

# Tuckers lead inaugural Hall of Fame list

By KATY NESBITT  
For the Wallowa County  
Chieftain

JOSEPH — Four Hall of Fame inductees will be celebrated as part of the 75th Chief Joseph Rodeo Days.

Selected for their contribution to Chief Joseph Days, these people supported the inception and popularity of Northeast Oregon's popular Pro Rodeo Cowboy Association rodeo.

## Harley and Bonnie Tucker

It comes as no surprise that Harley Tucker, the most famous cowboy and stockman in Wallowa County's history, tops the list. Born on a ranch near Joseph in 1908, Tucker owned and operated the Harley Tucker Rodeo Co. and provided rodeo livestock to events across the Pacific Northwest.

At their peak, Tucker's bucking horses, Brahma bulls, steers and calves gave even the sharpest cowboy a real challenge. His company worked 25 venues a year and furnished stock for San Francisco, Salinas, Fort Worth and the National Finals Rodeo.

Tucker and his wife, Bonnie, provided the stock for Chief Joseph Days for 16 years — the first few years for free to help get the rodeo off the ground.

Tucker died unexpectedly in 1960 of a heart attack while flanking bucking horses in Vancouver, Washington. His legacy, though, has lived on. He was inducted into the Pendleton Round-Up Hall of Fame in 1980, the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City in 1997 and the St. Paul Rodeo Hall of Fame in 1999.

The rodeo arena at the Joseph Rodeo Grounds is named in his honor, as well as the Harley Tucker Rodeo Series award that goes to the cowboy or cowgirl scoring



Contributed Photo

Harley and Bonnie Tucker were instrumental in the early days of Chief Joseph Days Rodeo. Both are part of the inaugural CJD Hall of Fame.

the most combined points in the Eastern Oregon Livestock Show in Union, the St. Paul Rodeo in St. Paul, the Elgin Stampede in Elgin and Chief Joseph Days.

Tucker's wife, Bonnie, is also being inducted to the Hall of Fame. She supported the rodeo in many ways including serving as rodeo secretary. Born Anna Louise (Bonnie) Knapper in 1914, she married Tucker in 1939, helping him with his budding stock company.

Her most visible role was serving as the secretary for all the rodeos the Harley Tucker Rodeo Co. produced. So well-revered is Bonnie Tucker, the rodeo office she used at the Pendleton Round-Up is still known as the "Bonnie Tucker Booth."

After her husband's death, along with the help of her crew and friends, Bonnie Tucker produced the remaining summer rodeos. In 1961 the Harley Tucker Rodeo Co. was back on the road in full force, with Bonnie Tucker at the helm; the only female stock contractor

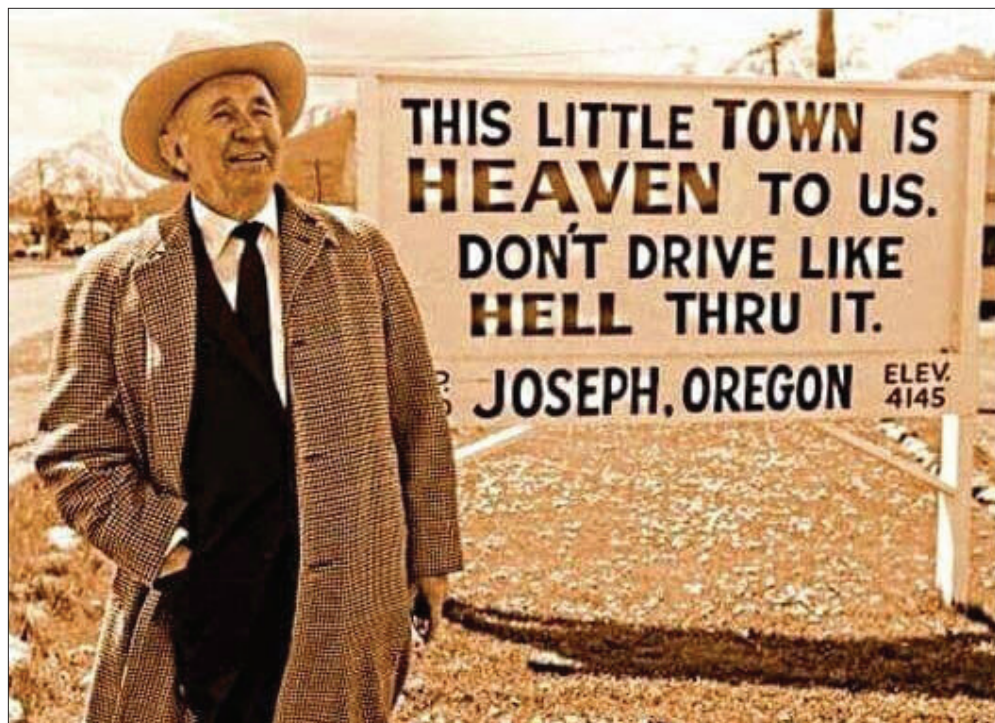
in the Northwest at the time. Bonnie Tucker Blankinship was inducted into the Pendleton Round-Up and Happy Canyon Hall of Fame in 2008.

## Walter Brennan

Actor Walter Brennan was a longtime supporter and promoter of Chief Joseph Days. Born in 1894, the three-time Academy Award winning film actor, television star and spoken-word recording artist, Brennan was a part-time — but active — resident of Wallowa County from 1941 until his death in 1974.

Brennan came to the county after purchasing the 12,000-acre Lightning Creek Ranch. He became a Joseph businessman when he built the Indian Lodge Motel and a movie theater (currently the Baptist Church) and opened a dry goods store on Main Street.

Brennan contributed to widespread awareness of the new celebration by arranging for newsreel footage and promotional airplane tours,



Contributed Photo

Actor Walter Brennan was a longtime supporter in the early days of Chief Joseph Days. He is part of the inaugural CJD Hall of Fame.

flying the rodeo court, local businessmen and fellow cowboy actor Chill Wills all over the Northwest.

Early in Chief Joseph Days planning, Brennan said he figured the Chief Joseph Days Parade couldn't be a parade without a marching band, so he recruited numerous local musicians and formed the "Chesnimnus National Marching Band."

Brennan was inducted into the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City in 1970 for his memorable portrayals of many likable codger cowboys in numerous Western movies. He was once quoted for saying, "Everyone wants to be a cowboy."

## Jack Carson

Born in Burns, Jack Carson was a top-notch Chief Joseph Days Rodeo contestant. He served in the U.S. Army Signal Corps as a high-speed code operator and was discharged in 1953.

For 17 years, Carson competed as a professional cowboy including saddle



Contributed Photo

Jack Carson won multiple Chief Joseph Days riding events in the 1950s and '60s. He is part of the inaugural CJD Hall of Fame.

bronc, bareback and bull riding. During his rodeo career, he won numerous events at Chief Joseph Days — in 1953 he was the bareback champion, and was the saddle bronc champ in 1958. A six-time bull riding champion, Carson won the title in 1955, 1956, 1958, 1959, 1961 and 1964. In 1959, he won the All-Around Cowboy Championship.

Always game for anything, his friend Daryl Hob-

dey dared him to join in an event at the Eastern Oregon Livestock Show — a wristwatch was attached to a bull's horns and cowboys could go out and get it if they could.

Hobdey said to Carson, "Jack, my watch quit. I'll give you \$25 for that watch." Carson vaulted over the chutes and grabbed the watch and handed it to Hobdey.

Carson lives in Clarkston, Washington.

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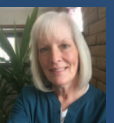
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Office Manager  
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kgilly@eoni.com



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