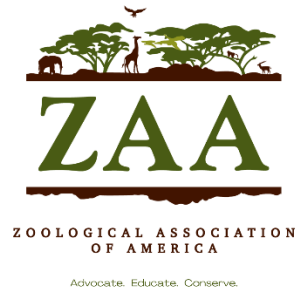


February 23, 2026

The Honorable Naquetta Ricks
Chair
House Committee on Business Affairs & Labor
HCR 0112
Colorado General Assembly
200 E Colfax Avenue
Denver, CO 80203



RE: HB26-1133 Traveling Animal Protection Act Environmental Education Program

Dear Chair Ricks and Members of the Committee:

I write to you on behalf of the nearly 1000 professional members and accredited facilities who make up the Zoological Association of America (ZAA) to express our concerns about HB26-1133 and ask that this letter be made part of any hearing record regarding the bill.

ZAA is a non-profit, membership-based accrediting organization dedicated to responsible wildlife management, conservation and education with more than 75 accredited facilities in North America, including the Downtown Aquarium in Denver.

ZAA members contribute to global wildlife conservation education and conduct programming designed to help the public connect with wildlife and understand the vital importance of preserving it. ZAA's stringent accreditation process establishes an extremely high bar with respect to professional animal standards, best management practices and exemplary animal care and welfare. All ZAA accredited facilities are also licensed and inspected by the United States Department of Agriculture. Plus, any ZAA member that holds endangered or threatened species or certain other federally regulated animals is also subject to oversight by the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

We recognize that HB26-1133 is seeking to make revisions to an existing statute, the Traveling Animal Protection Act ("TAPA"), codified at *Colorado Revised Statutes, 33-1-126*. Unfortunately, HB 01133 does not address and in fact exacerbates a fundamental problem with TAPA and that is the arbitrary and discriminatory favorable treatment of another private trade organization representing some, but by no means all, zoos, namely the Association of Zoos Aquariums. This is unfair and not supported by substance as there is no meaningful difference between the accreditation standards and process of ZAA and those of the AZA.

Even more troublesome is that TAPA and the bill provide the same favorable treatment to unregulated and unlicensed sanctuaries. Unlike any zoo, regardless of affiliation, unless a sanctuary is open to the public, i.e., operates like a zoo, it is not federally licensed or inspected. In other words, a USDA licensed zoo that is not an AZA member is not eligible for the exemptions provided under TAPA, but an unlicensed sanctuary would be eligible.

Many ZAA zoos operate programs where they might bring a limited number of smaller animals to schools or other community locations, e.g., a “zoomobile.” Generally, these are staffed by zoo personnel, and the animals return to the zoo afterwards. They are educational in purpose, and these kinds of programs provide opportunities for people, primarily children, to see and learn about animals that might not otherwise be available to them. They are not “circuses” or presenting animals in an entertainment setting. Yet unless they belong to the AZA club, our member zoos would not be allowed to operate such educational programs under this legislation. Not only is that unfair but it could have negative economic impacts on small and medium-size zoos, many of which are small businesses.

We maintain this discriminatory treatment is unjustified and unnecessary. It is also inconsistent with the approach taken by other states who have enacted similar legislation without including broad exemptions based on to which trade association a facility pays membership dues. The states of California, Hawaii, Illinois, Massachusetts, Maryland, New Jersey, New York and Washington all have enacted similar bans on the use of animals in circuses and have done so WITHOUT carving exceptions for AZA zoos or unregulated sanctuaries. We respectfully request that both TAPA and HB26-1133 be amended to remove the inequitable exemptions in lieu of something that is neutral and does not play favorites

Thank you for your time and attention. Please contact me if you have any questions and/or visit www.zooassociation.org for more information about ZAA and its accreditation standards.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Kelly George', is displayed on a light blue background.

