



Sword swallowers bring act to Dells for 'world day'

Swallowing a sword is truly a digestive issue, according to Jim Gehrke.

When a swallowed sword makes its way into the human body, Gehrke said, the swallower must navigate the blade safely through the digestive system to the stomach, sometimes “moving around the heart” in the process.

“From there, it’s just a straight shot to the stomach,” Gehrke, vice president of Concept Attractions, said Thursday from his office at Ripley’s Believe It or Not! in Wisconsin Dells. “The sword eventually reaches the bottom of the stomach.”

Gehrke should know — even if he is not a sword swallower himself. He is Ripley’s designated contact point for sword-swallowers, and on Thursday he was putting the finishing touches on organizing the lineup for the local Ripley’s celebration next Saturday of the 10th annual World Sword Swallowers Day.

A handful of sword swallowing practitioners — including Gigi Arroyo, also known as “Gigi Deluxe,” and Darrell Hunsley, who performed in the Dells on the same occasion a year ago — will gather in the Ripley’s lobby Saturday at 2:25:17 p.m. (the time to coincide with the date) for an exhibition of their craft.

The group — which is scheduled to include Brian Sterling, who calls himself “Kasimir the Hungry” — will reconvene downtown at 7 p.m. Saturday at Showboat Saloon for more swallowing of swords and other feats.

Both Arroyo and “Kasimir” also “eat fire,” and Arroyo proclaims on her website that she’s the “only archer in sideshow with human targets.”



Hunsley, meanwhile, tends to bring along such sideshow oddities as a two-headed minnow (“the world’s smallest freak,” he calls it) as well as his two-headed turtle, Mojo.

Sword Swallowers Association International (SSAI) organized the event beginning a decade ago, in part “to educate the general public and dispel myths on the art of sword swallowing, to honor veteran sword swallowers” and “to raise awareness of the contributions sword swallowers have made in the fields of science and medicine.”

Such contributions have been made by sword swallowers, Gehrke said, pointing to achievements of his friend and sword swallower Dan Meyer, who is the president of the SSAI and once received an “Ig Nobel Prize in Medicine” (a satirical but legitimate award, given by a group that includes actual Nobel laureates).

Much of what Gehrke knows about sword swallowing he has learned from Meyer, a good friend who nevertheless will probably be in a much larger locale than the Dells for Saturday’s swallow.

“He is way up the food chain,” Gehrke said of his friend.