

## Rod Murray, 2004 Grand Marshal



Rod Murray

The 2004 Grand Marshal of the Oregon Trail Pro Rodeo, Rod Murray, was chosen for his lifelong involvement with horses,

related activities and community service. An addiction to horses began with a Shetland pony when Rod was a small boy living near Hillsboro. Through the years Rod participated in calf roping and team roping, raised and schooled Quarter horses and served on the Heppner rodeo committee.

Rod graduated from high school in Newberg in 1944. Following graduation he served two years in the Army while stationed in both the United States and

in Germany. Taking advantage of the G.I. Bill that helped ex-service personnel to obtain further education, Rod enrolled at Oregon State University -- then called Oregon State College. Upon graduation in 1950, Rod became a licensed pharmacist and held positions in Roseburg and Hillsboro, Oregon, and Longview, Washington.

For several years Rod traveled extensively throughout Eastern Oregon and Idaho for Merek, Sharp and

Dobme pharmaceuticals. Rod says he was impressed with the Willow Creek Valley area and he became weary of constant traveling. In 1957, Rod and his wife, Margaret, moved to Heppner after Rod accepted a position in the drug store, then owned by Leta Humphreys.

The Murray's purchased this drug store in 1959. The continuing Murray legacy involves an expanded and modernized drug store in the original historic building on Main Street. That business and the Condon drug store were purchased by their son John and his wife, Ann. Before their retirement, Rod and Meg at one time owned five drug stores in different rural locations.

In those earlier days a pharmacist was required to be on duty whenever the drug store was opened. Therefore Rod says it was difficult to be absent during business hours, especially during the rodeo, as there

wasn't anyone else readily available that was qualified to take his place. So while on horseback in the rodeo arena he sometimes got called back to the store. That didn't prevent him from serving on the rodeo committee for seven years, often functioning as the livestock director.

"Putting on those rodeos, sanctioned by the RCA, was a lot of work," says Rod. "We had a very cohesive group who would work extra hours to get the grounds in shape, yet we had a great deal of fun. The large arena made the performances slower. Today's smaller arena helps make the Heppner rodeo one of the best in the country," Rod claims.

The Kinzua-sponsored Morrow County calf roping saddle was a trophy that all ropers wanted to win, says Rod. In 1959 Rod bested his fellow contestants to win that saddle. In addition, his sons, Mark and Matt also became saddle winners as second generation roping enthusiasts.

After the Murrays moved to Morrow County, Rod was instrumental in helping to get a local 4-H horse program started. The leaders helped youngsters to acquire better horsemanship skills long before there was a statewide 4-H horse program.

Rod served as president of the Wrangler Riding Club. During this time he donated a Quarter

horse colt to stimulate attendance at Wrangle Club events. Everyone who helped sponsor activities or did maintenance work at the riding club grounds was eligible to win. Rod and his sons also hosted team ropings at the arena at their lone home.

While raising his own horses for ranch work and rodeos, Rod later became interested in Quarter horse racing. Rod and Sonny Lackey trained horses on the 3/8 of a mile track built near their home that was then in lone. Those horses were consistent winners so Rod and Sonny were listed as leading trainers at the Yakima race track.

While Rod and Meg are now retired, their accomplishments leave an indelible mark on local communities. Rod continues to raise a few Quarter horses and fondly looks back on those days when friends laughingly called him a "drugstore cowboy."

A favorite activity these days is keeping abreast of the endeavors of their extended family with 15 grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren. The Murray's enjoy watching games and other activities involving their Heppner grandchildren. The five adult children of Rod and Meg are Mark Murray, Prairie City; Maralee Trotter, Springfield; Mathew Murray, California; John Murray, Heppner; and Anne Murray, Oregon City.

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