Kelly George, Ph.D.
Executive Director

CC: Rep. Monica Duran
Rep. Alex Valdez

HB26-1133 - Traveling Animal Protection Act Environmental Education Program

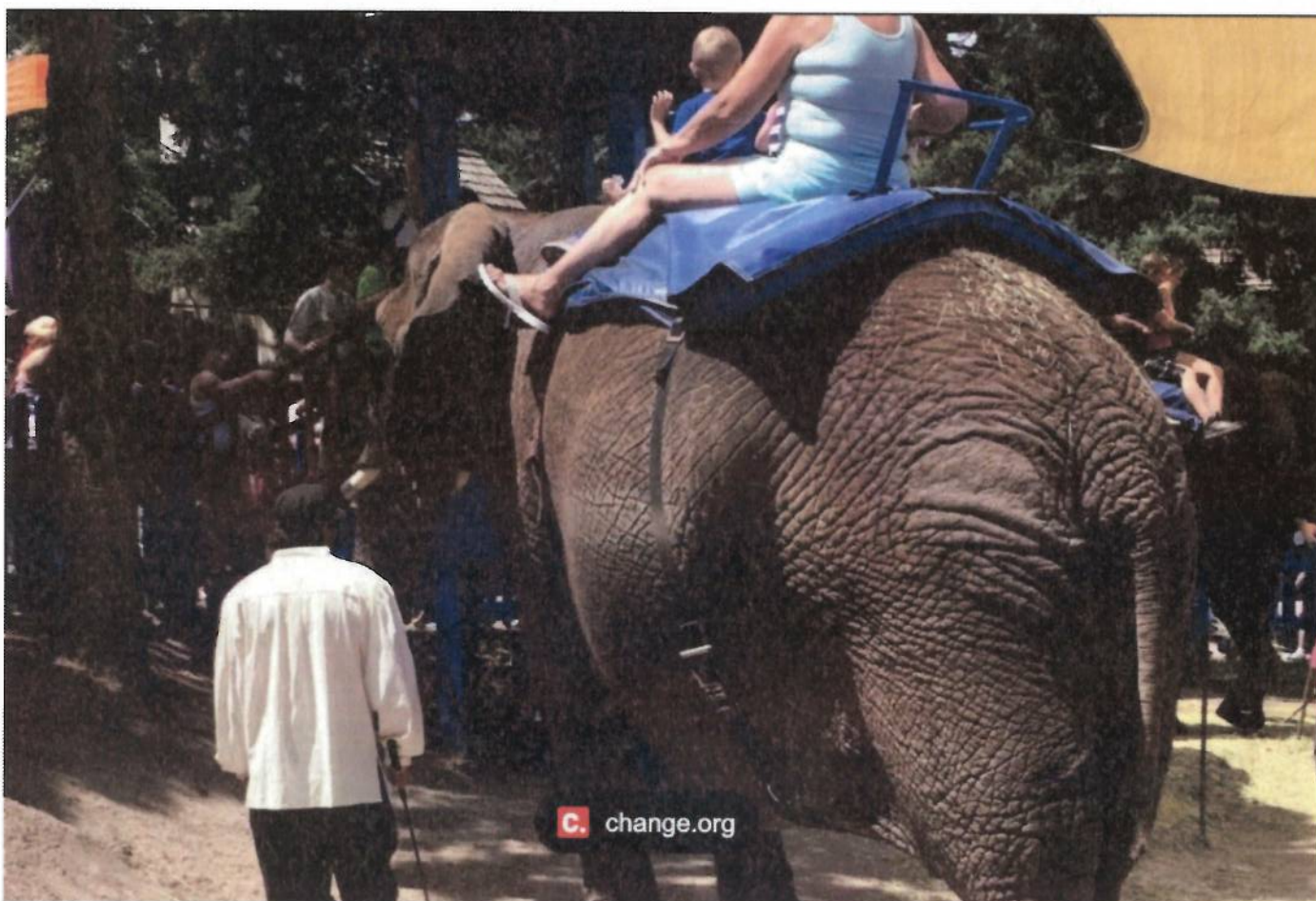
In 2021, SB21-135, the *Prohibit Certain Animals In Traveling Animal Act* was passed. The law prohibits the use of certain wild animals if required to perform tricks, give rides, or participate as accompaniments for the entertainment, amusement or benefit of an audience, or used for photographic purposes.

An exhibitor circumvented a loophole that permitted environmental and educational programs to be conducted by zoos, sanctuaries and veterinarians, provided the use was purely educational or in connection with veterinary practices.

The exhibitor renamed his exhibit from elephant rides to "The Elephant Experience" claiming the performances of his elephants were educational; something that occurred naturally in the wild, a condition that must be met in order for the exemption to apply.

Two experts in elephant behavior, one Dr. Joyce Poole, recognized as the world's leading authority, stated the behaviors in the photographs had never been observed in the wild and therefore would be in violation of the law.

