

Stroebers honored at Centennial fair

Two long-time Heppner residents, Don and Jan Stroeber, were honored this year from their continued commitments to the Morrow County Fair and Rodeo. Don was selected 2013 Morrow County Fair and Rodeo Grand Marshal, while his wife, Jan—"Mrs. 4-H" and avid fair supporter—received the honor of having the 2013 fair premium book dedicated to her. It's no accident that this couple should be the people honored this way in this year.

Soft-spoken Jan Stroeber can always be counted on to help out with the fair, generally behind the scenes and definitely without taking any credit. The advice she gives, "Ask not what the fair can do for you, but ask what you can do for your fair," paraphrasing John Kennedy's statement, just about sums up her hard work and dedication to 4-H and the fair.

Jan started working with 4-H kids around 1974, supervising a group of kids before her own children became 4-H members. Daughters Shelley (now Hill, College Place), Cindy (King, Payette, ID) and Christy (Correa, Heppner) soon became very involved in 4-H cooking, sewing, pigs, and English and Western horse clubs, and participated in a lot of cook-off contests.

Jan says her very first experience with the rodeo was in 1965 when she helped Betty Fulleton make serapes when Betty's daughter, Ruby Fulleton, was on the court. Jan and her husband really got into the swing of things after their daughters got involved in horse shows, and she credits her husband for his patience during those years.

"He was very tolerant," chuckles Jan. "We had three girls and five or six horses and he put up with all of it. And of course, you don't just have

your own family, but a lot of their friends."

In fact, "wrangler" might have served as Don's middle name. Over the years, Jan says Don wrangled just about everything—horses, snowmobiles, four-wheelers and most importantly, kids.

"I was a wrangler, not a rider," he jokes. He remembers hauling his three daughters, their horses and their assorted friends to junior rodeos, high school rodeos, horse shows and 4-H events all over the place over the years.

When he and Jan bought their current place out on Fairview Way in Heppner, across from the Morrow County Fairgrounds, they did it so he could build a corral out back for their girls to ride. Shelley was a princess on the rodeo court, and Cindy and Christy were pennant bearers.

"We lived so close to the fairgrounds, the kids were always running up to the house for a cooking utensil or a pair of boots," Jan laughs. "I remember one time Scott Doherty somehow got dunked, so not only were his clothes wet, but so were his boots, so he ran up to the house to borrow a pair of Don's boots."

"Of course, now I have grandkids in the fair, so I go down there to help out," Don adds. Christy's children have been very active in 4-H and FFA.

If "wrangler" is Don's middle name, then "trailblazer" might be his first name. Literally. Stroeber is responsible for mapping so many snowmobile and four-wheeler trails in Morrow County, the term trailblazer is right on the mark.

"Gene Orwick and I got maps drawn up for the Four-Corners Snowmobile Club and the state adopted it," said Stroeber. Drawing up the maps took them over a

year and a half to complete. Stroeber also helped form the original Morrow County Search and Rescue team in the area, shortly after Heppner's Doc McMurdo disappeared. Don and others spent a week looking for him, but, sadly he was later discovered deceased.

Stroeber was also on the original access travel committee, representing four-wheelers and snowmobilers, mapping trails in the late '80s when Roger Williams was the Heppner Ranger.

"It has been a lot of fun," said Stroeber of his trailblazing days. He used to do a lot of snowmobiling and admits he gets a little bored now, but still enjoys going up into the mountains to check out wild turkeys and other game, hunting, four-wheeling, and grooming state snowmobile trails.

Don, Burke O'Brien and Roger Mortimore were the first to map out the new OHV Park trail, which has become popular of late.

Stroeber, 74, originally from Elgin, came to Heppner in May of 1960. His dad was the head electrician at Pine Lumber Company and Kinzua and helped wire the Morrow County Fairgrounds. Don would have followed along in his dad's footsteps, but, he laughs, "I didn't like getting shocked."

Instead when he first came to the area, he farmed for a while at Turner Ranch and then went to work for Eldon Padberg's machine shop in Lexington. He then became the service technician for Morrow County Grain Growers, working there as a mechanic for 30 years before he retired. In his spare time now, he often runs a baler for the Thompson Ranch.

"I've seen quite a change in agriculture, especially in

machinery," said Stroeber. "I love to work on the new stuff. I think technology is great. I'd rather work on something modern."

He says he first became involved with the Morrow County Fair and Rodeo helping out with the grounds.

"The only reason they let me do it is because I had access to farm machinery," he jokes.

Over the years he worked on junior rodeos, then high school rodeos and then ended up as Morrow County Rodeo vice chair and chairman. Don says he continues to work at the fairgrounds to pay back for all the years that they had their "own private barn and arena at the fairgrounds."

He has also served on the Heppner Planning Commission for the past several years.

Jan, 67, born in Prairie City and raised in Spray has "always ridden horses." She and Don married on Nov. 12, 1966 at his parents' home. She says that her mother and father still enjoy the fair and come to watch the grandkids. Her mom, at 85, is still an active fair exhibitor, entering a Civil War quilt, among other quilting projects and paintings.

An expert seamstress, who is always completing a project to enter in the fair, Jan says that she has probably been sewing since she was eight or nine years old. She started helping out at the fair with Jane Rawlins.

"There were so many wonderful people involved at that time," said Jan, mentioning Lenna Smith, now of Bend, and Merlyn Robinson, Heppner. Jan remembers the late Theta Lowe, who helped her out with 4-H sewing. She recalls Theta's basement, where Theta



Don and Jan Stroeber

had three sewing machines set up, and remembers that you never went out and bought buttons, because Theta would have them.

Jan does wool appliques, braids rugs out of old wool blankets that she has dyed and now, reluctantly, is learning how to knit. Besides sewing projects, Jan generally enters around 10-15 items in the fair, including canning and baking items. She also enjoys gardening and decorating.

Jan, who expresses a genuine love of the fair, encourages more people involved, and is always seeking more sponsors.

"I have worked with a lot of wonderful people over the years. It was a great family time. I really loved helping the kids. I think 4-H and FFA offer so many learning tools. It is something that they carry with them."

Not only is Jan active in the fair, but she has also been a hair stylist since 1964, originally working in downtown Heppner for Jean Dobbs and Rene Ledbetter, and then opening her own shop, Country Shears, at her home in Heppner. Jan says that working at her shop has been ideal, not only when she raised her own kids, but then with her grandchildren, whom she also watched when they were small.

"Our greatest joy is time with our children and grandchildren," Jan says.