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Media Contact:

Ruth Nicolaus

319-321-2152

THE VOICE

Phillipsburg rodeo announcer celebrates 40 years announcing Kansas Biggest Rodeo

Phillipsburg, Kan. – July 10, 2023 – Randy Corley’s smooth voice floats across the Phillipsburg rodeo arena, with music in the background and the hum of happy voices as fans settle into their seats for a night of rodeo action at Kansas Biggest Rodeo.

For forty years, that scene has been replayed, for three nights in early August.

Corley, a native of Wyoming who, after broadcasting school in Seattle, settled in North Platte, Neb., worked at two North Platte radio stations. A former high school rodeo contestant, he announced at the nightly rodeo series that was in North Platte in the 1980s. There he met famed rodeo announcer and musician Hadley Barrett; Barrett helped Randy get his start as a professional rodeo announcer, and Randy married Hadley’s daughter Michelle in 1984, the same year he won a Nebraska Region Radio DJ award, and his first of what would be twelve PRCA Announcer of the Year awards.

Barrett was the person who got Corley started in Phillipsburg. Barrett had announced the rodeo from 1977 to 1983, and in 1984, asked the rodeo committee if they’d be willing to hire a young announcer, just starting out, Barrett’s son-in-law.

Rod Innes was on the committee at the time, and he remembers sitting at a table at the PRCA convention in Denver, when Barrett approached them about Corley.

“Hadley had the opportunity to announce seven performances in Casper, and he wanted to know if we would hire Randy. We didn’t have much choice,” Innes said, “because Hadley was going to Casper.

“We hired Randy and never looked back.”

Michelle and their kids Cole and Brittany came to Phillipsburg when the kids were young and have good memories of Phillipsburg.

“It’s where our kids learned to swim,” Michelle said. “Brittany and Cole swam at the Mark V pool with the Beutlers and Greg Rumohr.” Randy remembers the water fights the kids and Rumohr, a former bullfighter for the rodeo who has since passed away, would have.

“Greg would come and throw cold water on Cole’s head,” he said. “It was always a fun day.”

When the kids were little, Michelle borrowed cribs for them when they were in town.

Over four decades, he and Michelle have good memories of Phillipsburg.

He remembers the time Michelle won the truck that is awarded to an associate member. That year, the couple discussed buying the associate membership, because it was a stretch for their budget. But Randy wanted to support the rodeo committee, so “we went ahead and bought it,” he said, “and damned if she didn’t win the truck.” She was at the hotel; this was before the days of cell phones, so someone called the hotel to tell her she won. She didn’t believe it, telling him he was “full of crap,” but drove out to the rodeo grounds. Tiny Shields, former committee member, met her at the gate and gave his congratulations. “Oh, you’re in on this, too,” she said, thinking it was a joke. When Bennie Beutler congratulated her, she realized she had truly won.

Randy remembers when he and long-time rodeo clown Rick Young would buy raffle tickets for the gun and lament that they never won. When the winners were announced at the rodeo, Young would look at Randy, and, in the middle of the arena, would throw his tickets in the air.

Innes, who was on the rodeo committee for 38 years, said Corley has added so much to the rodeo.

“The announcer is the one who brings the rodeo together,” he said. “Without a good announcer, you lose a lot, and Randy is a great announcer.”

He, along with Bob Quanz, another former rodeo committee member, said Randy always did his homework. “I don’t think people realize how much homework it takes to be a good announcer,” Innes said. “Randy studied who was up, the horses or bulls they were on, what their standings were, Randy knew all of this stuff.”

Corley works well with different clowns and specialty acts, and he handles emergencies well, too, Quanz said. “He can carry a show through all of that.” Quanz recalls last year, when two saddle bronc riders were hurt within minutes of each other, and how Corley was able to keep the show going while the injured riders were attended to.

Corley has left his own mark on the Phillipsburg rodeo. He’s the one who dubbed the grandstands on the east side, to the north, as the Coors Rowdies, and then, as Rumohr’s Rowdies.

Corley loves the people of Phillipsburg and the county.

“It’s like a family,” he said. “I feel like I’m going to a family reunion.” Everywhere he goes, he’s greeted by locals. “Walking into the grocery store, everybody says, ‘hey, how are you?’”

The family lived in North Platte, then moved to Washington State in 2001. In 2019, he and Michelle moved back to North Platte.

Every year in August, Phillipsburg becomes “home” for him and Michelle, for a week.

“There are so many people in that town who are so good to us.”

Kansas Biggest Rodeo in Phillipsburg is August 3-5 at the rodeo grounds one mile north of town. Performances begin at 8 pm nightly. Tickets range in price from \$18-\$20. They can be purchased online at KansasBiggestRodeo.com, at Garrett Insurance in Phillipsburg, and at the gate.

For more information, visit the website or call 785.543.2448.

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1: Randy Corley has announced the Phillipsburg rodeo since 1984. He considers Phillipsburg his home away from home during rodeo week each year. Photo courtesy Corley family.

2: Randy and Michelle Corley. He is announcer and she works as a timer at the Phillipsburg rodeo. Photo courtesy Corley family.

3: Randy and Michelle and their two children, Brittany and Cole. Photo courtesy Corley family.

4: Michelle Corley works the Phillipsburg rodeo, as a timer. She and her announcer husband Randy live in North Platte and spend rodeo week in Phillipsburg. Photo courtesy Corley family.