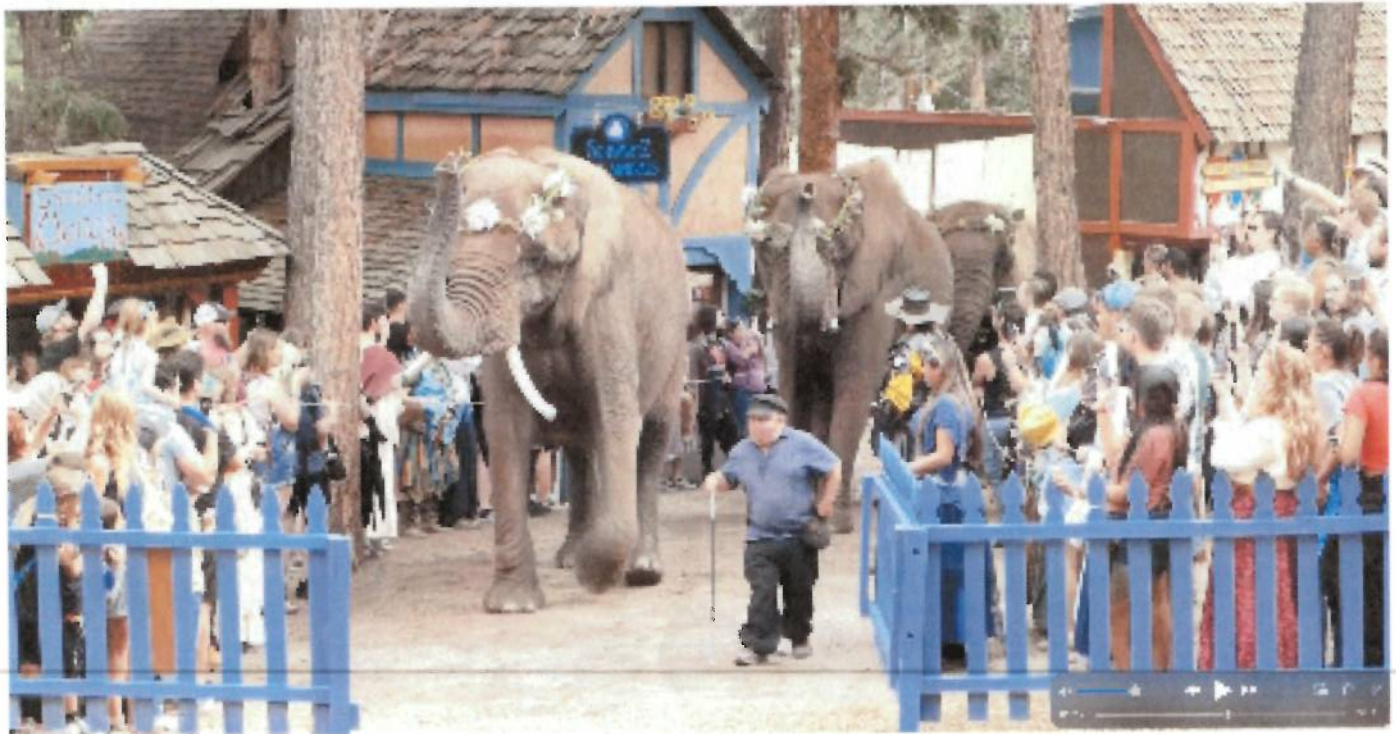
HB26-1133 simply closes the loophole. It does not affect accredited zoos, sanctuaries or aquariums, nor does it make any changes for livestock or the rodeo, which remain exempt from the law.



Elephant rides at the Colorado Renaissance Festival in 2021. Colorado's law did not become effective until August 12, 2021. Even though the law was passed before the Renaissance Festival opened rides continued to be given up to that time.



Note how close the elephants are to the crowd separated by only a thin rope.
Photo taken on July 27, 2024



The Colorado law prohibits animals from being required to perform tricks, give rides, or participate as accompaniments for the entertainment, amusement, or benefit of an audience;

