

Elks Youth Rodeo draws contestants from several states

By Gayle Smith

When Bob Strauser's daughter turned 16, he was at loose ends. "She had borrowed her mother's car and headed off to Montana to compete in numerous rodeos from Red Deer, Alberta, Canada to Fort Worth, Texas," Strauser said.

That year, Strauser not only lost his chauffeur job, but he missed the rodeo way of life, so he approached the Sheridan Elks Club about starting a youth rodeo. The Elks group gave Strauser a green light, so he launched into organizing what has become a premier youth rodeo that draws competitors from several states.

Strauser, who serves as the Elks Youth Rodeo chairman, said the rodeo enables children under 17 years of age to compete for substantial prizes that many other rodeos don't offer. In a letter to sponsors, Strauser wrote, "(The Elks Lodge #520) noticed that children who were involved in rodeo worked and practiced just as hard as the adults, and their expenses were as high as the adults, but they never got to compete for substantial prizes. Usually, their prizes were just ribbons and belt buckles."

The group decided to organize a rodeo that was open to all youth, not just ones in specific organizations. They also found enough sponsors to enable them to offer prizes substantial enough that they hoped children would spend their summers practicing hard for the event. Other goals were to keep entry fees low so most children could afford to compete and, most of all, make the event fun and enjoyable for the youth.

With the help of many sponsors, Strauser was able to organize the first Elks Youth Rodeo in 1993. That event was attended mostly by local children, although they offered a year's use of a bumper pull trailer and \$1,000 and \$500 scholarships as prizes. By the next year, the event had caught on and attendance nearly doubled. Competitors came from Montana and South Dakota to compete in the event, although most competitors were still local. Since then, the event has continued to grow.

In 2009, Strauser said the rodeo had 26 events and attracted contestants from nine states. Three arenas were running simultaneously to accommodate 763 entries each day. Exactly 150 contestants competed in the 2009 event. Strauser said cash and awards totaling \$58,170 were presented to contestants age 17 and under. Cash and scholarships amounted to \$12,026, and awards were valued at \$46,144.

This year's event will be the 18th annual rodeo. It is scheduled for August 28-29 at the Sheridan County Fairgrounds in Sheridan, Wyoming. "Over the years, we've added events and managed to increase the awards," Strauser said. "We have also increased the participation." A few years ago, after noticing a decline in the number of peewees participating in the rodeo, the group added a saddle as an award in the peewee division in hopes of getting more youth to compete. "Suddenly, we had twice as many peewee competitors," he said. "We feel it is important to keep the peewees interested in rodeo because we don't want to run out of seniors competing here someday. We really cater to the peewees." Strauser noted that children as young as two and a half have competed in the peewee division.

A couple of the highlights of the rodeo that draws in competitors from all over is the opportunity to win a year lease on a new Ford F250 four-wheel drive XLT quadcab diesel pickup, which is awarded to the senior all-around champion. Megan Belus of Buffalo, Wyoming was the 2009 winner of the use of the pickup, which was provided by Fremont Motors.

Prime Rate Motors and Jackson Trailer Sales donate a trailer for the youth all-around winner, which in 2009 was Quincy Segelke of Snyder, Colorado. Strauser said juniors, intermediates and seniors are all eligible to win the trailer, which is determined by the total points each contestant earns. "We've had eight-year-olds win the horse trailer and we've had seniors win the horse trailer," Strauser said.

Contestants between seven and 17 are eligible for the all-around youth award, Strauser said. The winner will receive the loaded Jackson three horse slant load gooseneck trailer with a walk-in tack compartment. The reserve champion will receive a \$2,000 scholarship and the reserve runner-up will receive a \$1,000 scholarship.

To be eligible for the all-around youth award, the contestant must designate at least two and up to five events on their entry form to be accumulated for points. These points will be awarded on a one rider, one horse basis. Points from both go-rounds will be combined. Strauser explained they went to a point basis in a maximum number of five events for the all-around to make the contest fair for all age groups. Since the seniors can compete in 10 events, intermediates in eight events and juniors in five events, seniors would have an advantage in the all-around competition if points were accumulated in every event a contestant competes in.

All-around awards will also be presented to each age group from a two-day accumulated total. The senior all-around winner will receive the pickup. The reserve senior all-around will receive a \$2,000 scholarship and the reserve runner-up will receive a saddle. The intermediate and junior all-around winners will receive saddles. The reserve champion winners in those divisions will receive custom made breast collars and headstalls with a Tom Balding custom bit. The reserve runner-ups will receive belt buckles.

Strauser said day money will also be awarded in all events for each go around for junior, intermediate and senior age groups.

For participants under age six, every contestant will receive a participation ribbon. The winner in each event will receive a trophy. A large trophy will be presented to the all-around winner. Strauser said this will be repeated in the second go around. A saddle will be awarded to the two-day all around winner, and a buckle to the runner-up based on total points for both days.

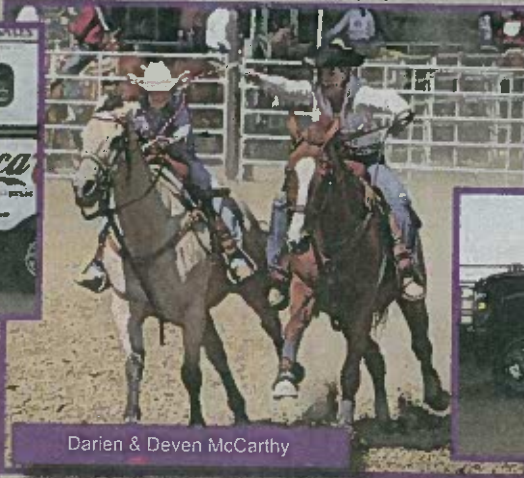
Peewee events are pole bending, barrel racing and goat tail tying. Junior events are pole bending, barrel racing, goat tail tying, flag race and ribbon race. Intermediate events are pole bending, barrel racing, goat tying, flag race, ribbon race, breakaway roping, daily team roping and steer stopping. Senior events are pole bending, barrel racing, goat tying, flag race, ribbon race, breakaway roping, daily team roping, steer stopping, ribbon roping, and tie down calf roping.

All of the events are open to both boys and girls. Teams can be any combination - girl-girl, boy-boy, or boy-girl. Entry fees are \$6 per event for peewees; and \$26 per event for juniors (age 7-9), intermediate (age 10-13) and seniors (age 14-17). There are additional fees for stock charges, stalls, office, and fairgrounds use.

Entry forms for this year's event can be downloaded from the Elks Youth Rodeo website: www.sheridanelks.org/rodeo/index.htm. They can also be ordered by mail: Elks Youth Rodeo, P.O. Box 624, Sheridan, WY 82801. Entry forms can be picked up at Fremont Motors in Sheridan, Western Services in Gillette, KLGT-KIX Country in Buffalo and Prime Rate Motors in Sheridan. Entry forms need to be postmarked by August 16, 2010.



Quincy Segelke, 2009 trailer winner



Darien & Deven McCarthy



Megan Belus, 2009 truck winner

Photos Courtesy of Elks Youth Rodeo