

Cowboy:

Continued from Page A1

his nephew to make saddles. Severe often took the instrument down to play.

Generations of Pendleton Round-Up cowboys have stayed at a bunkhouse on the second floor of the saddle shop. Randy's uncle Duff, who operated Severe Brothers Saddlery with Randy's father Bill Severe, started the tradition when a couple of rodeo cowboys mentioned they couldn't find a place to sleep. World champion saddle bronc rider Casey Tibbs is credited with christening the bunkhouse Hotel de Cowpunch and hanging a sign.

Cowboys pay nothing at Hotel de Cowpunch except for a signed photo of themselves that hangs on the wall. Saddle bronc rider Cody DeMoss has stayed at the bunkhouse every Round-Up since 2004. Severe befriended the cowboy, fixed his banged-up saddles and taught him about life and leatherwork. The saddlemaker, DeMoss said, had a soft spot for cowboys.

"He would drop what he was doing for a cowboy in need," DeMoss said. "He might be working on a \$25,000 or \$40,000 saddle for a client, but if a cowboy came to him with a torn-up bronc saddle, he'd drop everything to help."

DeMoss said the hole left by Severe's death is huge.



East Oregonian, File

Saddlemaker Randy Severe made more 200 championship saddles for the Pendleton Round-Up. Severe died Sunday, Nov. 21, 2021, from the effects of COVID-19. He was 70.



East Oregonian, File

Randy Severe, then president of the Pendleton Round-Up, rides around the arena Sept. 16, 2010, during the opening ceremony of the Pendleton Round-Up.

"Humanity has lost a fine human," he said.

As a boy, Severe spent

a lot of time in the family saddle shop, learning braiding techniques and making

belts and wallets. Uncle Duff wouldn't let him build saddles until he was married. After high school, he left Pendleton for a time, working on ranches in Arizona, Nevada and Oregon. He left for a season and got back in time for Round-Up. The ranch work was great preparation for making saddle gear.

"You get to understand the stress and strain that goes on a saddle and that beautiful squeak," he said.

Eventually he met Rosemary and popped the question. After their honeymoon in 1974, Duff met Randy on the doorstep and said, "It's time."

Duff schooled Randy in

the art of saddle making. Bill taught Randy's brother Robin how to craft the trees that serve as the saddles' skeletons.

Friends and family are struggling to imagine a world without Severe. Carl Culham and Bill Quesenberry remember their friend and fellow Round-Up board director as an easygoing cowboy who exuded calm and reason, even when dealing with tough issues. Severe acted as an ambassador for Pendleton.

"He lived and breathed Pendleton," Culham said.

"He helped put this community on the map," Quesenberry said.

Severe presided over the Round-Up Association during the rodeo's centennial year. Often board sessions lasted until past midnight, Quesenberry said, after which Severe went back to the shop for a few more hours to work on trophy saddles.

Both men enjoyed Severe's sense of humor. Culham told the story of a layover at the Dallas/Fort Worth airport during a trip with Severe and a couple of other directors. They noticed Severe stop and chat with a woman who held a piece of paper in her hand. They watched him dig out a pen from his pocket and sign the paper. When Severe got back to the group, Culham asked, "What was that about?"

"People sometimes mistake me for Garth Brooks," Severe explained. "It happens every once in a while."

Severe did look a little like Garth and it wasn't the only time he signed autographs, said family members. They said they will miss that easy sense of humor, along with his omnipresent smile, unruffled calm and ability to fix anything. As a father, his daughter Jodi Thackeray said, he was "firm, but loving" to his two sons and three daughters. After the punishment, "he came back to tell us he loved us and was proud of us."

Randy, Rosemary said, was the fun grandfather, making his grandchildren stunts and presiding over "stilt wars."

Ryan and Jarad Severe learned from their dad's work ethic.

"He'd work his fingers to the bone," Ryan said. "He'd never complain about it."

"He taught us to work hard and serve others and to be happy doing it," Jarad said.

All of them will miss Randy's delight at simply being.

"He was big on life," Jodi said of her father. "He loved just living life."

Severe died on Sun, Nov. 21, morning surrounded by his family. Daughter Darla Phillips added a final update about her father on Facebook.

"Heaven just gained an amazing man," she wrote, "to which we will all be grateful for, for the rest of our lives."

Ride on, cowboy.

Spirit:

Continued from Page A1

who said she and others were working "for the love of the community."

Smart, who was in charge of the kitchen, said she has been working at the event since 2014.

