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## giant welcome to John Ringling Hotel guests

Hampton Dunn

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# Photouring Florida

By HAMPTON DUNN



## A GIANT WELCOME TO JOHN RINGLING HOTEL GUESTS

By HAMPTON DUNN

SARASOTA --- John Ringling, the circus king, was a showman first, last and always. And he always was a wheeler-dealer, also. During the Florida real estate boom, he stamped his imaginative impression all over the Sarasota area and many of the colorful landmarks still stand out here.

Ringling spent three-quarters of a million dollars trying to build his Sarasota Ritz-Carlton Hotel out on Longboat Key, but the boom collapsed before it came anywhere near completion. But John wanted a hotel, anyway. Maybe it was to keep up with his brother, Charles, who had the well to-do Sarasota Terrace Hotel.

One of John's pals was Owen Burns, also a Sarasota developer, who had built the El Veron Hotel, situated on what is now designated U.S. 41. The structure was designed by Architect J. Dwight Baum--and was described by experts as "the most perfect example of Spanish architecture in Florida." Burns named the hostelry for his wife, the former Miss Verona Hill Freeman of New York. It was formally opened with a great ball and celebration on New Years Eve, Dec. 31, 1926. Ringling acquired it later and changed the name to "John Ringling Hotel." All the silver and dishes and other items bore the new name.

Ringling staged a grand welcome for his guests. He stationed one of his circus giants out front as the doorman. The seven-foot giant was uniformed in glittering blue and gold togs, including big brass buttons down his cutaway coat. He also wore a shaker top it off.

The structure today is known as "John Ringling Towers."

