

# Nez Perce enthusiast promotes tribe for his legacy

Sidney Austin here for 90th birthday, CJD, Tamkaliks

By **BILL BRADSHAW**  
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — A Junction City man with ties to the Nez Perce and a passion for promoting the Indian people has come to Wallowa County to celebrate his 90th birthday.

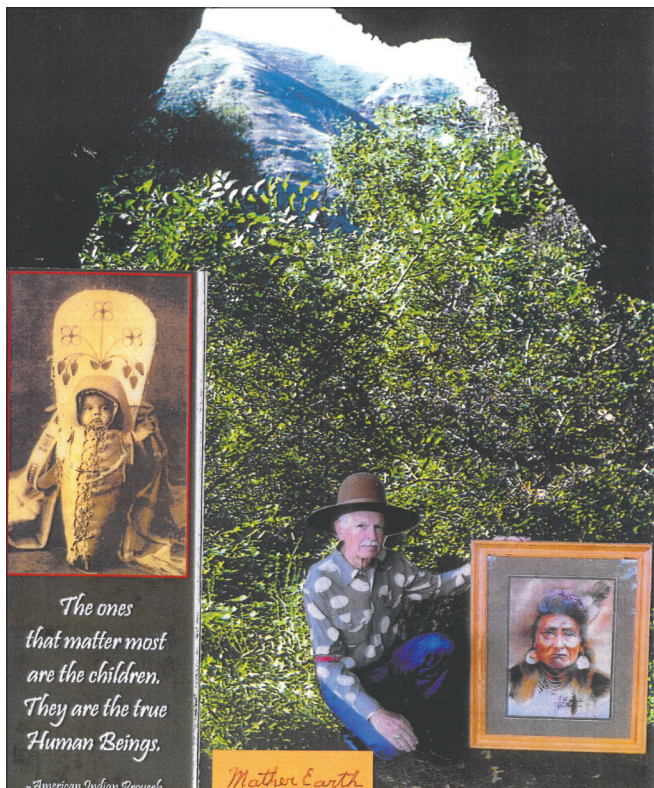
Sidney Austin, a longtime partisan of the Nez Perce and other tribes, hopes spreading information about their history can be his legacy.

“That’s why I’ve been involved in promoting the Indian people,” he said Tuesday, July 12 — Austin’s birthday. “It’s something that I’m really devoted to ... to getting information out there on Chief Joseph and Jackson Sundown.”

In fact, he’s even been “gifted” with the spiritual name of Jackson Sundown, a rodeo champion from the early 1900s.

According to the website of the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum, Sundown was said to be a nephew of Chief Joseph. Sundown was the first Native American to win a major rodeo championship.

Born around 1863 in Montana, his birth name was Waaya-Tanah-Toesits-Kahn (Earth Left by the Setting Sun). Sundown is believed to have fought against U.S. troops in the Nez Perce War of the late 1870s. After his people’s defeat, he took ref-



Contributed Photo

**Sidney Austin holds a portrait of Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce in 1982 at the cave in Joseph Canyon where it is believed Joseph was born.**

uge on the Flathead Reservation, where he married, raised a family and learned to “cowboy.”

Sundown entered the bucking horse competition at the Pendleton Round-Up in 1914, 1915, and 1916. At an age when most cowboys have long since retired, the 53-year-old Sundown captured the trophy saddle. He later competed in a number of California rodeos.

According to Cowboys and Indians Magazine’s website, Sundown was inducted into the American Indian Athletic Hall of Fame,

the National Multicultural Western Heritage Museum and Hall of Fame and the National Cowboy and Western Heritage Museum and Hall of Fame. He is considered a Native American and Pendleton Round-up icon.

Wounded three times in the Nez Perce War, he eventually made his way back to Nez Perce country in Idaho. Retracing the route of his flight 23 years earlier, Sundown finally arrived back in the Wallowa country and, in 1912, on the Nez Perce Reservation, married a Nez Perce widow he’d known as



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**Jackson Sundown, a Nez Perce rodeo cowboy, won the world championship at the Pendleton Round-up in 1916.**

a child. All the while, he’d been developing a reputation among the Indian and ranching communities alike as a skilled horseman.

Asked why he was “gifted” Sundown’s moniker, Austin remains a little puzzled by it, even if totally overwhelmed.

“That’s a good question. It kind of came out of the blue in 2016 (the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the National Museum of the American Indian in New York City), I invited seven people to the museum and four or five of them were

Nez Perce,” Austin said.

The museum now has a location in Washington, D.C., as part of the Smithsonian Institution.

“It was a wonderful experience. There were thousands of people there,” he said. “I gave (the director of the museum) \$50 of gold and it was a beautiful, Indian gold coin ... I gifted him with it at that time. That may have had something to do with it later on. They sent me the certificate and I didn’t argue with it one way or another.”

