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CG Riding Club to celebrate 70th rodeo



PHOTO C/O CINDY WEELDREYER

Rodeo royalty is just part of the annual Cottage Grove Pro Rodeo experience each year. This year's event is July 13-14.

By **Cindy Weeldreyer**
For The Sentinel

The 70th Annual Cottage Grove Pro Rodeo is set for July 13-14 at the rodeo grounds south of town. Members of the Cottage Grove Riding Club, who produce the annual summer event, are busy sprucing up the grounds in anticipation of the hundreds of people who will flock there for two days of Old West fun next month.

Decades ago, the Cottage Grove Riding Club (CGRC) presented its first amateur rodeo at the Purdy Ranch in Lorane under the leadership of "Stub" Mosby.

On the heels of its successful event, the club approached Hattie Sharp about leasing 40 acres of her property approximately a mile south of town. The five-year lease agreement allowed the CGRC to pay \$500 per year with an option to buy.

They spent \$16,000 to build chutes, corrals, fences and the grandstand to stage a more professional show and allow more citizens to attend. Adina Mosby was the first Cottage Grove Rodeo Queen.

However, the anticipated revenue was less than expected and it took club members several years to pay off the debt.

In 1955, with a \$5,000 down payment, the property was

purchased by the CGRC for \$18,000. Other improvements followed that included a watering system and lighting that made night-time events possible.

The local Stardusters Square Dance Club leased some of the land and built a dance barn with 60-foot-by-80-foot hardwood floor that later served as the local roller skating rink.

For the past 70 years, the purpose of the CGRC has remained constant: to provide healthy recreation for local youth that encourages horseback riding and good sportsmanship.

Today, President Joel Reiten leads the organization. He joined the board in 2016, initially, he said, to rebuild a bridge between the rodeo and Bohemia Mining Days (BMD).

In BMD's early years, the two events were held on the same weekend. In the 1960s the Lemati Gang and CGRC members conspired to stage a faux robbery of the excursion train, "The Goose," during the festival and for special occasions. Last year Reiten was elected club president.

The Rodeo Queen's Court is the face of the Cottage Grove Rodeo. The court consists of one queen, a junior princess and a senior princess. They stay busy attending rodeos and appearing in parades in other

communities.

They visit Doernbecher Children's Hospital and elementary schools to get younger children involved with horses.

At her husband's request, Sharlene Reiten, assumed the duties of the Queen's Court Coordinator this year. Her young charges are Queen Breonah Jones, 15, Senior Princess Cassie Ferguson, 15, and Junior Princess Dakotah Braatz, 13.

"This is a very old tradition," Sharlene said. "It's a lot of fun and it can be hectic, too, with all the traveling that's involved. The three girls are great kids and they text me all the time and are eager to do new things."

Currently the CGRC has 40 members. Many of them have been involved in the organization for decades with the third generation of some families now participating in club activities. As with other local organizations that produce an annual multi-day event, CGRC is trying to find a different way to make the event financially sustainable.

"We have a five-figure annual budget," Joel Reiten said. "A number of small town rodeos have ended due to monetary constraints. We own our property; but the large donors of the past are going away. You can only raise prices so much because you want it to remain affordable for individuals and families."

Sanctioned by the National Pro Rodeo Association, events include competitions for youth and adults.

Kid events begin at 5 p.m.

with the Grand Entry starting nightly at 7 p.m.

Pre-sale tickets are \$6 for youth 5-12, \$9 for veterans and seniors, \$12 for adults and \$30 for a family (Two adults and up to three kids ages 5-12) and are available at Schweitzers Western Wear, El Tapatio, Country Farm (Creswell), Cottage Grove Sears and the Vintage Inn.

There is also a \$3 parking fee. Additional attractions include mechanical bull rides, a shooting gallery, and the Saturday morning Buckaroo Breakfast. A nightly dance features Kurt Van Meter, a country music performer who opened for Garth Brooks and performs in other large venues.

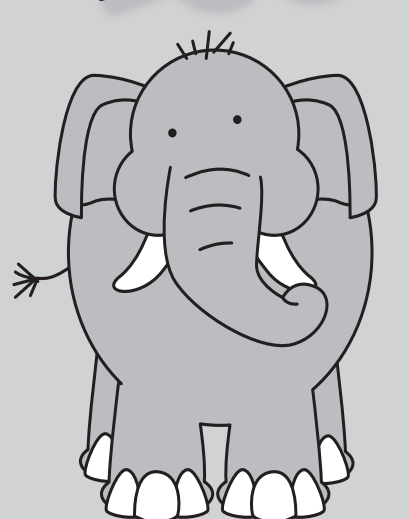
After 9 p.m. Grovers who love dancing to country music can kick up their heels for a \$5 admission fee.

Reiten said, "The 70th anniversary of the Cottage Grove rodeo is a statement of the tenacity of local horse fanatics. While it is an important anniversary, it's also a continuation of the dedication and love of horses that our members have.

To us, this year's celebration serves as a rededication to youth and equine activities for the generations yet to come.

We have a fantastic facility and our goal is to reach out and connect with youth that want to ride. While the rodeo is an important part of what we do, more importantly we want to connect with our kids and teach them riding skills and leadership."


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