"I was doing nothing for Thanksgiving, and I wanted to do something," she said. "I felt the need, and I looked for something until I found this."

As a head cook at Good Shepherd Health Care System, her skills and experience were useful to this cause.

"It makes me feel better as a person in the community," she said. "It's fulfilling to see that we're helping so many people."

As tears welled up in her eyes, Smart explained she was immensely touched by the outpouring of donations and effort that made this event possible. It would not be feasible without many caring, loving people, she said; it is a testament to the goodness of the community.

Another volunteer, Ryan Greene, said he was doing this work because he enjoys helping people.

"A lot of people are lonely, especially if they don't have family around or if they are in a position in which they don't have money for food," he said.

Community Fellowship Dinner Chairman Gary Humphreys explained the history of the event, dating back to the early 1980s. It started, he said, with families who were eating meals in an apartment building when it dawned on them that they were eating alone and that it would be better to share a meal together.

In 1982, around 20 of the apartment residents got together for dinner. They enjoyed the experience so much, they wanted to keep doing it, Humphreys said. What is more, he said, they wanted to invite others. The idea caught on, snowballing to create bigger and bigger turnouts.

As Humphreys told the story, participation for the



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Volunteers package to-go meals Thursday, Nov. 25, 2021, at Hermiston High School for the Community Fellowship Dinner.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Volunteers organize to-go meals Thursday, Nov. 25, 2021, at the Hermiston Community Fellowship Dinner at Hermiston High School, Hermiston.

community dinners grew so much, they needed additional space. They moved to a local church, then a senior center and, finally, Hermiston High School.

The school, which has held the event ever since, is an excellent facility, he said. It has a large kitchen for food preparation, and they are helped by school staff.

COVID-19 threw a wrench into the gears, Humphreys said. No longer was it safe to bring the community together for people to enjoy face-to-face interaction. Instead, he said, the event shifted so volunteers were preparing food and handing it to people as they passed by in cars.

The dinner provided 1,300

and maybe an oven, which would make the event more self-sufficient. No longer will community dinners need to "begging for and borrowing" materials to host their events, he said.

Any funds left over will go toward future dinners, he said, while senior centers and other groups in need get any leftover food.

In a normal year, according to Humphreys, around 150 volunteers are needed. This year was different, as there was no table service and cold meals were handed to passersby, so there was a need for only 50 volunteers.

Next year marks the 40th Community Fellowship Dinner. Humphreys said he expects 2022 to revert to regular times with the community meeting as they did pre-pandemic.

"We'll do whatever is necessary to make that possible," he said.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Maj. Toni Halstad, of the Salvation Army, hands out to-go meals Thursday, Nov. 25, 2021, during the Pendleton Salvation Army's annual Thanksgiving meal.

Meals:

Continued from Page A1

he lives mostly out of what fits on his back and "lives and sleeps under the stars."

This year, Carter decided to volunteer. In recent days, he has been posted outside the Pendleton Safeway as the Salvation Army bell ringer there. Speaking in energetic bursts and looking around with his piercing blue eyes at the volunteers and people stopping by for food, Carter said he has been thinking about the gratitude he feels for what he has, rather than what he does not.

The same held true for several volunteers on Thanksgiving.

Administrative assistant Melissa Widel spent her day driving around town delivering meals — like she has since March 2020, when the pandemic left countless people unemployed and shut in, heightening food insecurity nationwide. During times of greatest need, Widel said they have delivered as many as 150 meals in a single day.

"Every day is a blessing," Widel said of her work.

Widel said she enjoys hearing the stories and grateful words of the people she serves. This year, she said the Salvation Army was fortunate to have more help than usual.

"It warms your heart," said Widel, who works at Simply Catering.

Halstad said they ordered food early this year to avoid the supply chain issues that have swept the nation. She spent her day standing at the doorway and chatting with people as she gave them meals.

Cooking the meals in a frantic frenzy this year was Travis Hackett, a volunteer, former worker at a four-star restaurant and single father. Sweat gleaming from his forehead, Hackett said he has a goal to feed his kids well and enjoys refining his cooking skills.

So he put those skills to work with the Salvation Army, where he found a sense of community after he came to town about a year ago. Hackett said he felt a sense of teamwork through volunteering on Thanksgiving. He said it gives him a sense of purpose to help long lines of people who he doesn't know.

*In this day,
there is no more important matter in the world
than universal peace
--'Abdu'l-Baha*

*On the centenary of the life of 'Abdu'l-Baha,
the son of the Founder of the Baha'i Faith,
The Pendleton Baha'i Community wishes Peace to all*

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