

Urban students embrace rural lifestyle experience

By Steve Tool

Wallowa County Chieftain

Eight students from Sunnyside Environmental School in Portland recently completed their Wallowa County stay as part of the 4-H Urban 2 Rural Exchange program with Wallowa County. The purpose of the program is to expose students from both Portland and Wallowa County to life "on the other side."

While some students make repeat visits, Sunnyside students Rebecca Miller-Rondthaler and Adeline Finney are first-time participants in the program. The two spent their Wallowa County stay with ranchers Todd and Angie Nash.

Rondthaler said she wanted to participate in the program last year, but declined for an unusual reason: "I didn't want to miss school. I know it's kind of weird," Rondthaler said with a laugh. She added it was her last chance to participate, so she took the plunge.

The difference in the rural lifestyle appealed to Rondthaler as the two spent the weekend riding horses and attending three brandings. "I branded a cow and gave them vaccines, and we saw a calf



Two Sunnyside happy campers after a few days on the ranch. From left: Adeline Finney, rancher Todd Nash, and Rebecca Miller-Rondthaler.

being born. I enjoyed it; it was really fun," Rondthaler said.

Finney had an equally good time during her stay. "I came here because I thought it sounded like a fun experience. and I wanted to see what life was like down here," Finney

said. Both girls said their visit poured a good dose of reality on their preconceived notions of ranch life in general. The girls intend to participate in the future.

Todd Nash enjoyed the weekend as well. "I always enjoy having the kids here. Becca and Adeline were very congenial young ladies. They were low maintenance, and we didn't do anything special outside our normal routine, and they really enjoyed it," Nash said.

Early in the program, Nash

said some of the students believed the ranchers polluted streams and raised water temperatures, overgrazed the land and compacted soils. "We didn't preach to them, we showed them the ranching process and how many thousands of people we feed with our cattle, and they ended feeling different about it," Nash said.

In the end, Nash said the program is about mutual respect. "We can appreciate each other as human beings, and that's all I want out of this."

Steve Tool/Chieftain

McDowell reins supreme at derby

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After the roaring of the crowd subsided and the dust from flying hooves had settled from five days of competition, one man reigned supreme: Wallowa County's Matt McDowell and his horse Lorenzo (registered name of FM Shine N Tag Chex). McDowell didn't win all-around-cowboy at a spring rodeo, he won the HF Mobster Open Derby at the "Best Little Derby in the West," put on by the Great Western Reining Horse Association.

The derby took place at the Ford Idaho Horse Park in Nampa, Idaho, from April 22-26. Exhibitors from as far away as Colorado, Alberta and Utah competed in the derby. It is the first major reining event to take place in the Pacific Northwest.

McDowell is a reining horse trainer. Reining is the western style equivalent of dressage — the European style riding events seen in the Olympics. Reining is based on the athletics of a working cow horse. The horse runs a particular pattern that includes spins, sliding stops, flying lead changes, rundowns, circles, backing and rollbacks. The horses are judged not only on the finesse and speed of their performance, but also on the subtleness of cues it receives from the rider.

McDowell, already a two-time national wrestling champion, still maintains his competitive edge in the reining world. "This was the biggest derby ever in the Northwest. All the guys from Canada came down, and it was a big, big show. The competition was just crazy with run after run of people going full blast with the dirt flying," McDowell said with a laugh.

McDowell won the event with a score of 148.5 with a two-judge system. His closest competitor scored 147. "I was pretty nervous waiting for the last five horses. I had some pretty heavy hitters like Shawna Sapergia, an Olympian from Canada and Jesse Beckley,



Courtesy photo

Matt McDowell on reining horse Lorenzo, who is coming to a sliding stop while competing at the Cactus Reining Classic in Scottsdale, Ariz. earlier this year.

another Canadian champion coming up behind me. I ended up holding on for the win, so it was fun," McDowell said.

McDowell said he appreciated the proximity of the derby as most big reining shows take place in the Southwest. "We're happy with this event, we only have to go four hours and we're happy to have big money to go for," McDowell said. His winning ride on Lorenzo garnered \$5,400, a trophy saddle, two Lawson bronze sculptures, two belt buckles and two trophy picture frames.

Other team members who contributed were training assistant Wyatt Shetler as well as Kazzie Dawson, Denny Dawson, Dustie Pickard and Jerry Winegar. McDowell also won the Novice Horse Open circuit on Surprise Ima Chick, also owned by Tamarack Ranch.

Although McDowell raises and trains his own horses, as well as those of others, his main client is Tamarack Ranch, owned by Suzy Simar (pronounced See-mar) of Texas, who also owns Lorenzo. McDowell met Simar while she was a client of his parents, who once owned the Eagle Cap Pack Station. "She really loves horses and has nine of her horses in training," McDowell said.

Simar is currently building Tamarack Ranch, which includes a large riding arena, at Walker Lane in Joseph. Although McDowell currently takes outside horses, he will work exclusively for Tamarack Ranch when the ranch is finished in a year.

McDowell said he'll always train his own horses as well. "My kids show, and my family shows and it's really important to me. This is a big deal for my family and they have to be a part of it. We'll always have a place to train our own horses."

McDowell's children are following in his boots. His son, Mason, won the 13-and-under reining class and tied for the win in Short Stirrup class at the Nampa show.



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