

November 23, 2007

Artcirq's scary high wire financing act

The international acclaim is great, but Igloolik's clown princes are desperate for cash

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They've brought tears to the eyes of onlookers with a strangely moving acrobatic performance that is, in turns, as dark as Arctic winter and as bright as the midnight sun.

They're Artcirq, Igloolik's ragtag circus troupe. And they're gaining international exposure.

In October five Artcirq members found themselves in Monterrey, Mexico's third-largest city, where they performed during a United Nations conference.



Five clowns from Igloolik's ragtag circus troupe, Artcirq, performed in Monterrey, Mexico in October during a United Nations conference, where they swapped circus tricks with Cirko Dementes. Artcirq has artistic allies around the globe, but finding government support has proven more difficult. One of Nunavut's success stories may soon be broke.

(PHOTO COURTESY OF ARTCIRQ)

performers glowed with pride.

The show also featured a throat-singing interlude by Iqaluit's Qaggiq theatre troupe, who crept about the darkened room in Greenlandic masks and made menacing gestures.

It was a true Arctic circus, complete with a polar bear - or, to be precise, an Artcirq member garbed in the skin of a bear he shot - lumbering on stage.

Yet that same summer, Artcirq lost one of the funds it depends on, provided by a federal crime-prevention program.

As a result, the group is in "big economic difficulty" right now, Saladin says.

Artcirq has given its young performers a sense of purpose for their lives. It's also let them travel to faraway places - places with pools filled with water, rather than old mattresses.

So, while in Monterrey, the clowns took advantage of the locale and swam during their time off.

The trip also let them swap circus tricks with a Mexican circus troupe, Cirko Dementes. Artcirq taught the Mexican clowns the "seal dance" that's part of their routine.

The Mexicans had never seen a seal, but, as well-practiced dancers, they quickly learned the flopping motion.

The Artcirq crew couldn't speak much Spanish. The Mexicans couldn't speak much English, let alone Inuktitut. Yet the two groups quickly bonded.

When you're counting on someone to catch you as you stand on another person's shoulders, you bond fast.

"Very fast we became friends," Saladin said. "After six hours of workshops, we were already hugging each other. Here, we only shake hands with our friends."

Artcirq already has its share of artistic allies, including their big brother, Igloolik Isuma Productions, the creators of the acclaimed movie, Atanarjuat.

But without help from Nunavut's government, Saladin worries that one of the territory's success stories may soon be broke.