

Sisters Rodeo creates lifelong memories

By **Jim Cornelius**
Editor in Chief

Sisters Rodeo is the highlight of the year for thousands of people. Many have built lives around it.

Sisters Rodeo Association President Curt Kallberg lives in Sisters in large part because of the Sisters Rodeo.

In the mid-to-late 1980s, back when he was young and limber as the Ian Tyson song goes, he was a participant in one of the most thrilling — and risky — events in the “Biggest Little Show in the World.”

“We lived over in the Valley,” Kallberg recalled. “And we’d come over here and wild horse race.”

In the Wild Horse Race, teams vie to get a wildly uncooperative horse saddled and get one of the team aboard to race him bucking and jiggling around a barrel. The Wild Horse Race opens the Rodeo and it’s usually a chaotic scene with far more cowboys crawling up out of the dirt to limp away than there are in a saddle. And it’s addicting.

“(Sisters) was about the crown jewel of wild horse racing,” Kallberg said. “We never could win, but we’d come year after year. It was kind of a pilgrimage to the Sisters Rodeo. If you did *one*

rodeo, you did Sisters. You’d come and camp and it was the *best*.”

Eventually, Kallberg moved here and became a member of the Sisters Rodeo Association. He’s now president, succeeding the long-serving and greatly admired Glenn Miller.

Tanya Jones is literally a child of the Sisters Rodeo. Her grandfather was Mert Hunking, who was the stock contractor for the Sisters Rodeo for many years before it became a PRCCA Rodeo.

“I grew up in that arena, more or less,” she said. “I started carrying the American flag there in 1980.”

Jones started barrel racing at Sisters in 1990, and has had many memorable runs in her home arena.

She also recalled the epic challenge between the bull Red Rock and champion bull rider Lane Frost in 1988 (*see related story, page 14*). Red Rock had not been ridden through his career, and rodeo promoters staged a Challenge of the Champions series pitting the undefeated bull and the young champ against each other in an exhibition.

Jones had a special connection to Red Rock — he was her grandfather’s bull. And despite his fearsome reputation for mercilessly

unseating riders, Red Rock was a gentle creature. He only turned on the power when he went to work.

Jones used to sit on Red Rock in the pasture when her grandfather fed him hay. She admitted that she had mixed feelings about the outcome of the challenge, when Frost stayed on the legendary bull for the full eight seconds of a qualifying ride.

“That was a pretty cool experience,” she said. “We were all kind of sad, because we really didn’t want him to be rode, but it was pretty amazing to witness that.”

The rodeo is entertainment, and nothing adds to the entertainment more than a talented clown. For years, JJ Harrison kept the crowd in stitches with his antics — and with his athletic dance moves and stunts.

Mike Biggers recalled a moment in the 2010 Sisters Rodeo when a bull treated JJ like a soccer ball or hockey puck. After a ride where a tough bull had dumped a cowboy, Harrison taunted the bull into charging him where the clown sat in his protective barrel.

The ensuing scene can be found on Youtube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r14atdJYpvY>

Harrison ducked-and-tucked into the barrel as the



PHOTO PROVIDED

Tanya Jones was raised in the Sisters Rodeo arena — and rode there as a competitive barrel racer.

bull knocked it over, then proceeded to head-butt it over and over till it got a good roll going — across a third of the arena and right through the gate into the chutes. Goooooaaaaaallllll!

Such moments of hilarity meld with significant moments like raising record amounts of funding for Sara’s Project, a local nonprofit that fights breast cancer. Legendary Saturday nights on the town in Sisters meld into warm Sunday mornings with family and friends at Sisters Kiwanis Buckaroo Breakfast.

It all makes for an event

that brings many people back year after year, decade after decade.

For many Rodeo volunteers, the camaraderie of staging the event each year is the highlight. John Leavitt leads the Queen selection committee and participated in the Rodeo for many years as a team roper. He can’t separate out any one favorite memory that stands out from the others.

“After 40 years, I don’t know what it would be,” he said. “There’s so many of them. I just love the Rodeo and I love the job I do.”

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