He finds the gifting of a spiritual name exhilarating.

“It’s a compliment and it happens every once in a while with palefaces,” he said. “It’s really a thrill.”

The Nez Perce connection first brought him to Wallowa County in 1982, when he heard about what is purported to be Chief Joseph’s birth cave in Joseph Canyon.

During his visit, “I realized why Joseph and his people loved this area so much, seeing it visually,” Austin said. “Then I learned about the cave and I spent a whole day looking for it. The second day, I found it and got into it.”

He said it’s not hard to get to and not far from a road.

“While I was there, there was an eclipse of the moon that night ... It was late and I stopped and looked and could see where the entrance was and I didn’t try to go in then,” he said. “So I went down and camped in Hells Canyon and camped overnight. I stayed up and watched the eclipse.”

Now Austin is here again for Chief Joseph Days and Tamkaliks. It seems to be a place he tries to come on a regular pilgrimage.

“I try to come every year, but this year it cost \$250 for gas,” he said.

Coming to Wallowa County to find the cave and take part in the events have enriched his life, Austin said.

“I’ve made many, many friends,” he said. “I think the Nez Perce people are a remarkable people and the Indian people overall are remarkable and I appreciate them sincerely.”

# Two-year queens value experience with Chief Joseph Days

Wecks, Micka, Harrod got extra service because of pandemic

By **BILL BRADSHAW**  
Wallowa County Chieftain

JOSEPH — Last year’s royalty for Chief Joseph Days had a special opportunity serving two consecutive years instead of the usual one year.

As the 75th CJD came around Brianna Micka, Destiny Wecks and Casidee Harrod had the unique chance to be royalty for an extra year because the 2020 festivities were canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.



Wallowa County Chieftain, File

**Chief Joseph Days Rodeo queens, from left, Brianna Micka, Destiny Wecks and Casidee Harrod reigned in 2020 and 2021. They are seen here during the CJD Grand Parade on Saturday, July 31, 2021.**

The girls came to a mutual agreement, they said, to jointly serve as co-queens for

two years and the CJD board of directors agreed.

Although the reason they

got the extra time in the saddle wasn’t a positive, the horsewomen took to it like they were made for it.

Wecks said she found the extended time because of the pandemic both an advantage and a disadvantage.

“We got to spend more time with other court queens and learn more about the rodeo,” she said. “But it affected everybody in that we couldn’t go to events in person and had to talk over the phone most of the time.”

Harrod found the experience largely an advantage.

“It was a unique opportunity to learn about the rodeo and Chief Joseph Days,” she said.

Micka, too, found the two-year option the best, rather than serving for only one year.

“I’d planned for only doing it one year,” she said, but when 2020 was canceled and the directors decided to keep the girls on for another year, “that was the best option. ... It was a great opportunity to do it for two years.”

Also, the court has regular chaperones for each event they attend and as it turned out, the board members rotated as chaperones.

“We got a lot of good personal experience with them,” she said.

She agreed that serving as

co-queens rather than a queen and two princesses was also the best option.

“That was a good way to have us be all three queens with what we went through with the pandemic,” she said.

Wecks, too, liked being one of three co-queens.

“Chief Joseph Days is super unique as one of the few (rodeos) to pick their queen later in year,” she said. “It was cool that us three girls got to reign equal to each other.”

Harrod said it allowed the girls to become part of a greater sorority of Chief Joseph Days royalty.

“The biggest thing for me was ... being a part of a huge family of women who’ve served Chief Joseph Days and the beautiful county,” she said.

She also said she believes the experience helped her grow as a person.

“It was a very awesome experience and I’m glad that I did it,” she said. “It gave me a lot of great character traits that I wouldn’t have gotten anywhere else.”

Wecks noted there was a difficult time the first year simply because of the rodeo being canceled. But the 2021 festivities made up for that.

“The second year was amazing being queen for our hometown rodeo,” she said.

The end of their reign as CJD royalty doesn’t mean the end of rodeo royalty for the girls.

Micka will be a Tuckerette, one of the hard-riding group of young women dedicated to making the rodeo exciting. She also has started giving riding lessons and serves as an unofficial judge at various horse clinics.

Harrod, who hasn’t served in any court since, did serve as a member of a previous Elgin Stampede court.

Wecks went on to the biggest honor in the rodeo royalty world, winning the title of Miss Teen Rodeo Oregon last summer. As such, she’s been traveling around the Northwest and as far away as Florida to professional rodeos and events.

Since hanging up their rodeo crowns, the girls are moving on with their lives.

Micka is working on a double degree in elementary education and agriculture education at Eastern Oregon University, where she’s also the reporter for the Agriculture Club.

Wecks is attending Treasure Valley Community College to study agricultural business management and equine science.

Harrod has been studying to be a dental hygienist at Oregon Institute of Technology.

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