

# Bonnie Knox: The volunteer spirit of a horsewoman

By Eileen M. Chambers  
Correspondent

“I really love Sisters Rodeo,” Bonnie Knox said as though the second weekend in June could not come soon enough. “All the painting we do. Ushering in the gold section. My peeps who come out every year to watch the show.”

She, along with a handful of the rodeo’s “painting ladies crew,” had gathered for a Taco Tuesday, Happy Hour “meeting” at Takoda’s with fine beverages, laughter and abundant insider conversation about grandbabies, ticket sales, rodeo schedule changes and “What could possibly need paint this year?” flowing quite freely.

The letter from Sisters Rodeo Association had arrived in the mail a few weeks ago, like clockwork. Annual dues due (“a very modest sum”). The don’t-miss-it February meeting with potluck (“we do eat so well”). And that post-winter promise: “Get ready to roll up your sleeves for the 78th The Biggest Little Show in the World.”

This year would be the rodeo’s 78th year. Mind-boggling. How did this all-volunteer organization exist for generations?

Perhaps, it is because of folks like Bonnie.

Come out for a Saturday work party (Ray’s donuts and hot coffee brewing) and you will find Bonnie Knox, paintbrush ready, dressed in jeans splattered with years’ worth of red, gold and blue grandstand paint. You will discover that she is chief among those unassuming, behind-the-scenes, hardworking “I don’t know what you could write about me” people who make up the heart and soul, not only of the Rodeo, but of Sisters itself.

A summer job as a counselor at Camp Tamarack first brought her to Sisters decades ago. It was a time when the town, she said, “was more reminiscent of the Old West.”

Although her mother wanted Bonnie to have a metropolitan life, her grandfather’s cowboy heritage was in her blood. In 1977, in the midst of raising children, being a 4-H leader for 24 years and breeding Arabian horses, Bonnie moved to ranch property on the outskirts of town.

“It was about 10 years ago that I joined Sisters Rodeo,” Bonnie said. “I wish I could have volunteered sooner but my life was too busy.”

A highly-skilled horsewoman, Bonnie was working at the time with Richard Patterson of Patterson Ranch (now Cole Ranch).

“Richard had five excellent stallions and I owned a 42-stall barn and arena which the Pattersons used to house the many visiting mares from across the country,” she recalled.

When the recession hit, times changed and then tragedy struck when a fire destroyed her barn and arena, killing a number of horses.

“Horses have always been a big part of my life,” Bonnie said, with no desire to recall the painful event. “The fire is really something I don’t talk about.”

Fortunately, in Sisters, Bonnie has found many similarly tenderhearted friends who understand her love for animals, even a dog who was completely deaf.

“It was about 15 years ago,” Bonnie recounted. “There was a hoarding situation where a large number of horses needed to be evacuated. Officials were looking for experienced horse people who had trailers. I volunteered and with others,



PHOTO PROVIDED

Members of the Sisters Rodeo painting ladies crew: Sheryn Bagley, Eileen Chambers, Bonnie Knox and Sharon Wong. They’re already planning this spring’s work.

including vets and deputies, we entered the property.”

Bonnie described what she encountered as “awful.” Dead foals, chickens and debris scattered everywhere. Horses foundered and near death. Feral cats running wild. In a pile of tires, puppies were nipping at white ball of fur, which turned out to be another puppy.

“I held that pup and went right up to the trailer where the hoarder lived. When she opened the door, I said, ‘I would like to buy this puppy.’ She reared back, saying angrily, ‘How do I know that you will take care of her puppy shots?’

“Standing among those dying animals, I barely controlled my temper but managed, ‘There are five vets here. All of them will tell you that I will give her the shots.’ The hoarder came back with, ‘I want \$10.’ I couldn’t get the money out of my pocket fast enough. That little dog was coming home with me! Three days later, I discovered that she was deaf but it didn’t matter to me. I had Lacey for 15 wonderful years.”

When it comes to the Sisters music scene, whether it is Bill Keale, Dry Canyon Stampede, or The Anvil Blasters, you will find Bonnie

and her painting crew buddies in the audience.

“I am a groupie,” she laughed. “I love it when they sing the ‘shoot straight’ song. We all join in,” she said.

Happy Hour was over. The Taco Tuesday meeting was adjourning. One of the painting crew still wondered aloud, “I can’t imagine what

we are going paint after all we did last year...”

“You watch,” Bonnie, the veteran volunteer answered. “The red section is going to need paint.”

No doubt she will be right.

For information on joining Bonnie Knox in volunteering with Sisters Rodeo call 541-549-0121.



I’ve traveled widely and eaten many great meals. I recently ate at **Chops Bistro** in downtown Sisters and I was very impressed. We were there on a Wednesday and 12 of us from Metabolic Maintenance and Personalized Nutrients had a great dinner. We enjoyed the dinner so much that we came back two nights later. There is not another place in the Sisters area where you can sit down and have an elegant, relaxing, fireside dinner. I recommend the filet mignon and a nice bottle of wine – but everything is delicious. I hope you will give yourself a treat and enjoy **Chops Bistro’s** amazing food, service and ambience, and they support live music on the weekends!

-Ed Fitzjarrell, Metabolic Maintenance

(paid for by Ed Fitzjarrell)

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