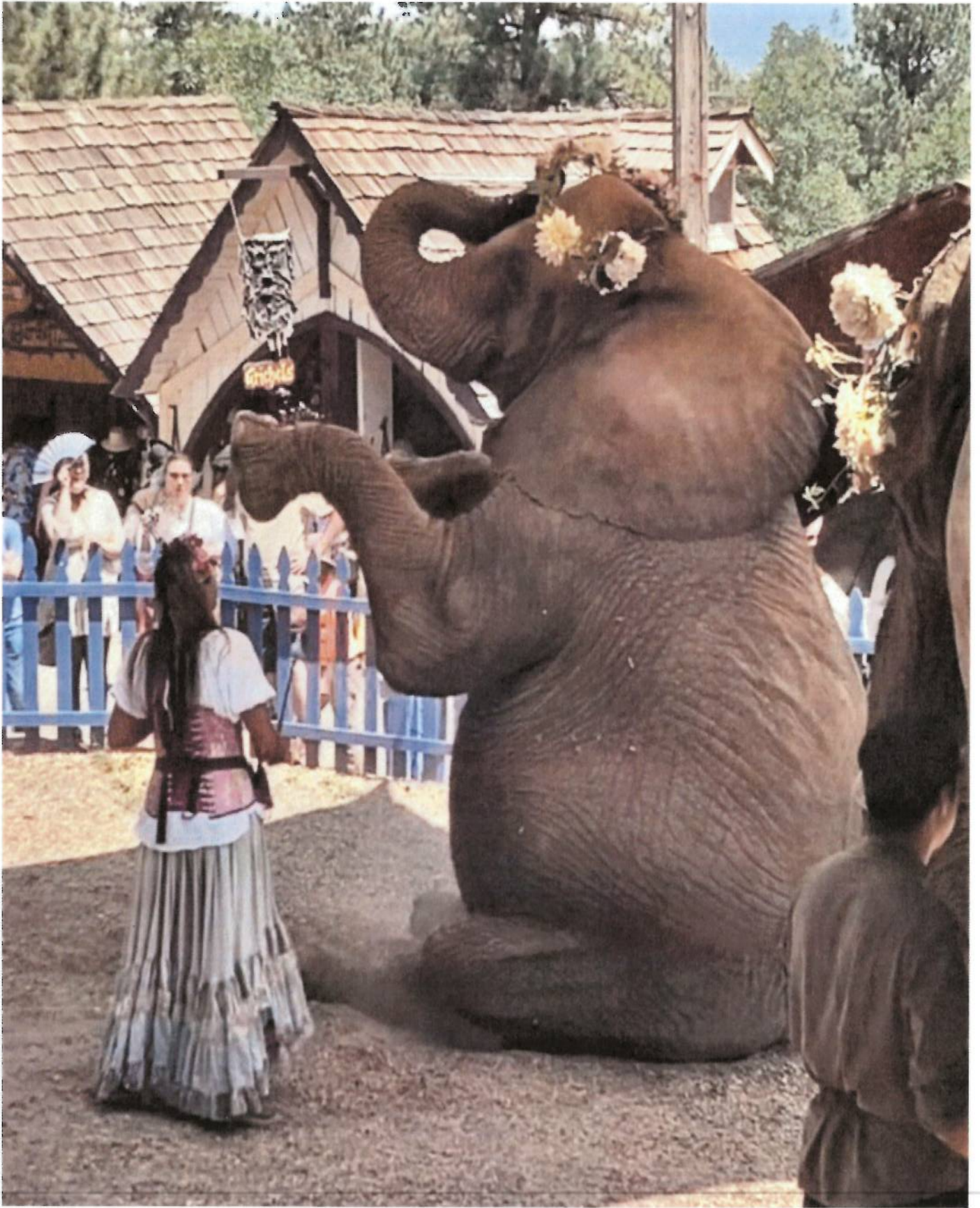


Photo taken July 14, 2024

This sitting and holding out legs behavior has never been observed in the wild

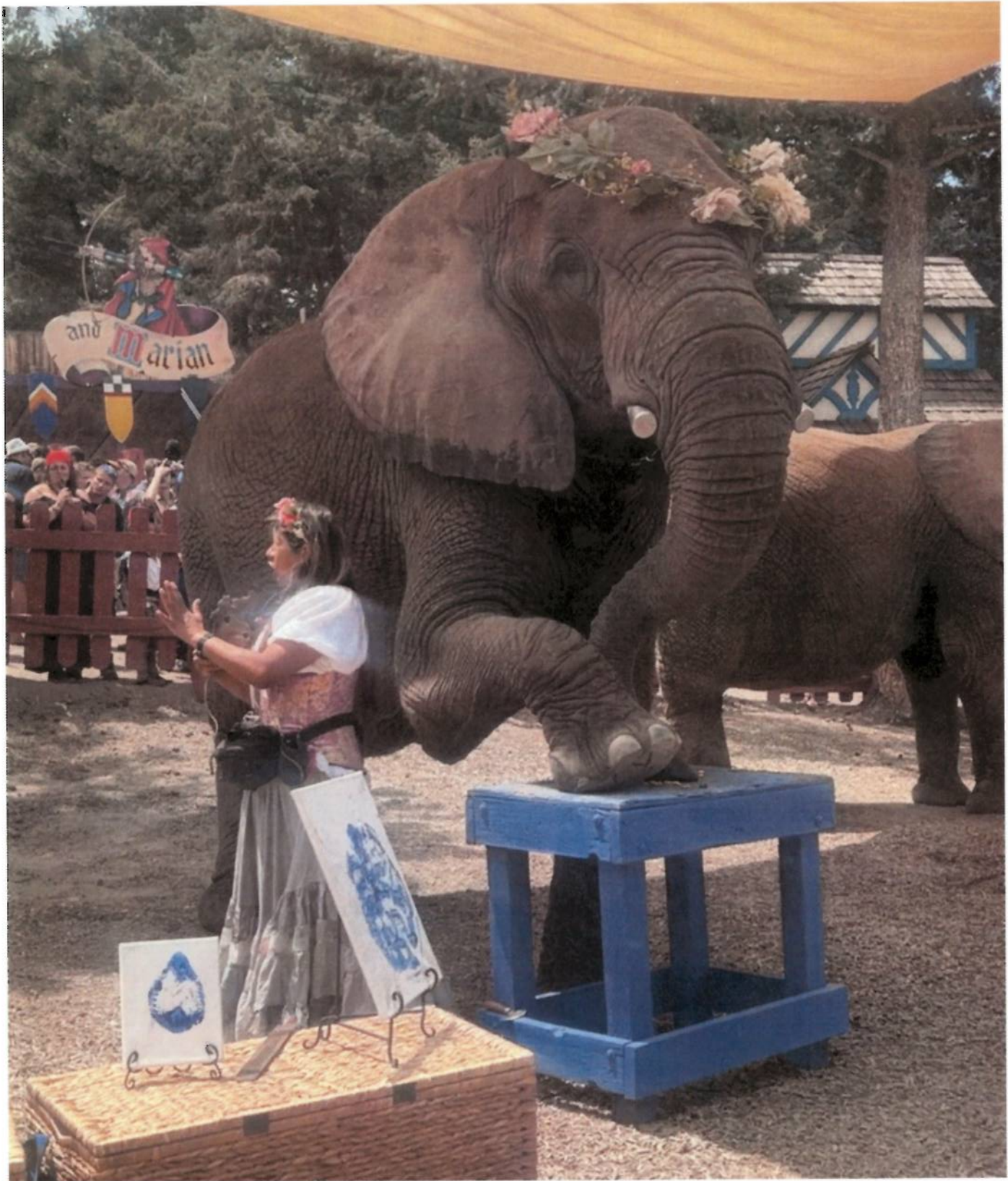


Photo taken July 14, 2024 (after law became effective)

Note the spectators. The law prohibits animals from being required to perform tricks, give rides, or participate as accompaniments for the entertainment, amusement, or benefit of an audience.

