

"That was the buckle I wore until I won the world title," said the 2000 Farm-City steer wrestling winner. "I never got to know him but everybody talked about him and always had good things to say."

"It was a huge honor and it was really something that everybody wanted that buckle for that reason. He was so well respected."

Cowboys will have even more reason to go hard after the buckle this year.

After 26 years, the 2016 Mike Currin Memorial Buckle will be retired.

With the rodeo moving to a new arena for 2017, Judy said it just felt like the right time.

"A time for new traditions," she said. "It should be special to whoever wins it. Hopefully this buckle will be the most sought-after one."

Hand Up To Cowboys Gray Ribbon Challenge

Created for the 2015 Farm-City Pro Rodeo, the Hand Up



FILE PHOTO

Ty Erickson of Helena, Montana, finishes a 5-second time in the steer wrestling event at the 2013 Farm-City Pro Rodeo in Hermiston. Steer wrestlers will compete for the Mike Currin Memorial Buckle for the last time during the 2016 rodeo.

To Cowboys Gray Ribbon Challenge memorializes longtime Farm-City board member Darrel Sallee.

A former competitor in team roping, Sallee served on the

Farm-City board of directors from 2004 up until his death in 2014 from brain cancer at age 64.

Sallee brought a tireless spirit and unlimited generosity to his work with Farm-City, and despite

having a thriving business of his own to operate would never pass on the opportunity to lend a hand.

"This was our peak season for our business but yet he still broke away and donated a lot of time around down there," said his widow Rhonda of the time leading up to the early-August rodeo. "He'd get off work at five or six and he'd be down there until midnight. Sometimes he wouldn't come home. I started fixing them all dinner and taking it down there every night."

He was also known to open his door to the competitors when they were in town, and his daughter Jolene Sallee-Davis said temporary house-guests were a regular part of the summer.

"He never said no. He never told anybody no. When they wanted help he went there and helped them," she said.

Sallee-Davis was trying to find a way to honor her father's giving spirit and his love of rodeo while also spreading awareness about brain cancer when she came up with the Gray Ribbon Challenge.

"I wanted to merge the idea of what my dad really was, what his whole repertoire was with the cowboys."

The award is given during each performance and rotates through the four timed events — calf roping, steer wrestling, team roping and barrel racing.

Contestants wear gray ribbons (the color designated for brain cancer awareness) on their hats; some add a gray feather.

"Some of those guys have been wearing their feather for the last year because that's the kind of connection they had with my dad," Sallee-Davis said.

The contestant with the fastest time from that night's performance is presented with a \$500 bonus check.

That's where the Hand Up To Cowboys part comes into play.

"We wanted to spread awareness and help out those cowboys that maybe don't win the event for the week, but they win the event for the evening," Sallee-Davis said. "My dad was all about helping the cowboys."

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