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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WINNEMUCCA RANCH HAND RODEO CELEBRATES 20TH ANNIVERSARY
Ranch Hand Rodeo has now grown into Winnemucca's biggest weekend of competitions

WINNEMUCCA, Nev.—Twenty years ago, three ranching brothers decided to kick off a little friendly competition between neighbors by hosting the first annual Ranch Hand Rodeo in Winnemucca, Nevada.

For Tim, Hank and Dan Dufurrena, the idea was to draw together teams who would go head to head in saddle bronc riding, cow mugging, calf roping, team branding, team roping and ranch doctoring.

There was one catch, though: professional rodeo cowboys weren't invited. Instead, all competitors had to make their living as ranch hands, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

Those first few years, the Dufurrena boys put on a good show, splicing the event in with Humboldt County's September horse races. The idea wasn't to upstage anybody; it was simply to give bettors a diversion between races.

By 1994, though, the horse races folded, unsettling the ranch hands who, for a time, wondered if their event could stand on its own.

It wasn't a long wait. By the next year, the Ranch Hand Rodeo not only demonstrated its staying power, but the local Agricultural District No. 3 (Ag 3) agreed to help continue the competition, providing it with a stable funding base and a ready network of professional promoters.

“You know, it really didn't need much,” said Winnemucca Events Complex Operations

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Supervisor Sheree Tibbals, who has provided a steady backbone to the event since 1995.

“It has always enjoyed a steady following. Every year, you could bank on about 15 teams showing up, rain or shine; it has always been a fun event because nobody ever got too serious.”

The Ranch Hand Rodeo dutifully assumed its position at the end of a long line of successful events, becoming a September mainstay for the Ag 3 and its sister agency, the Winnemucca Convention and Visitors Authority.

One year, the number of teams swelled to 19, but all in all, the event enjoyed a healthy reliability that chairman Garley Amos came to depend on. It wasn't the calendar's biggest event and it wasn't the smallest either. It was just that: steady.

Boy, was Amos surprised then when a brand new 97,000-square-foot indoor event center swept the rodeo off its feet, crowning it the kickoff to what would become a nonstop special event season.

In 2001, as construction on the Winnemucca Event Center neared completion, Tibbals and Ag 3 Director Kim Petersen wondered aloud what would happen if the Ranch Hand Rodeo came to the head of the class rather than waited out the tail.

“As we thought about it,” said Petersen, “we came to realize that we were asking these ranch hands to come out and compete at the end of a very long summer. Why not invite them to kick off the year instead?”

Tibbals added, “Plus, they would be competing inside a brand new, beautiful building instead of being at the mercy of the weather.”

The logic was there—March did offer more possibilities than September—but for Petersen, Tibbals, Amos and others, it felt like something of a gamble, too.

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As with all good Nevada bets, though, the hand seemed too good to pass up and the Ranch Hand Rodeo moved to March. According to Tibbals, there hasn't been an ounce of regret since.

“In September 2001, we had 16 teams; in March 2002, we had 30,” said Tibbals. “I think it's safe to say we made the right decision.”

The event continues to evolve and develop in big and small ways. For example, in 2008, the event began requiring that teams include four men and one woman. Now, each team competes in all the events while women must compete in breakaway and cow mugging.

But that wasn't the biggest change to date. The weekend has grown into more than a rodeo. This year's event will include five additional crowd pleasing events—a change that has placed the Winnemucca Ranch Hand Rodeo as the cornerstone of Winnemucca's premiere weekend.

The weekend now features the Stock Horse Competition, Cow Dog Trials, Western Trade Show and Kids' Dummy Roping and Stick Horse Barrels.

A Ranch, Rope and Performance Horse Sale also gathers horse sellers and buyers to Winnemucca from all over the Western United States.

So over the course of 20 years and countless changes, what has made the Winnemucca Ranch Hand Rodeo so popular with teams across the West?

Tibbals said, “I think it has a lot to do with the fact that these guys aren't professional rodeo cowboys, but they are professionals in the truer sense of the word; this is what they do every day back at the ranch.”

Tibbals continued, “There's something very competitive when people put their career skills on the line, and that's what these guys are doing.”

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The competition gets underway with a Calcutta where teams are auctioned to the highest bidders. Rodeo action immediately follows and continues the following morning at 10 a.m.

Of course no competition would be worth its sweat without a little incentive for top performance. The four-man teams compete for honors as top hands and top teams. Buckles are awarded in each event along with jackpot money.

Last year, the top team walked away with over \$6,000 cash. That’s a far cry from the \$1,600 awarded to 1990’s top team.

“So somehow, somehow, everything has come together to make this a fun and very competitive event that really has a charm all its own,” said Tibbals. “The real key for me is that it’s as fun to watch as it is for competitors to participate.”

Tibbals added, “I guess when it comes down to it, that’s the true test.”

The 2009 Ranch Hand Rodeo weekend will take place from Thursday, February 26, through Sunday, March 1. There is no charge to spectators on Thursday and Friday. Saturday and Sunday, cost to attend the Winnemucca Ranch Hand Rodeo is \$6 for adults and \$2 for children ages 5 to 12.

For more information, please visit www.RanchRodeoNV.com or call (775) 623-5071 or (800) 962-2638.

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