



# 60 Years of LEA PARK PRO RODEO

BY DEANNA KRISTENSEN

Tucked into the grassy hillsides of northeastern Alberta 10 miles north of Marwayne is a 60 year-old gem known as the Lea Park Rodeo. After six decades, it is evident that this CPRA rodeo is edging its way into becoming one of the top rodeos on the circuit.

"Marwayne is one of my favorite rodeos to go to," comments this year's Lea Park Bareback Champion Russ Hallaby. "It grows every year and the crowd is fantastic."

This year's rodeo was held June 6 - 8, and during its action-packed sunny Sunday afternoon performance, Hallaby claimed a winning 87-point ride aboard Calgary Stampede's great CFR/NFR bay mare, Special Delivery. According to this four-time CFR bareback veteran, this particular win - aboard one of rodeo's best bucking horses - is ultimately a ride for his record book.

"To win a rodeo like that - you can't beat it," laughs Hallaby. "They are putting more and more money up every year. It's kinda like a miniature Armstrong."

Besides its claim to fame as the original home of the Wild Ride event, what really makes Lea Park one of the most successful CPRA rodeos, is its local manpower.

"That committee," smiles Hallaby "they go the whole nine yards. I've been going there since 2000 and they've always got a good setup. There's always added money and the stock is good. This year they had hospitality tents, you could go in there and get a free meal and drinks - every little thing counts."

According to Hallaby, the Lea Park Rodeo is growing, because they've got a young and creative bunch of organizers who know how to produce an exceptional rodeo.

"Lea Park has a lot of different ideas and it is certainly working for them."

Over the course of the three days, Lea Park Committee President Lloyd Gray says 10,000 fans came out to watch their show under a pristine Alberta sky.

"The weather gods were with us," Gray laughs.

During the Sunday performance, there were two special edition prints auctioned off (number one and sixty), painted by local artist Pat (Coleman) Eidsvik. The horse Eidsvik depicted is Franklin Rodeo's Evening Mist; a nine-year-old NFR bareback and CFR saddle bronc mare. Shane Franklin's wife, Charlotte Lodoen, took the original photo, after the grey threw Kyle Daines on the ground at Wildwood, Alta.

Evidently the riderless horse Eidsvik captured depicts an emotional moment - to any cowboy.

"The reason that Pat did that... it is for everybody who was fallen in the rodeo family," says Gray.

Forty-one-year stock contract provider Franklin Rodeo, was also honored with a 60th Anniversary print of their great horse.

After being a part of this rodeo for his entire rodeo career, Shane Franklin says he was a bit rocked and shocked, by this special tribute to his family's business.

"I was surprised... and it was as good as it gets," says Shane Franklin.

Over the past half century, Franklin says he has witnessed the Lea Park Rodeo evolve from wood rails and page wire fencing, to its now premier facilities - which are strong enough to hold in the wildest stock in the business.

This year Gray says the rodeo committee decided to fix up a sponsor appreciation night, to honor those who financially back the Lea Park Rodeo.

"It went really well for the first year. Invites went out to all the rodeo sponsors. We thought we'd try it Thursday night before the rodeo. It will be an annual thing now, to show our sponsors how much we really appreciate them."

Gray estimates there were about 200 attendees throughout the evening, and the committee really enjoyed the opportunity to wine and dine all their generous supporters.

"Lets face it... without these sponsors, we would not have a rodeo."

Gray says it was obvious that the sponsors enjoyed the committee's efforts as many stayed throughout the rodeo weekend. "Along-side the beer garden they sold six sponsor tents, where sponsors could entertain their families, do business and meet new friends. We had a lot of positive feedback from everyone on how much they really appreciated it."

After being a part of this rodeo for over 30 years, Gray says he has witnessed the way the spirit and ingenuity within the Lea Park Rodeo Committee, has made this rodeo really special.

"If you don't have a committee and volunteers to put in hours and hours, you don't have a successful event."

Gray comments that one of the keys to this rodeo committee's success is its life-long members and the families who have been with the rodeo from the start.

"Gerald West was one of the ones who started with us sixty years ago," explains Gray.

With the aid of many hands and countless man-hours, the Lea Park grounds today showcase the strong northern character, within this Alberta community.

"Now it's all state of the art - two and seven-eighths pipe welded and it'll be around for another 100 years."

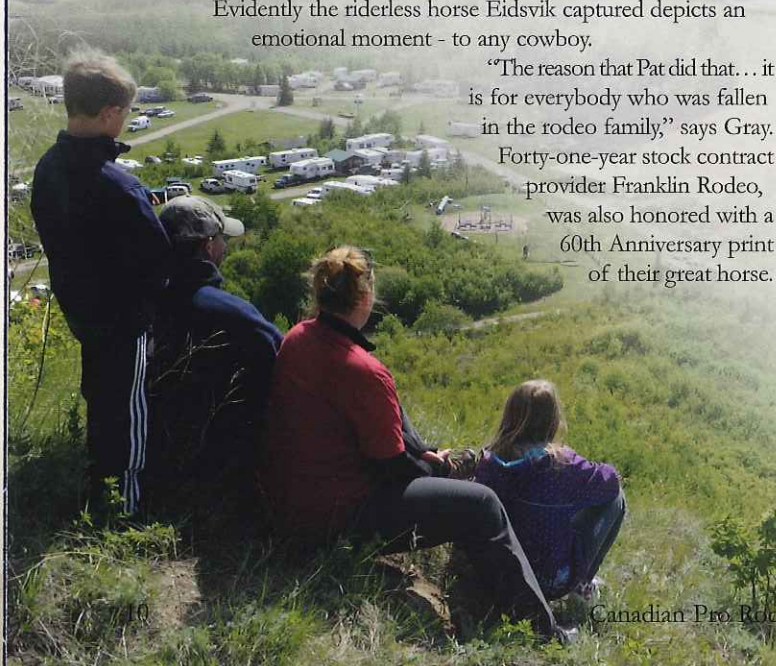
A very traditional aspect of the Lea Park grounds are the grassy hillsides surrounding the rodeo arena; which become covered with lawn chairs, coolers and large crowds of rodeo fans during the three day event. "We are never full," laughs Gray. "The setting at Lea Park is beautiful."

There's do doubt that after 60 years, the Lea Park Rodeo aims to raise the roof when it comes to the growth of their rodeo. Today Gray sits on the CPRA board as a committee member and in 2010 he was honored by the CPRA as the Committee Person of the Year; the same year Lea Park was awarded top CPRA Medium Rodeo. With a payout of just over \$100,000 in 2014, Gray says the committee is already pushing forward to increase its purse for next year.

"We've already had our first gripe meeting after the rodeo this year; all I will say is that we are talking about getting bigger."

With its 60th Anniversary year now in the history books, Gray says contestants and rodeo fans can only expect that the Lea Park

Rodeo will continue to be one of those unique spots on the rodeo trail that annually strives forward, and will continue to showcase the bright possibilities within the future of tomorrow's professional rodeos.





2014 LEA PARK PRO RODEO PHOTOS BY MIKE COPEMAN