



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Mourners fill the Pendleton Convention Center on Tuesday, Nov. 30, 2021, for the funeral of 70-year-old saddlemaker and former president of the Pendleton Round-Up Randy Severe. He died of COVID-19 at a Portland hospital on Nov. 21.

## Mr. Round-Up:

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"I think of him every time I think of Eastern Oregon," said Dave Gamroth, an account executive at MicroGenDX in Portland and friend of Severe.

Severe's procession began in the packed convention center parking lot and wound through town, closing roads as police led the way and the Oregon Department of Transportation blocked interstate exits. Dozens of cars followed.

"Even if they weren't at the service themselves, they knew exactly who that was coming through," Phillips said.

Tim Hawkins, a former Round-Up president, looked on as the Severe family carried his good friend's casket, on its way to Olney Cemetery.

"When people thought of the Round-Up, they thought of Randy Severe," said Hawkins, a lifelong friend who met Severe at Pendleton High School more than 50 years ago. "He went away way too soon. He had a lot of saddles left to make, songs left to sing, and a lot of people to grace his presence with."

### Sharing stories

A large table sat beside the hundreds of mourners at the service, covered in Severe's belongings and photos of his life. There was his guitar, his leather boots, magazines and books about his saddlework. There was even a 1976 check and letter from U.S. President Gerald Ford for \$379.75 made out to the Severe Brothers.

The service began with the sounds of Alisha Mae's "Dancing in the Sky." Then the six remaining Severe brothers stepped to the front of the room one after another, some with tears welling in their eyes.

They painted a portrait of Eastern Oregon life with their brother: playing tag; riding horses; jumping off the big rock into the Umatilla River; skinny dipping and getting sunburns on their backsides; hiding dead rattlesnakes to pull pranks on the waitress at the local A&W, which banned them from the restaurant. Their jokes triggered low, muffled laughter.

Stewart Severe said his brother



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Randy Severe's grandchildren perform "Grandpa" at his funeral Tuesday, Nov. 30, 2021, at the Pendleton Convention Center.

had a photographic memory for phone numbers. Every time he called, his brother would answer in that same upbeat, cheery voice: "Well hello, Stewart."

"Rest in peace, my brother," Stewart Severe said. "You set quite an example for your brothers. And I will be calling you again."

And the service was filled with music. Paul Green, a family friend, played "Green Grass of Home." A dozen of Severe's grandchildren sang in unison a song titled, "Grandpa." Some mourners swayed in their chairs to the music while others dotted their eyes with handkerchiefs.

Severe's sons, Jarad and Ryan Severe, stepped forward. They told the story of how their mother met their father and fell in love with him as he strummed ballads on his guitar. They told about how their father had a firm but loving hand, adding, "Being in the leather business, there was never a belt far away." They recalled digging post holes, spreading manure. They recalled a house full of fiddles, guitars and yodeling.

They didn't have much growing up in the ways of nice cars or vacations, one said, but they had each other.

### Family with Severe in final days

And as Severe lay in the hospital before he died, the five children fought to be next to him. Hospital protocol allowed just two family members to see a patient per day, Phillips said. But health care workers went to the hospital management and vouched for the whole family to see him. Then, two family members at a time rotated in to see Severe, Phillips said.

"It was pretty neat that they saw that compassion, that we really loved and wanted to be there with our dad," Phillips said.

Curtis Severe said during the service that although doctors said Severe's lungs were only operating at 10% capacity, he knew his brother died peacefully.

"Families are meant to be eternal," Curtis Severe said. "And I know Randy's will be."

Phillips wrote a poem about her father that was on the back of the funeral program. The final two stanzas read:

"I wanna walk just like you  
And I'll get back on and ride  
'cause I know you'll be here,  
you're just on the other side.  
Your love and memory goes on

forever cherished by all,  
In the toughest of times  
I promise to always stand tall."

