

Byerley talks Ceremonial, rodeo and water conservation

Written by By Bernie Dotson Sun Correspondent
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Sitting alone at the counter of Cowtown Feed & Livestock along U.S. Route 491, Dudley Byerley, proprietor of the business, gazes out onto the store floor where a few customers browse.

Business is good these days, folks from around the area need dog food, vaccinations, horse feed, ranch supplies, and just plain good, old-fashioned advice on how to address issues with animals, and much of anything else, that occurs at the ranch.

“I get people from all walks of life and I have a lot of repeat customers,” he said. “I guess you can say I was born into this.”

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Byerley, 61, was born in Oklahoma and moved with his family to New Mexico during the 1960s, during a time when Gallup and the surrounding area was not as developed as it is now. He was raised in Grants, and his family moved to Thoreau when he was a freshman in high school.

He graduated from Thoreau High School, where he was a member of the Hawks football team and where he also participated in track and field.

Growing up he got involved with selling and caring for horses. Byerley would go on to serve 15 years on the Bi-County Fair Board, and another two years on the state 4H Rodeo Board.

“I’ve been on the New Mexico State High School Rodeo Board for more than 20 years, and have been a member of the McKinley County Soil and Water Conservation District for 10 years,” he said. “And I am in my third year in working with the Gallup Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial.”

When Byerley moved to Gallup, he knew that he was home.

“I like the climate, and love the people,” he said. “I can’t really think of any other place I would rather live.”

He currently resides with his wife Bunny on a 100-acre ranch in Gallup. He has three adult daughters and seven grandchildren. Ranching is in his DNA, and he believes strongly in the values it teaches young people.

“I like the lifestyle,” he said. “It teaches kids the responsibility of taking care of animals.”

He added that there’s also a lot of upkeep, from growing grass to making sure there’s plenty of fresh water.

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Byerley helped bring the Junior High School Rodeo Finals to Gallup, and the city ended up hosting the popular event from 2005 - 2013. He worked with the rodeo for seven of those nine years.

“When the junior high finals came to Gallup we were able to, along with the city of Gallup, raise scholarships from around \$4,000 a year to practically \$23,000 a year,” Byerley said. “We raised team travel money from \$25 to \$1,000 a year per contestant that qualified for the National High School Finals rodeo. I retired from the High School Rodeo, and when I left, the board had \$65,000 in CDs to help in the funding of future scholarships.”

He noted the economic spinoff effect of the rodeo to the city with respect to lodging and spending at gas stations and convenience stores, not to mention the downtown shops.

Byerley said the city’s first year there were a little more than 600 contestants.

“When I left there were a little more than 1,017 contestants that stayed in (Gallup) for an average of eight days. That amounted to over \$2 million brought to the city during that timeframe,” he said.

Beaver Segotta, a member of the state Rodeo Board, vouched for Byerley’s expertise on rodeos, saying he was an asset during the years that he served on that particular board.

“He was an asset in that he was very knowledgeable and hard-working,” Segotta said. “His knowledge of rodeo is second to none.”

Of the McKinley Soil and Water Conservation District, Byerley said the entity is making big strides on a consistent basis. The district includes all of McKinley County and a small piece of Cibola County.

“Thanks to some of our local legislators we have been able to purchase equipment that is not

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available in our county,” he said. “That equipment helps farmers and ranchers.”

Some of the undertakings of the district are with tree thinning on state and forest land, salt cedar eradication in McKinley and Cibola counties, and watershed protection projects.

“Our board is part of the landscape team that has been working for the past two years on the wilderness areas in the Zuni mountains and Mt. Taylor,” he said. “As of two weeks ago we have started discussions on how to best repair and maintain McGaffey Lake.”

Byerley noted that in 2015 the district passed a land use plan, which covers everything from mining to new roads and from wolves to dust control.

“The plan gives us a seat at the table when it comes to bettering the protection of people, forest, wildlife, livestock grazing, and minerals in our district.”

As the current president of the Ceremonial Board, Byerley said he’d like to increase overall numbers at the annual event.

“I want more vendors, more folks in the exhibit area, and more dancers,” he said.

Byerley said this year’s Ceremonial Board is aggressive in their stance to make the annual event packed with more activities than in recent years. The board has also been in discussion with its past membership to restore some events that made the five-day event great in the first place.

Expect more dancers, more local traders back in the trade show hall, and bigger dollar amounts awarded to talented artists. He said that the board is considering adding fry bread and mutton rib eating contests. And the go-getters are working with business owners to encourage traditional dress during the week of the Ceremonial, Aug. 10 -14.

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The rodeo plans on bringing back wild horse, hide, and pony express races, along with wooly riding, a fruit scramble, and more. Overall, more awards and prizes will be handed out.

Babette Herrmann contributed to this report.

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