

Volunteers: The heart and soul of Chief Joseph Days

By ELLEN MORRIS BISHOP
For the Wallowa County Chieftain

JOSEPH — If you are going to the Chief Joseph Days Rodeo, you might consider giving a hearty “Thank you” to the person who takes your ticket. Without them, and the more than 300 volunteers from the community who work hard all year, there would be no parades, no rodeo and no Chief Joseph Days. For each of them, volunteering for CJD is a labor of love and a way to support their community. It’s been that way for more than 75 years.

You’ll see these volunteers who make the rodeo happen mostly as the people who take your tickets, or sell you a beverage or assist at the bronc or steer chutes. But they are also the ones who maintain the rodeo grounds year-round, handle the ticket sales, organize the parades, pay the bills, keep track of contestants and much, much more.

“We just couldn’t have a rodeo without them,” said CJD Board of Directors President Terry Jones. “They are truly the heart and soul of Chief Joseph Days.

Volunteers like the rest

Jones, like the rest of the board, volunteers his time in what is a year-round job. Jones tackles the tasks of lining up and signing rodeo performers, specialty acts, stock contractors, bullfighters, and other pro performers. During the rodeo, you’ll usually find him working the bronc and bulls chutes and, along with other volunteers, trying to stay out of the way of flying hooves, bucking horses, rank bulls, pickup riders and bullfighters.

The cancellation of the 2020 rodeo didn’t mean any less work for many of the 300-plus volunteers, many of whom work



Above, volunteer Harry Lathrop adjusts the songs and sounds for a Tuckerettes and Rodeo Honor Court practice session on a very smoky Monday, July 19, 2021. Below, from left, Jake Thompson, Randy Eschler and J.J. Jones hang a new sponsor sign on the front of the Harley Tucker Arena’s south grandstand.

entirely behind the scenes. They bore the brunt of issuing refunds to ticket holders, and the wrenching job of notifying the specialty acts, entrants, and others, including former court members who had been invited to the Saturday night performance, of the cancellation.

With the 2021 celebration of the 75th Chief Joseph Days, volunteers Judi Holbrook and Janie McArtor devoted more time to contacting past CJD rodeo court royalty and ensuring that they can participate in the 2021 CJD parade with ease. That means again gathering as many as possible of the more than 200 women who have been on rodeo courts

since 1946 to appear at the 75th CJD Rodeo on Saturday, July 31.

Plenty of ways people volunteer

Some volunteers, like J.J. Jones and his wife, Rachael, have volunteered at Chief Joseph Days for more than 20 years. Long-time summer residents, they just moved here permanently from Poulsbo, Washington. Rachael is a time-keeper for the rodeo’s timed events. This year, J.J. will drive the CJD Rodeo’s big red water truck, keeping the Harley Tucker arena as dust-free as possible. He volunteered as

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