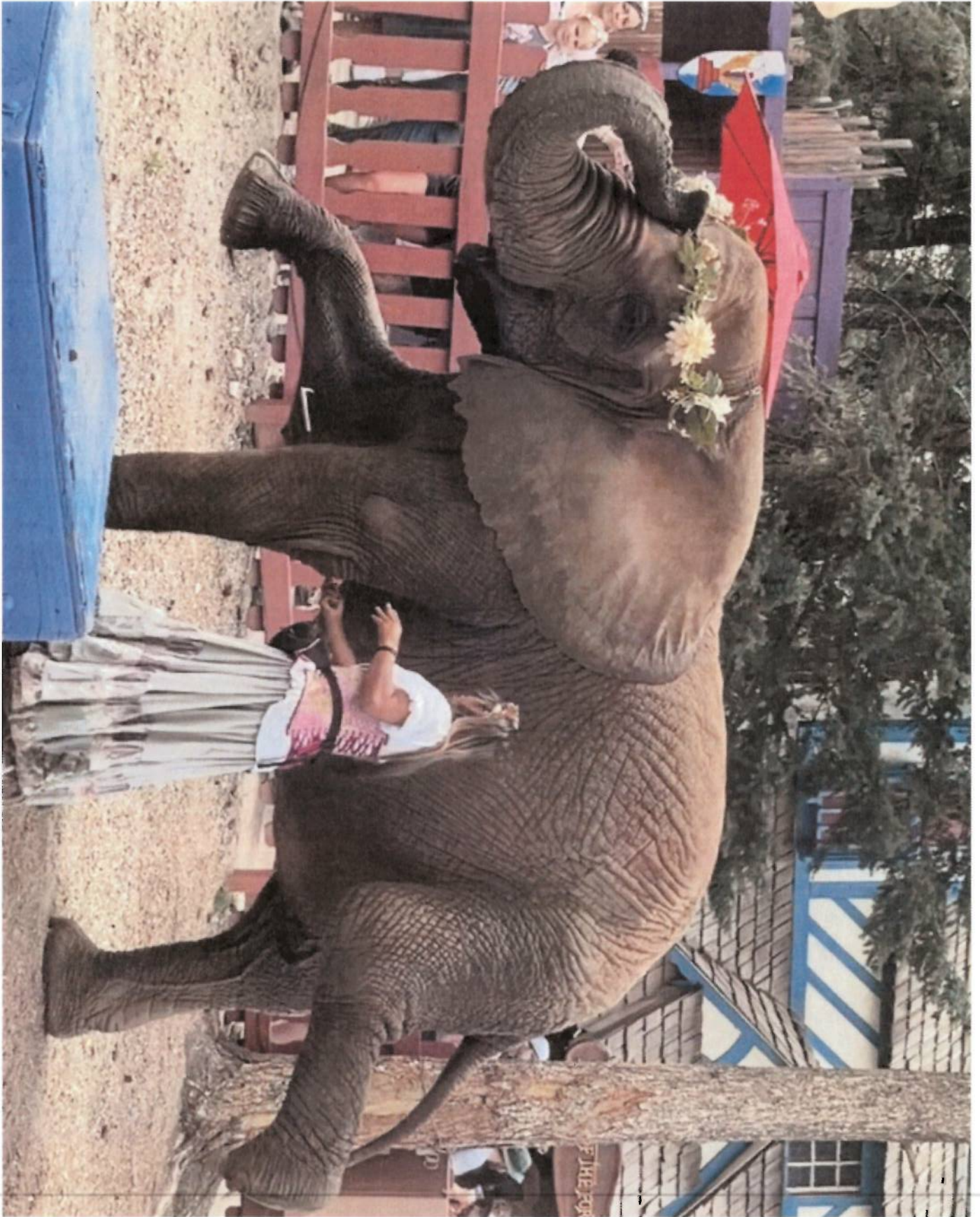


Photo taken July 14, 2024 (after law became effective)
"Elephants do not adopt either of those poses naturally." Dr. Joyce Poole, PhD

