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For Kansas Biggest Rodeo

RODEO HEROES

Three Phillipsburg rodeo competitors are featured on rodeo t-shirts

Phillipsburg, Kansas – July 22, 2019 – Three people with ties to the Phillipsburg Rodeo are immortalized on rodeo t-shirts.

Nat Berney, Bud Forell and Wanda Bandt are all pictured on the fronts of t-shirts produced by the Phillipsburg Chamber-Main Street office.

All three have competed at the Phillipsburg rodeo.

Nat Berney, who was born in 1921, was a bareback rider, calf roper and bull rider who competed in Phillipsburg and across the Great Plains. He was a Phillipsburg Rodeo Association shareholder and served as rodeo secretary. After he quit competition, he worked as a rodeo judge for Little Britches and pro rodeos. Berney passed away in 2002. His wife Betty lives in Phillipsburg; the couple had three children.

Bud Forell, born in 1931, competed in every event in rodeo: steer wrestling, saddle bronc riding, bareback riding, calf roping and bull riding, but steer wrestling was his forte.

After graduating from Phillipsburg High School in 1949, he served in the U.S. Army in Germany from 1951-1953.

He competed at Kansas Biggest Rodeo numerous times and was a committee member, helping with maintenance and welding.

He and his wife Artyce married in 1954 and had two sons and four daughters. Eldest daughter, Deb Christy, who is a barrel racer, remembers her dad's outlook on life. There were "never any excuses," she said. "You had no excuses, and you never gave up. He had a tremendous work ethic."

Forell died in 2005 at the age of 74.

Barrel racer Wanda Bandt was raised on her family's farm near Kensington and won the barrel racing at the Phillipsburg rodeo in 1971 and 1974. She grew up riding horses, and as a young woman, worked as an airline stewardess. But after a time, she tired of it and quit. She was in Minnesota and had no way to get home, so she and two girlfriends sold all they had and bought horses, which they rode all the way back to Kansas.

Bandt was known for riding without using her stirrups, and daughter Tamra Griffey wonders how her mom stayed in the saddle. Polyester pants were in style then, and Bandt would have had trouble staying in the slick saddle with polyester on.

The two times Bandt won the Phillipsburg rodeo, she was riding her famous horse Copper. Competing at the regional level, Bandt and Copper won 51 consecutive rodeos in the late 60s and early 70s.

Bandt was also skilled at sewing and leather tooling and was an artist, talents her daughter Griffey uses in her work. Bandt sewed nearly all her own clothes, making bright colorful outfits like blue jumpsuits, in style at the time, with western belt loops, and a red jumpsuit, paired with a red hat and red checkered boots. Griffey said her mom sewed without patterns.

Bandt died in 1983 at the age of 46 of a brain tumor, and Griffey's daughter, who never knew her grandmother, has a motto that conceptualizes her grandma's gumption and talent: "If Wanda can do it, I can do it." Bandt's husband Layton served on the Phillipsburg rodeo committee for three years.

Berney, Forell and Bandt have connections to each other. Berney's wife Betty traveled with Bandt to rodeos, keeping her company. Forell's daughter Deb Christy babysat for Bandt's children at rodeos, and as a teenager, was mentored by Bandt as she competed alongside the older woman.

T-shirts are available for sale through the Phillipsburg Chamber of Commerce/Main Street, Blossoms and Butterflies, White's Foodliner, and Curly Willow II, all in Phillipsburg.

The Phillipsburg rodeo runs August 1-3 beginning at 8 pm each night. Tickets start at \$11 for children and \$15 for adults. They can be purchased at Heritage Insurance in Phillipsburg (785.543.2448).

Thursday, August 1 is Family Day at the rodeo; all children ages ten and under are free with the purchase of an adult ticket.

For more information, visit the website at www.kansasbiggestrodeo.com.

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Cutline:

Nat Berney is pictured on a 2019 Kansas Biggest Rodeo commemorative t-shirt. The Phillipsburg man competed at the rodeo and served as rodeo secretary.

Bud Forell, who passed away in 2005 at the age of 74, competed in every event in rodeo and worked rodeos across the Great Plains, including the Phillipsburg rodeo.

Barrel racer Wanda Bandt won her event twice at the Phillipsburg rodeo. On the t-shirt, she rides her famous horse Copper, who won 51 consecutive barrel races at a variety of rodeos. Bandt often kicked her feet out of the stirrups as she rode.