



Team Abrahamson of the Colville tribe from Omak, Washington, takes an early lead in the second heat of the Indian Relay race on Wednesday at the Pendleton Round-Up.



Farmers Ending Hunger accepted their \$5,000 check from the Pendleton Round-Up on Wednesday.

Pendleton Round-Up helps Farmers Ending Hunger

Organization receives \$10K in donations

By GEORGE PLAVERN
East Oregonian

At its heart, the Pendleton Round-Up — like most rodeos around the West — is an ode to the working class farm and ranch lifestyle, and a celebration of the region’s agricultural roots.

So when the Round-Up Association agreed to a three-year partnership with Farmers Ending Hunger earlier this year, both sides agreed it was a natural fit.

Wednesday marked the first ever Farmers Ending Hunger Day at the Round-Up, raising awareness and support for the organization’s mission of eliminating hunger statewide. The group also received cash donations of \$5,000 each from River Point Farms and Northwest Farm Credit Services, which were presented just outside the Round-Up Grounds.

Farmers Ending Hunger was founded in 2006 by Fred Ziari, of Hermiston, upon hearing that Oregon was one of the most food insecure states in the country. According to the Oregon Food Bank, about 644,000 Oregonians do not have access to enough affordable, nutritious food, of which 223,480 are children.

Ziari, who serves as CEO of IRZ Consulting, reached out to colleagues and local farmers to see if they would be interested in pitching in to help solve the problem. Without exception, he said the farming community was on board.

“We shouldn’t have hunger in our state,” Ziari said. “Agriculture is our business, but food is all



Fred Ziari, founder of Farmers Ending Hunger, said Wednesday’s partnership with the Pendleton Round-Up was a perfect match.

Oregonians’ business.” This year alone, Farmers Ending Hunger has been responsible for donating 5 million pounds of ready-to-eat food to the Oregon Food Bank. Roughly 80 percent of those donations comes from Eastern Oregon, where farmers grow more than 200 different types of crops.

Top contributors include Amstad Produce, which gives 30 tons of potatoes every month. River Point Farms, the country’s largest grower and processor of onions, also kicks in 20-30 tons of produce every month. Threemile Canyon Farms contributes 20 beef cows every month, which are processed into hamburger meat.

“All the food is given by the farmers for free,” Ziari said. “This is what you buy at Safeway and grocery stores. It’s the same quality.”

What is not free is the packaging and transportation to ship that food to food banks across the state. That’s where Wednesday’s cash donations come in handy. Members of the public can also sign up to “adopt an

acre” to help cover those costs.

Bob Hale, president of River Point Farms in Hermiston, said the company has contributed to Farmers Ending Hunger since the very beginning.

“I think it’s in the spirit of agriculture in general,” Hale said. “We want to make sure everybody gets to eat equally. We think it’s all part of the process, to feed people. It isn’t just business. It’s a way of life.”

The partnership with the Round-Up was finalized in May during the annual Portland Rose Festival. Rodeo royalty joined with Farmers Ending Hunger to help pack food boxes at the Oregon Food Bank, which are then distributed among a network of 21 regional food banks and 970 partner agencies, including CAPECO in Umatilla, Morrow, Gilliam and Wheeler counties.

John Burt, executive director of Farmers Ending Hunger, said the Round-Up started as an agricultural event, and the partnership between the two groups only seemed natural.

“To recognize the bounty of this area at harvest time makes sense,” Burt said.

Burt made no secret of his excitement for the partnership as he unfurled the large “Farmers Ending Hunger Day” banner, describing it as a huge milestone for his organization. He hopes to see it evolve into an annual celebration.

“To be sought out and asked by the Round-Up, that is just huge,” Burt said. “To me personally, that means we’ve arrived.”

To learn more about Farmers Ending Hunger or to make a contribution, visit www.farmersendinghunger.com.

MILITARY: SeaBees have been helping with the hay and barns volunteer group

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that had been attached to poles or the ground.

As diners swarmed the soldiers after the show finished, it was hard to believe that some of the men who had just conducted target practice on top of a moving animal had as little as six months of experience on horseback.

Horsemanship is not a requirement to join the Commanding General’s Mounted Color Guard, formed in 1992 and based in Fort Riley, Kansas.

First Sgt. Jason Therkelsen explained how the infantrymen and engineers and other disparate Army positions who have already served tours in Iraq and Afghanistan sign up for a two-year tour on horseback.

Color guard members go through 30 days of horse training, including 40 hours on bareback before traveling to rodeos and horse shows across the country.

While every member of the color guard looked skilled behind the reins, Sgt. Cecil Sanderson stood out during his portion of the presentation.

The color guard’s senior rider, Sanderson was the only member who wielded a shotgun for the first half of the course, eviscerating his targets with crowd-safe ammunition, then switching to a revolver and continuing to drop targets.

Sanderson’s talents were reflective of a childhood spent around his horse-training father and as a competitor in mounted shooting competitions.

After joining the Army and serving in Afghanistan, Sanderson was a natural fit for the mounted color guard.

“If I can be in the Army and ride horses, that’s two of my favorite things,” he said.

On the other end of the spectrum was Specialist Connor Boyer, who had zero horseback experience despite growing up around cattle.



Four members of Army’s mounted color guard perform Wednesday in the Pendleton Round-Up.

Boyer said “everyone has their falls” during training, which was met with some razzing from his fellow color guard members, who said Boyer took more than a few. The mounted color guard will make the most of their trip to Pendleton, making additional appearances at Wednesday’s Happy Canyon Night Show and Friday’s Westward Ho! Parade.

Following last year’s visit from the U.S. Marine Corps. mounted color guard, Round-Up General Manager Casey Beard wants to make the military a permanent presence at the Round-Up.

“Patriotism and militarism are in our charter,” he said.

The Round-Up history with the military stretches back all the way to the early years of the rodeo. According to Beard, Round-Up champions Lee Caldwell and Dell Blancett formed Company D as a patriotic response to the U.S. entry into World War I, which marks its 100th anniversary this year.

The mounted troop was sworn in at Happy Canyon and trained at the Round-Up Grounds, but were converted to artillery when they arrived in Germany.

Still, the members of Troop D wrote “Let ‘Er Buck” on their cannons and were noted in media reports for their resiliency.

The military remains involved with the Round-Up in other ways.

The Oregon Air National Guard will perform a flyover for Saturday’s championship round during the grand entry, Round-Up publicity director Randy Thomas said.

Throughout the week, the Round-Up has also received a helping hand from the U.S. Naval Construction Battalion, better known as the Seabees.

Based out of the Boardman Bombing Range, Jesse Canisalez, a second class equipment operator, said up to seven members of the Seabees have been helping with the hay and barns volunteer group.

Volunteering to take care of livestock is a part of a broader effort from the bombing range to do more community outreach, Canisalez said.

While many of their efforts have been focused on Hermiston, Canisalez said the goal is to continue volunteering at Round-Up in the future.

Contact Antonio Sierra at asierra@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0836.

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John Burt, executive director of Farmers Ending Hunger, hangs a banner Wednesday for Farmers Ending Hunger Day at the organization’s booth inside the Round-Up Grounds.