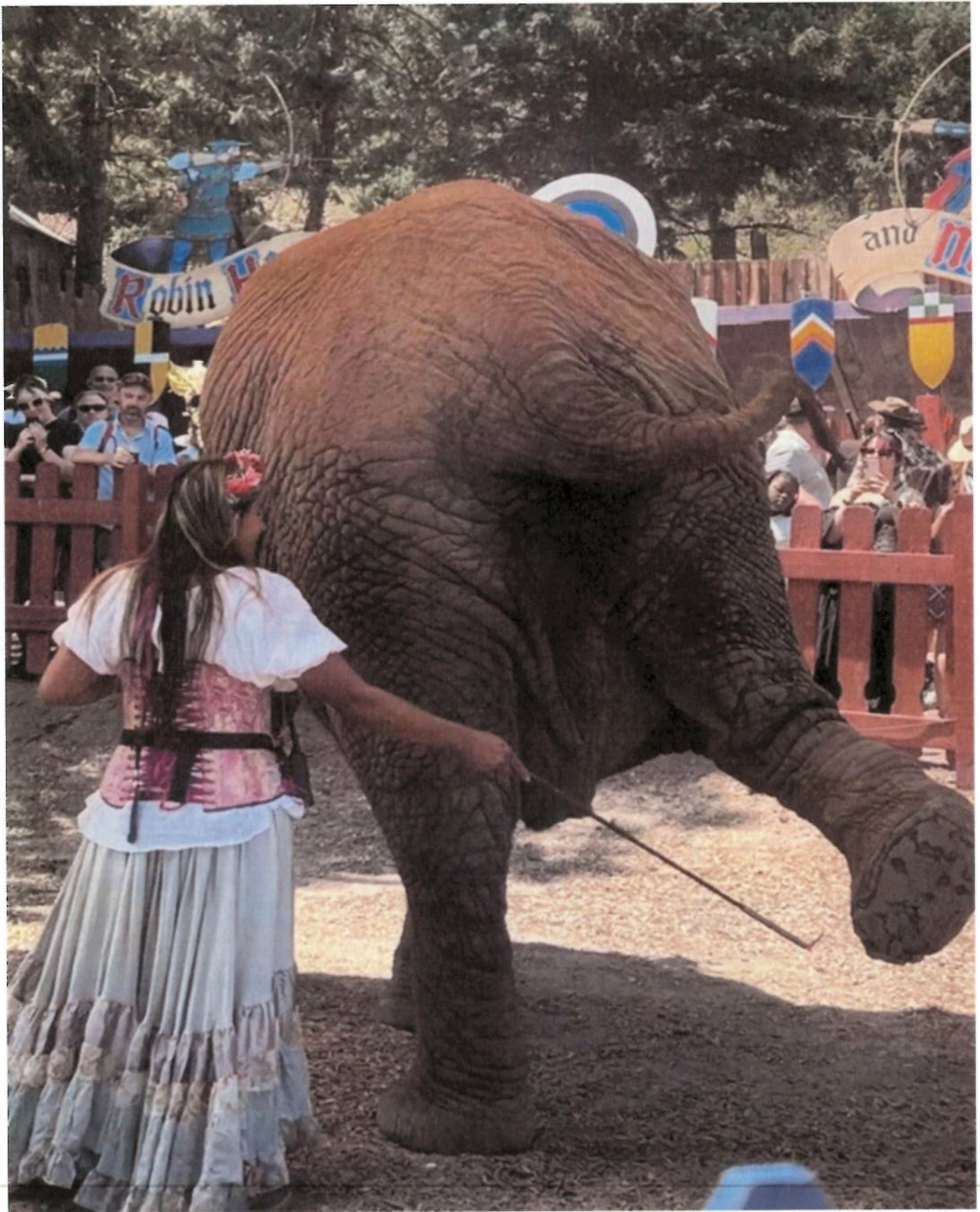


Photo taken July 14, 2024

Elephants only lift their leg when prodded, often with a sharp implement

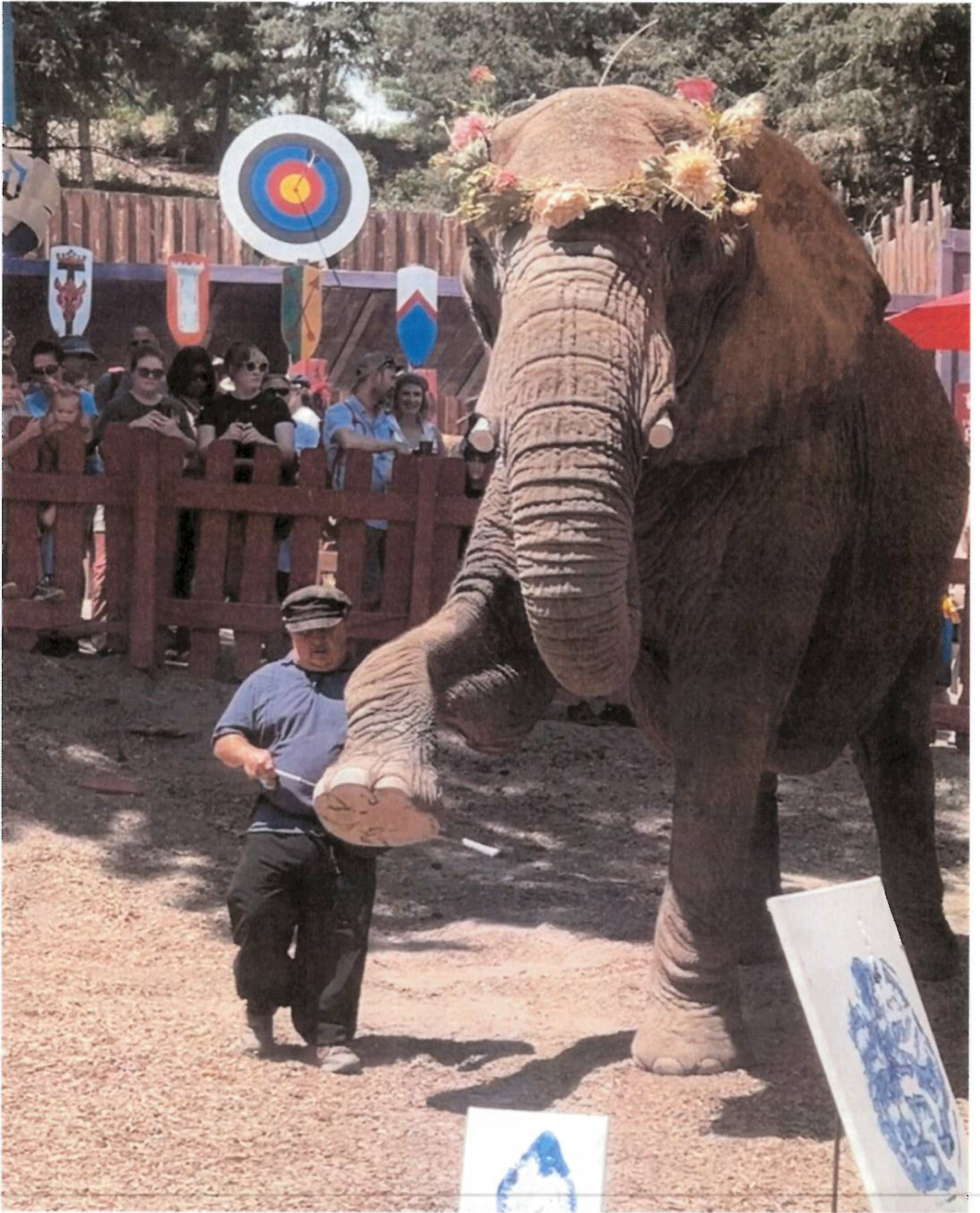
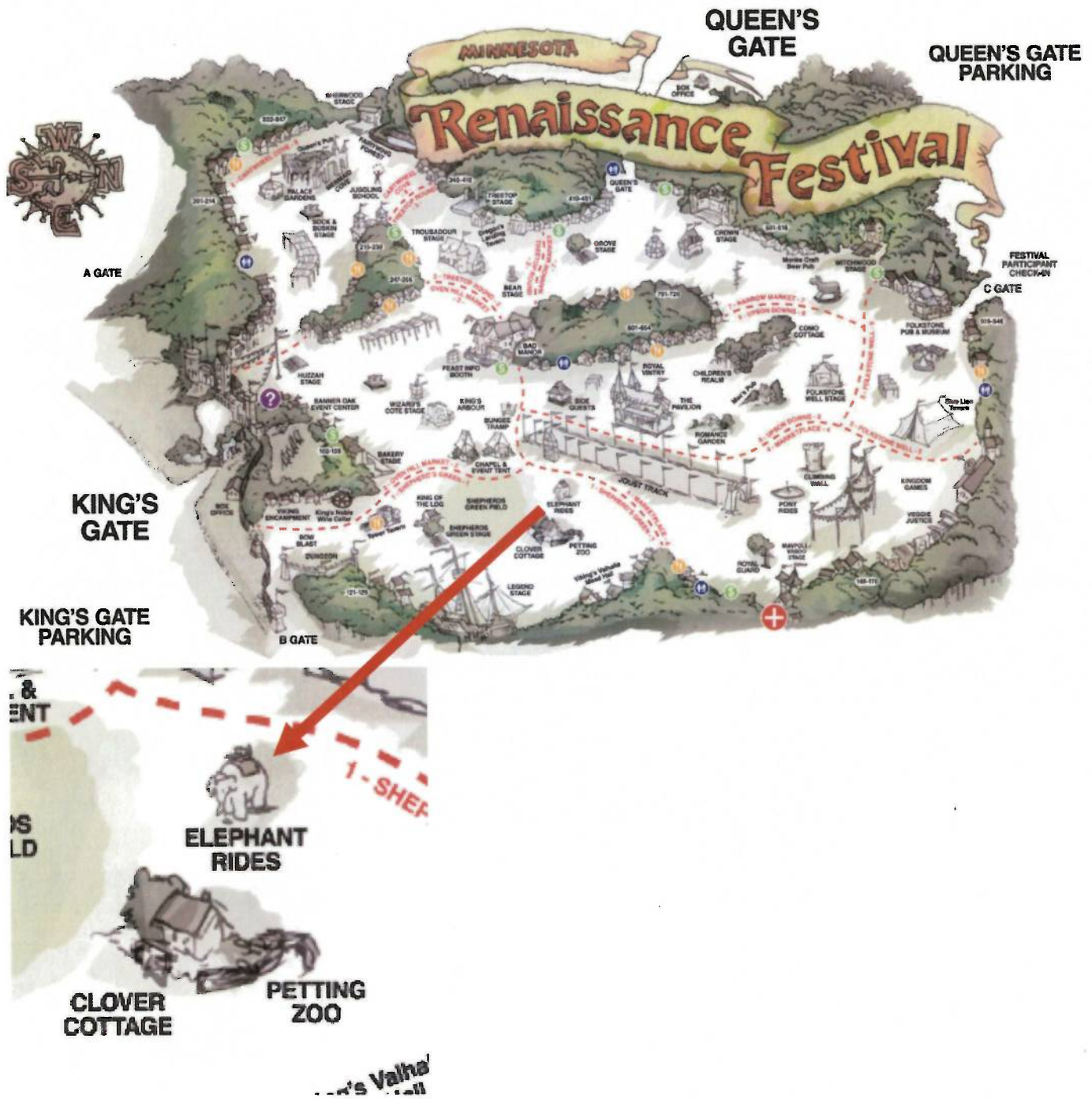


Photo taken July 14, 2024

Elephants only lift their leg when prodded often with a sharp implement

Map for the 2026 Minnesota Renaissance Festival. The same exhibitor who claimed his program was solely educational at the Colorado Festival is offering elephant rides at Minnesota's Festival where there is no state law to protect against wild animal performances.



Colorado Voters for Animals
191 University Blvd., #345 - Denver, CO 80206
Roland Halpern - roland@covotersforanimals.org - 303-720-9293