

# Ocean or mountains? Not a hard call for one Joseph man

### Chief Joseph Days volunteer spent much of life in military service

By **KATY NESBITT**  
For the Wallowa County Chieftain

JOSEPH — In a tradition stretching back 76 years, volunteering at the rodeo starts for many at childhood. For Joseph native Max Prout, his first involvement started in Cub Scouts.

“My uncle Wick (Willard) Prout helped start the rodeo,” Prout said. “We would come down and clean up the rodeo grounds and in high school I worked the gates for the bucking chutes.”

For the first 12 years of his life, he and his brother, Gary, grew up in the dam tender’s house at the foot of Wallowa Lake. Their father worked for the Associated Ditch Co. The boys enjoyed access to the lake, learning to swim and boating.

“We had a milk cow, pigs, chickens and a big garden in front of the house — Mom canned everything,” Prout said.

Long retired from military service, Prout said he joined the Navy after graduating from high school during the Vietnam War. After 10 years with the branch, he moved over to the Coast Guard and served another 14 years.

“Growing up in Joseph you could work for a mill, go into logging or ranching or go to college, which was way too expensive. I had the option to go into the military and once you were there, you could get a GI Bill for education,” Prout said.

During his time in the



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**Max Prout is a volunteer who helps his brother manage the Chief Joseph Days Rodeo stagecoach that travels to some of the rodeos the court attends.**

military, Prout said he took advantage of both military education courses as well as correspondence courses.

“I took courses wherever I was stationed,” Prout said. “I have credits from 13 or 14 different colleges.”

Eventually, he said, the

credits added up to a bachelor’s degree in general studies.

With the Coast Guard, Prout said he had a variety of experiences from drug interdiction, turning back Haitian refugees in Florida and even protecting George

H.W. Bush’s family compound in Kennebunkport, Maine.

“When I was stationed at Cape Cod our patrol area was from the mouth of Ambrose Light/New York Harbor to the Maine coast and out 200 miles into the

Atlantic,” he said.

A military career allowed Prout to retire as a relatively young man and he said goodbye to the oceans where he’d worked and moved back to the West.

“The joke was when we retired we would throw an

anchor in the back of a pick up truck and drive until we found a place where no one knew what it was and that’s where you would live,” Prout said. “I saw so much of the oceans I didn’t want to go back — they aren’t as beautiful as our mountains.”

Today, Prout’s medals and commendations are lovingly stored for family history with his daughter, Prout said.

Since retirement, he’s also gained a love of the desert, spending part of the year in Arizona and the warmer months in the Wallowa Valley. Prout also kept very busy working for Oregon Parks and Recreation Department as both a staff member and a camp host in Southern Oregon, Wallowa Lake and Minam state parks.

As he spent more and more time in Wallowa County it wasn’t long before his brother asked him for help managing the Chief Joseph Days Rodeo stagecoach that travels to some of the rodeos the court attends.

“The stagecoach is the best advertisement for the rodeo,” Prout said.

For more than a dozen years Prout helped manage the team of horses and maintain the stagecoach, a labor of love and adherence to a strict checklist that details how the horses are managed and each piece of equipment and tack is connected in the precise order. Caring for two large draft horses and a carriage dating from the late 1800s takes strength and keen attention.

About two years after his brother was handed the reins of the stagecoach and team by Dave Turner, he asked his brother to help — and they had very little time to learn the system and train newly acquired draft horses.

# Local teens help on horseback during Chief Joseph Days Rodeo

By **JACK PARRY**  
Wallowa County Chieftain

JOSEPH — There are many volunteers at Chief Joseph Days Rodeo that help the attraction get up and running during the last week of July each year. Those of all ages do various jobs from moving cattle and horses back and forth to waiting at the gate and helping set up stands.

However, some younger volunteers during the afternoon on the weekdays get to help out not just around the events, but on horseback inside of the arena.

Tylee Evans and Lauren McBurney spend a lot of the time sitting idly by on their horses during steer wrestling competitions, but when they are called into action they have a pretty important objective.

“We mainly just chase the cows to the other end of the arena,” Evans said. “it keeps everything going faster and smoother so they don’t get loose. Then you have to have much more problems.”

So after the steer wrestlers tie up the cows and finish a round, Evans and



Jack Parry/Wallowa County Chieftain

**Tylee Evans, left, and Lauren McBurney just outside of Harley Tucker Memorial Arena in Joseph on Thursday, July 28, 2022.**

McBurney guide the cows with their steeds away from the action.

McBurney has volunteered at the event before, but the 14-year-old from

Joseph has just recently been working inside of the ring.

“This is my first year helping with slack, but I volunteered other times just not with slack,” she said.

Having ridden a horse since before she could walk, Evans, who also is 14 but from Enterprise, said her favorite part of working the rodeo is pretty obvious.



Jack Parry/Wallowa County Chieftain

**Tylee Evans and Lauren McBurney lead a cow to the edge of Harley Tucker Memorial Arena in Joseph on Thursday, July 28, 2022.**

“Anytime I’m on my horse in an arena (during) an event,” Evans said.

McBurney’s favorite parts about working the rodeo are not just the connections, but the ability to observe rodeo workers up close on a major stage.

“We all come to the rodeo to watch the rodeo, so it’s super fun to see all these professionals do what they grew up doing,” McBurney said.

For Evans, Chief Joseph Days is more than just a volunteer gig. Having worked at the rodeo since she was

about 5 or 6, her grandfather Terry Jones is the president of the Chief Joseph Days directors, while her mom Teah Jones is also on the Chief Joseph Days Board.

Most of her relatives attend the event, which gives them a rare chance for quality time together.

“My favorite part is just getting to spend it (the rodeo) with my family and work together with my brothers, my mom and my grandparents ... because it’s the only time we’re all together,” she said.

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