The service concluded with poetry, music and words from Tygh Campbell, a former Round-Up director. Bishop Gary Edwards made the closing remarks, his voice cracking through the tears as he spoke to Severe's loved ones.

"When it's your time to go, you won't have to tap an angel on the shoulder and ask where he's at," Edwards said. "He'll come to you."

As people stacked chairs and the room emptied, Rawley Stanley and Larry Enbysk lingered near the front of the room, sharing their memories. Enbysk talked about spending time with Severe on his ranch, sitting around the fire and playing guitars. Stanley spoke about bringing his 10-year-old daughter to Severe's saddle shop in May. He knows the shop might not continue without his old friend from high school.

"How could it, without ..." his voice trailing off. He repeated over and over again, "I could never say a bad thing about him."

By 3 p.m., long after the service had concluded, the sun briefly broke through the clouds.

## Center:

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For more than 30 years, Blue Mountain Wildlife has cared for wild animals, primarily birds of prey, who are seriously injured, often after coming into contact with humans. Each year, Blue Mountain Wildlife takes in more than 1,000 birds that get stuck in buildings, get shot by hunters or mistakenly ingest lead ammunition they find in carrion. During last year's sweltering heat wave, the rehabilitation center took in dozens of chicks that threw themselves out of their nests to escape the blazing sun.

Beyond rehabilitating birds and returning them back to their habitats, Blue Mountain Wildlife has an educational component. For years, Tompkins would transport her rehabilitation center's permanent avian residents to schools around the region to give students lessons about conservation.

But COVID-19 halted her trips to schools, and with her husband and co-founder, Bob, dying in March, Tompkins doesn't have the same appetite for travel.

"I'm at a point where I'm not going to drive all over the countryside," she said.

That doesn't mean Blue Mountain Wildlife is leaving behind the educational part of its mission.

The group recently built a new educational facility at its property, so visitors can view the birds the center uses for educational purposes away from the rehabbing animals. Tompkins said she would like to start granting money to schools to cover the costs of field trips to Blue Mountain Wildlife.

Tompkins also said she is hoping the \$45,000 gift will aid Blue Mountain Wildlife's efforts to build a new wildlife hospital on site.



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A newly constructed educational facility at Blue Mountain Wildlife in Pendleton is among director Lynn Tompkins' plans to help expand the educational abilities of the organization.

## Wolves:

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Despite the boost, ranchers say it is still not enough as they face greater instances of wolves attacking and killing their animals.

Oregon has at least 173 wolves scattered across the state, according to the most recent estimate from the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. So far in 2021, ODFW has confirmed 87 animals killed or injured by wolves, including 51 cattle, 28 sheep, six goats and two guard dogs. That is up by more than double over 2020, when 32 animals were attacked or killed by wolves — 28 cattle, two llamas and two guard dogs.

Levy said the estimated cost for dead and missing livestock, as of Nov. 6, was \$780,000 and that number is expected to increase as ranchers finish moving their livestock out of the mountains and down into winter pasture.

Rodger Huffman, a Union County rancher and member of the OCA wolf committee, said the compensation program likely will not cover counties' grant requests.

"More tools are needed," Huffman said. "If more tools are not provided in management, then more money is needed for compensation."

What's more, Huffman said the program does not compensate ranchers for other hidden costs they suffer due to wolves. Livestock might not be directly killed or injured, but have lower birth rates or gain less weight if they are stressed by predators.

"There's cost in the cattle production side," Huffman said. "Then the other big cost is the producer cost to be out there trying to prevent the depredations."

Sandau, with ODA, said applications for ranchers to receive compensation for 2021 depredations will be made available in February 2022. With the \$400,000 boost in funding, he said they should be able to fulfill more requests than they have in past years.

"We talk to stakeholder groups and county governments, and with the available funds make the best investment that we can," Sandau said. "With potentially more depredation requests for 2021 in the granting cycle for 2022, we'll see how it all balances out."