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After overcoming much initial reluctance, particularly from ranchers and stock handlers, the first gay rodeo raised thousands of dollars for beneficiaries. Soon other cities joined, and in 1982 the first National Gay Rodeo Finals were held in Reno. At that event, more than 43 contestants (including mounted drill teams) and 10,000 spectators (led by comedian Joan Rivers) filled the stands.

Today, 32 chapters, including international chapters in Canada, continue to preserve and build on the traditions of the Western lifestyle. While PNWGRA has about 80 members in its tri-state region, the gay rodeo groups in Colorado, California, Texas and Nevada have hundreds of members, with numbers rivaling—and, in some instances, surpassing—the imperial court systems in those cities.

Major 2006 rodeo events include the International Gay Rodeo Association's Rodeo School on Jan. 12 and 13 in Phoenix, the IGRA University from Feb. 17 to 19 in Las Vegas and the IGRA Finals from Nov. 10 to 12 in Reno.

KEEPING THE WESTERN LIFESTYLE ALIVE

The primary purpose for gay rodeo—and perhaps its greatest appeal to those who do not own horses or want to compete—is what Bunting refers to as “preserving the Western lifestyle.” This seems to describe living the Cowboy Code of Ethics immortalized by old-time cowboys like Gene Autry, who said, “Cowboys also always speak the truth and never take unfair advantage.”

In today's age of cynicism, these words affirm core values that situational ethics often obscure—and many want to revert to time-honored standards of ethics when so many values appear to be fleeting. The Western lifestyle also embraces those who simply love the Old West and the spirit of our pioneer forefathers. Others still just enjoy wearing cowboy attire—most recently popularized in the Ang Lee film *Brokeback Mountain*.

“Keeping the Western lifestyle and celebrating those traditions are what Pacific Northwest Gay Rodeo is all about,” Bunting says. Although

PNWGRA is still a few years away from hosting a rodeo (it has to raise the nearly \$50,000 that it costs to create such an event), lots of activities are available to those with an interest in the rodeo lifestyle. For example, the association holds a twice-yearly Play Day, usually in rural locations so that members can bring their horses.

At the 2005 Spring Play Day in Estacada, nearly 90 guests participated in a Western-themed weekend campout. This gave enthusiasts the opportunity to experience pole bending and barrel racing; for those who do not own or ride horses, on-foot variations were available, as were clinics on calf roping. The event ended successfully with an old-fashioned barn dance with music provided by the Roadhouse Wranglers band and an old-fashioned feed featuring a roast pig.

Similar events are planned for this spring and fall. Other 2005 events included a Monte Carlo Night at Thanksgiving in Boise and a Dance Party just a few weeks ago in Seattle. More than 20 members actively attend other rodeo events in sister cities, and several (including Bunting and his partner, Greg Look) will be attending the Road Runner Gay Rodeo's School this month in Phoenix. There they will learn how to chute dog, goat dress and compete in other events like calf roping.



city (as well as Seattle and Boise) at Embers, 110 N.W. Broadway.

“We're looking forward to bringing rodeo to an all new level in Portland,” says Bunting.

According to Steve Suss, owner of Embers for more than 38 years, “The gay rodeo is off and running, and we hope this is the first of many rodeo and cowboy-themed events in Portland and at Embers.”

Aside from PNWGRA events, you can also experience the Western lifestyle Wednesdays at C.C. Slaughters, 219 N.W. Davis St., with country dance lessons including line dancing and the two-step.

And don't forget that rodeo is for women, too. According to Bunting, “Women are a big

part of the rodeo scene.” He adds, “We want more women to come out because our female membership is not as large as some of our sister associations.” According to the International Gay Rodeo Association, nearly half of all members nationwide are female.

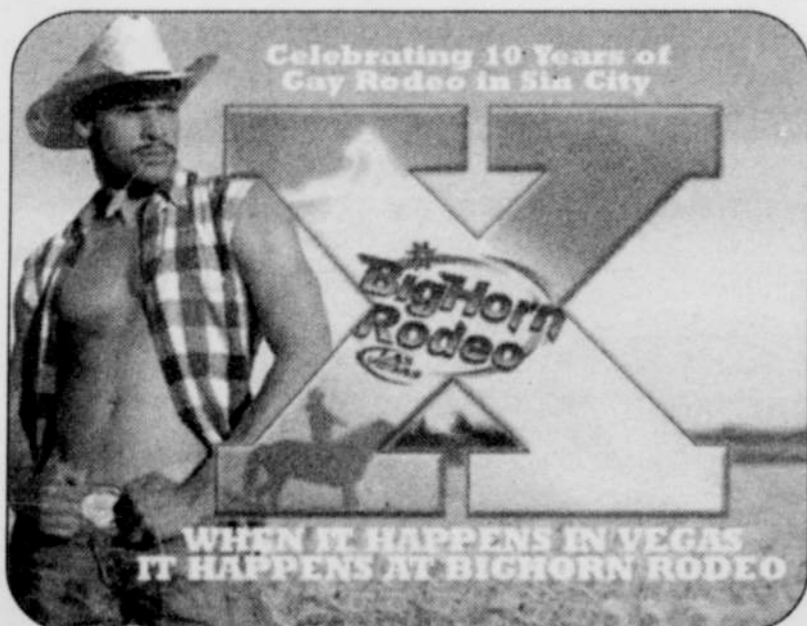
So, if you're inclined to preserve the Western tradition, go country line dancing or throw back a beer—or if you're simply looking for your own Heath Ledger in Wranglers—check out the PNWGRA Web site or stop by a gay rodeo event. When you do, you'll have one heck of a time...even if you never attempt to put jockey shorts on a goat. 10

For more information about the PACIFIC NORTHWEST GAY RODEO ASSOCIATION visit www.pacificngra.org. Membership costs \$25 a year and includes a subscription to the PNWGRA newsletter and admission to the PNWGRA Yahoo group. For more information about the International Gay Rodeo Association, visit www.igra.com.

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THE CHICKEN RANCH COMES TO THE CITY

PNWGRA kicks off its 2006 season 6 p.m. Jan. 27 with an event that will bring members from the far corners of the Northwest to celebrate all things cowboy right here in Portland. “The Chicken Ranch Comes to the City” will feature dinner, dancing and live entertainment from around the



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