

# Man injured in bleacher collapse files suit

By **JAMES F. McCARTY**  
PLAIN DEALER REPORTER

## CLEVELAND

One of the more seriously injured victims of Saturday's circus bleacher accident filed a class-action lawsuit yesterday against the circus and the corporation that runs the building where it occurred.

Michael Ward, 26, of Huron, O., was released yesterday from Southwest General Hospital, where he had been treated for five days for a fractured neck vertebrae. Ward had taken his three daughters to the Big Top at the International Exposition

Center in Brook Park when a section of bleachers collapsed, injuring 47 people. The three girls were not injured.

Ward works for a road construction firm, but his injury will prevent him from resuming his job during the busy spring paving season, said his lawyer, R. Jack Clapp of Cleveland.

"He's in a lot of pain ... and can barely talk," Clapp said. "He would have done anything not to have been involved in this."

The grandstand caved in during a performance of the Circus Williams Althoff German National Circus. In-

vestigators found the collapse occurred when two steel-frame supports inexplicably slipped from their moorings. Measures were taken this week to reinforce the bleacher-support struts with boards bolted to the concrete floor.

Ward's lawsuit contends the circus and I-X Center personnel should have foreseen the danger of the bleacher construction and prevented it from failing.

Officials from the circus and I-X Center could not be reached for comment last night. Phones at the center were answered by a taped message.

At a news conference Tuesday, officials said the accident was unavoidable, and even strict inspection controls failed to turn up the danger that awaited the crowd in the bleachers.

"It shouldn't have happened," Clapp said. "This wasn't some corner carnival. This was the I-X Center, which is supposed to be a top-notch operation."

He asks for damages in excess of \$50,000. The class-action was filed to consolidate all 47 victims and to preserve evidence before the circus leaves the I-X Center in May, Clapp said.