



## FOR RELEASE FEBRUARY 21, 2009 ##

Sword Swallowers Association International  
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## **President Proclaims Sword Swallower's Day**

*40 Feet of Solid Steel to be swallowed at Ripley's Believe It or Not! Museums Worldwide*

HARTSELLE, AL (SSAI) – At 2:28pm on February 28, 2009, Sword Swallowers around the world will attempt to swallow over 480 inches of steel swords at Ripley's Believe It or Not! museums worldwide for International Sword Swallowers Awareness Day. That's over 40 feet of solid steel!

Sword Swallowers Association International (SSAI) President Dan Meyer proclaimed the third annual "International Sword Swallowers Awareness Day" to raise awareness of sword swallowers around the world. The day is co-sponsored by Ripley Entertainment, who together with SSAI, is inviting SSAI member sword swallowers to put on sword swallowing demonstrations at Ripley's Believe It or Not! locations around the world.

Why do sword swallowers need a day of awareness? "We sword swallowers risk our lives every time we swallow a sword, but many people don't believe it's real, or they think the art has died out," explains Meyer, a sword swallower and Ripley's Believe It or Not! himself. "SSAI established this day to promote this ancient art that is still being carried on by a few dozen surviving practitioners, to honor veteran performers, to raise awareness of the medical contributions sword swallowers have made to the fields of medicine and science, to correct misconceptions and educate the public and medical professionals by putting on demonstrations for medical facilities and the media around the world."

Why is Ripley's co-sponsoring the day? "Because it's great entertainment," said Tim O'Brien, VP of Communications for Ripley Entertainment Inc. "Sword swallowers and Ripley's go way back to the very first Ripley's Believe It or Not! Odditorium, set up at the Chicago World's Fair in 1933. There, three performers, two of which were ladies, mesmerized huge crowds. Ripley's has been home to sword swallowers around the world ever since."

On February 28<sup>th</sup> sword swallowers will perform worldwide, with some attempting to set individual or small group records, while others will perform at Ripley's Believe It or Not! locations around the world. "Normally most of us perform alone," Meyer says. "By SSAI hosting 'International Sword Swallower's Day', it gives us a chance to all work together to be part of something much bigger, and performing at Ripley's Odditoriums helps bring us all together."

On February 28<sup>th</sup>, SSAI sword swallowers will perform at Ripley's Believe It or Not! Odditoriums in Ocean City MD, Hollywood CA, Orlando FL, Gatlinburg TN, Niagara Falls, New York City, and London, England. Highlights at Ripley's locations will include performances by SSAI's President Dan Meyer in London, the world's tallest sword swallower, George the Giant in Hollywood, the world's youngest sword swallower, Erik Kloeker with his brother Travis Fessler in Gatlinburg, and the largest gathering ever of female sword swallowers in New York City. All Ripley's performances will take place on 2/28/09 at precisely 2:28:09pm local time. At the end of the day, sword swallowers will submit reports of their activities to SSAI to be submitted for consideration as a possible "Ripley's Believe It or Not!" cartoon.

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"It's a huge honor for us to carry on the great tradition of sword swallowers who have performed at Ripley's Believe It or Not! museums over the years," Meyer explains. "In light of this, SSAI is sending an open invitation to all sword swallowers worldwide to contact us to join us in swallowing swords at Ripley's Believe It or Not museums and other locations on the 28th!"

Since some sword swallowers perform charitable work for the medical community during February "National Swallowing Disorders Month", SSAI is encouraging all sword swallowers who are not near a Ripley's Believe It or Not! location to perform medical demonstrations at local medical facilities throughout the day to help raise awareness of esophageal cancer, dysphasia, GERD, and other upper gastro-intestinal and swallowing disorders. Sword swallowers will also perform at hospitals, nursing homes and orphanages for those who would otherwise have difficulty getting to theaters to see live performances. "Sword swallowers who participate in these activities find them rewarding," explains Meyer. "On February 28<sup>th</sup>, many people will have the opportunity to see sword swallowing first-hand who would otherwise not have a chance to witness it."

"Many of us have been entertaining for years, and we love our work," explains Meyer. "'Sword Swallowers Day' is a great opportunity for us to show the medical community and the rest of the world what we really do, and performing at Ripley's locations helps us get the word out!"

The art of sword swallowing began over 4000 years ago in India, and requires the practitioner to use mind-over-matter techniques to control the body and repress natural reflexes to insert solid steel blades from 15 to 25 inches down the esophagus and into the stomach. With the demise of the traveling circus sideshow over the past several decades, there are currently less than a few dozen full-time professional sword swallowers actively performing the art of sword swallowing around the world today.

#### **About the Sword Swallowers Association International**

The [Sword Swallowers Association International](http://www.swordswallow.com), founded in 2001 to preserve and promote the ancient art of sword swallowing, is comprised of sword swallowers from around the world and maintains a site with general information on sword swallowing for the general public at [www.swordswallow.com](http://www.swordswallow.com).

#### **About Ripley Entertainment**

Ripley Entertainment Inc. ([www.ripleys.com](http://www.ripleys.com)), keepers of the Ripley's Believe It or Not! brand, is a global leader in location-based entertainment, entertaining more than 13 million annually at its 74 attractions in 13 countries. In addition to its 32 Believe It or Not! museums, the Orlando-based company has publishing, licensing and broadcast divisions that oversee projects including the syndicated Believe It or Not! television show, best-selling books and the popular syndicated cartoon strip, Ripley's Believe It or Not!, that runs daily in 42 countries. Ripley Entertainment is a Jim Pattison Company, the third-largest privately held company in Canada.

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**Medical Facts and Trivia about Sword Swallowing – Believe it or Not!**

- Sword Swallowing is a 4000 year old art that originated in India around 2000 BC.
- The average person swallows about 600 times per day – 350 while awake, 200 while eating, and about 50 times while asleep.
- The average swallow uses 50 pairs of muscles and can take from 3-23 seconds to complete.
- Sword swallows use mind-over-matter techniques to repress the gag reflex in the back of the mouth, the peristalsis reflex in the throat, and the retch reflex in the stomach to "swallow" solid steel blades from 15-30 inches in length.
- Sword swallowing can take from 2 years to 7 years to learn, and even after years of practice, some people never learn to master it.
- SSAI reports that there are on average between 4-6 serious sword swallowing related injuries reported around the world each year that require medical attention and hospitalization, with dozens more that go unreported each year.
- Treatment of sword swallowing injuries can cost from \$25,000-\$75,000 per injury.

This might help explain why there are currently less than a few dozen full-time professional sword swallows left performing around the world today! Believe It or Not!