Curran, Edward: Humanities Chairman Nomination Hearing (1985): News Article 05

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aeal a Park Service rejection of
the disputed portion of the mural
and to receive official certification
for the tax credit.

Wynmark last month spent
$10,000 to paint over illusionary
architectural effects designed by
noted muralist Richard Haas on
the front of the building. The Park
Service threatened to withhold the tax
credit if the artwork was not wiped
out, on grounds that it changed the
historic character of the building.

After a work crew painted the front of
the 10-story building a beige
tone, the Park Service certified the
tax credit.

Mark G. Griffin, one of
Wynmark's owners, said he had
never heard of the provision allow­ing
for a 30-month period to win
certification for the tax credit after
it had been submitted to the Inter­
nal Revenue Service.

"If that were the case, I wish
someone would have told us," he
said.

Rogers acknowledged that "it's
probably true we didn't give him
that information. We usually think a

See MURAL, D8, Col. 3

Twisted Mister
Of the Big Top
Circus Contortionist Rudolph Delmonte

By Michael Kernan
Washington Post Staff Writer

Let's see now. You do a back­
bend, and when your hands are
all the way down on the floor be­
hind your heels, you slowly lift
your legs up so you're standing
on your hands. Then you bend
your legs at the hip so they ex­tend
over your head like a roof.
Now you bend your knees—you
still with me?—and curl up until
you can tuck your feet under
your arms.

Then you start doing push­
ups.

Rudolph Delmonte is a con­
tortionist with Ringling Bros. and
Barnum & Bailey Circus. He
is 23 years old, and the first
thing he says is that he is not
double-jointed.

Actually, that isn't the ques­tion. The question is whether he
has any joints at all or is just
made of muscle.

"I can't explain the moves," he
said. He sketched on a table
top with his finger. "My legs are
here, my top is here, and my
arms, like it makes a zigzag . . ."

He starts off his act with a
one-handed handstand, simplic­
ity itself, and then he balances
on a 3-foot-long wand and does
the handstand on that. Then he
balances a small ladder on one of
its legs and does the handstand
The contortions are so bizarre that you tend to forget how strong he is. In fact they would be almost sickening to look at were it not for the exquisitely slow grace with which he moves. It is a kind of ballet contained in one body. "I did go to ballet school at 11," he said. "I did that for seven years and jazz dancing for eight years."

Five years ago he was runner-up for Mr. Teen-age America in weightlifting. It is not in the least surprising.

My mother taught me everything I know. She's from Holland, and she met my father here in the circus in 1948. He was a lion tamer, but they were divorced and my father took the act to another circuit. So she worked with me."

Anna Delmonte, who was a contortionist and showgirl until 1956, was in the wardrobe department when not coaching her son. It was she who made him the spangled cape that would have cost, as he says, $4,000 if ordered from outside.

Brought up in Sarasota, Fla., the traditional winter home of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, the young Delmonte has been part of the circus as long as he can remember. As a kid he worked in the Circus Hall of Fame there, and he has always lived in its exotic world: the organization are interested in learning more about Curran's views.

"We hope for in-depth Senate hearings," Phillips said. "Curran, of course, is different from previous NEH nominees in that he does not come from higher education and does not have a demonstrated knowledge of public programs that do not involve schools." Phillips described the nomination as "sensitive" because of the great discretion the endowment's chairman exercises over funding priorities.

The National Endowment for the Humanities is a federal agency with an impact and visibility far greater than its relatively small $140 million budget, and the periodic search for its chairman usually produces political fireworks.

The endowment awards thousands of grants and fellowships to scholars, museums and universities for research and preservation. The chairmanship has often served as a pulpit for administrations' views on the role of the liberal arts in American life.

Bennett, for example, used the endowment to call for a return to the study of the classics of western history, literature and philosophy. He is described by friends and critics alike as having steered the endowment away from the cultural pluralism that marked the Carter years.

The Massachusetts-born Curran was headmaster of the National Cathedral School from 1968 to 1980. He subsequently served on President Reagan's Education Transition Team and put in one year as associate director of the Office of Presidential Personnel. In 1980 he headed a political group called Professionals for Reagan, and is, according to friends, a close friend of Vice President George Bush.

Curran graduated with a bachelor's degree from Yale University in 1955 and earned a masters' degree from Duke University in 1968. He was dean of students at a Houston private school from 1957 to 1968, and taught at a private boys' school in Englewood, N.J., for two years before that.