

PRCA coming back



A vision to bring a better rodeo for the community sparked Jerry Gentry's commitment to put on a professional rodeo.

"Rodeo is one of the only professional sports that a small community can host in their town," stated Gentry.

PRCA rodeo is no stranger to Gentry, as he grew up with watching professional rodeo each year at the Morrow County Fair and Rodeo. Gentry, himself is a member of the PRCA, has competed for years. Heppner's last pro rodeo was 13 years ago when the increasing cost, spurred by lack of support, forced rodeo to fall back into the amateur levels.

Gentry's commitment started in January as he along with rodeo committee members John Moyer, Sally Ingraham, John Kilkenny, Mike

Proctor, John Schiller, Wayne Evans and Larry Scroggins set out to raise money to put on a pro rodeo. Their first task was to raise a big enough purse to attract cowboys.

"We felt if we could raise \$1,000 per event we would bring some top notch cowboys into Heppner," added Gentry.

Seven businesses rose to the occasion and contributed the \$1,000 purse: Morrow County Grain Growers-steer wrestling; Les Schwab-bull riding; Hamms-Graybeal Distributing-barrel racing; Seitz Aviation-saddle bronc; Miller Ranchers-team roping; Eric Anderson-calf roping; and Hawkeye Construction-bareback riding.

"We had these seven sponsors by April first, putting to rest rumors that the purse was too high," noted Gentry.

The next undertaking for the rodeo committee was to raise the funds to cover the cost of the rodeo, since a pro rodeo is more expensive to run. The committee sent out a letter to 330 registered brand owners in the county asking them to commit \$20 to the rodeo. Over 60 responded and now their brands will appear in the official program. Additional funds were raised by selling ads in the program.

The rodeo committee also pocketed over \$4,000 from the St. Patricks Day beer stand. Now that funding was secure, the members tackled another challenge to change the set-up of the arena.

"We felt the present area was too big and made the show drag on. We purchased new panels and a roping chute," Gentry added. "The rodeo should run smoother and be more exciting to watch. Bleachers also will be installed closer to the rodeo action."

With the community support, the committee has raised over \$12,000 to finance the rodeo. Gentry is quick to give credit to the community, businesses and the fair board who have been very supportive. Gentry said he has learned alot about rodeo production and dealing with people and thinks every cowboy who competes should help produce a rodeo.

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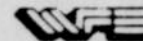
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