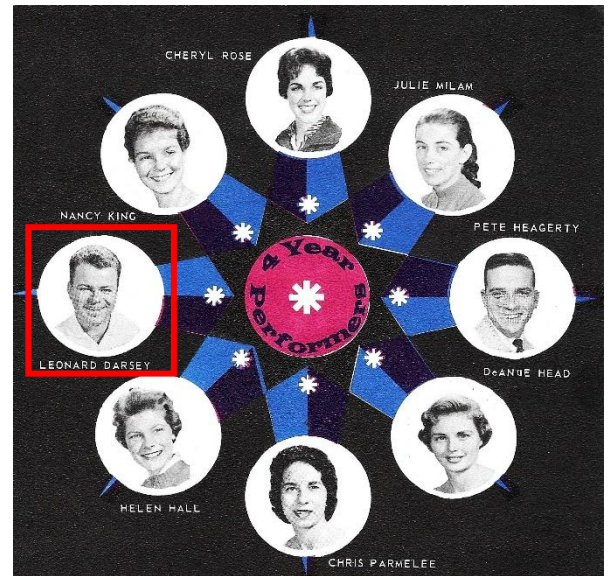


# How Many Trapeze Artists Do YOU Know?

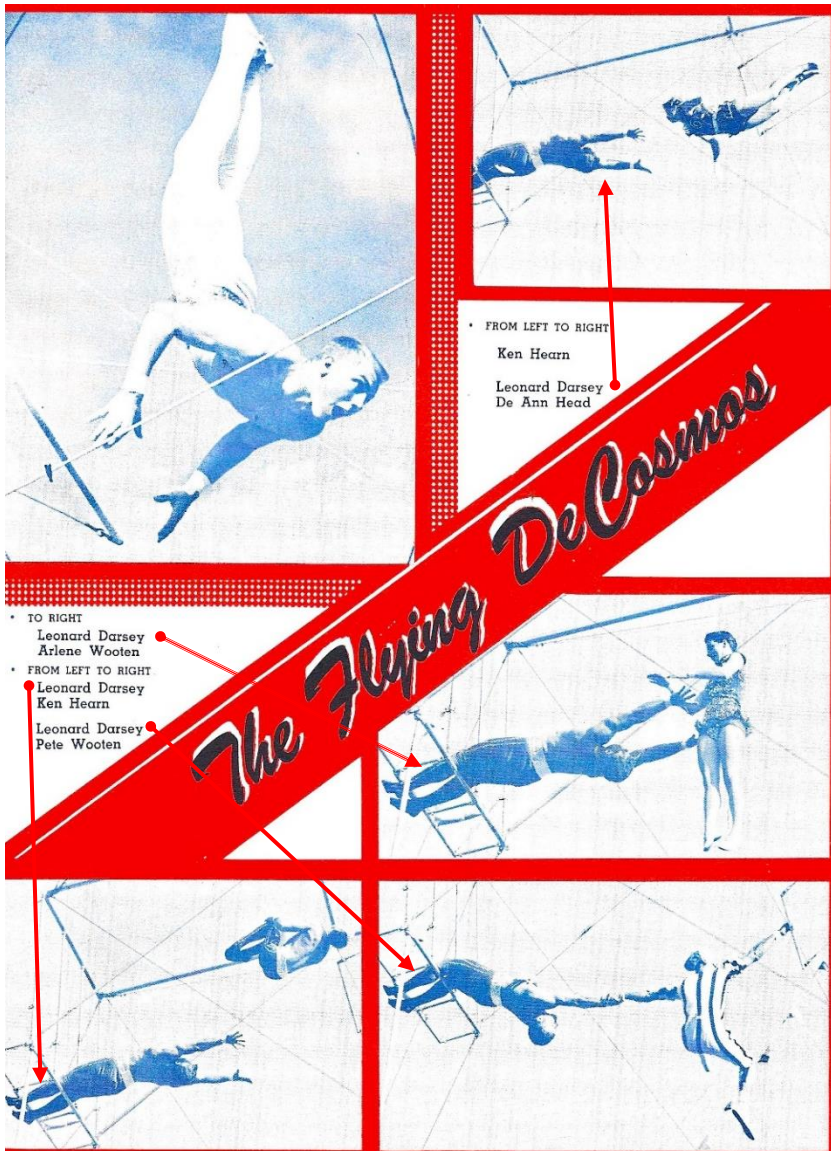
By Kathleen McClanahan Gruhl

I think that we all have something unique in our past, but in most cases those fun and interesting things are never revealed. We have a neighbor here in Bell Tower Park that has a very fun and very interesting past from his high school and college days. Bently Circle resident, Leonard “Len” Darsey, is literally the only person I have ever met that spent time performing in a circus! He was involved in the circus both in high school and college as a very skilled and talented aerial acrobat.



As a freshman at Sarasota High School, he was involved in a full-fledged circus of student performers trained and supervised by faculty and parents, some of which are or were professional circus performers. The world-famous Sarasota High School Sailor Circus began as a half-time tumbling demonstration during a football game in 1949. Leonard spent four years in high school performing with that circus.

Established in 1947 by founder Jack Haskin, the Florida State University “Flying High” Circus started with a simple goal, providing an activity that men and women could participate in together on the newly co-ed campus. Over the years, this program has developed and grown into a beloved mainstay at FSU.



As a very talented acrobat in 1955, Leonard was then accepted into FSU's "Flying High" Circus as part of a group called "The Flying DeCosmos" and performed until he graduated in 1960. There are only two collegiate circuses in the US – and FSU has a year-round program in which student groups can take advantage of a



marvelous learning opportunity from the circus as an extra-curricular part of their collegiate experience. Leonard served as the Assistant to the Director in 1958 & 1959. Look at the great photos of this talented guy !!!

*(For a glimpse of state-of-the-art trapeze in those years, Len offers the following short video: [click To Tell the Truth Game Show 1963](#) The person in the video, Adrian "Nucci" Catarzi, was in Len's high school but was about five years younger. After leaving the circus, Len did "catch" Nucci one time, a couple years later. No, it wasn't a "triple".)*

The FSU Flying High Circus, in Tallahassee, Florida suffered devastating losses on May 10, 2024, when a tornado ripped through campus and destroyed its big top and nearly all the contents. While the damage was severe, it gives the opportunity to rebuild better and stronger.

After graduating with a degree in accounting, Len spent many years as a CPA. Eventually, he purchased a small thermocouple manufacturing business from one of his clients. Len's involvement with that business went on for 27 years. He met his wife, Judy, in college, and they have been married 63 years. Judy was a Florida grade-school teacher, with most of those years in the Lee County school system. Upon retirement, they moved into Bell Tower Park in 2006.



**Judy & Len at home  
on Bently Circle**