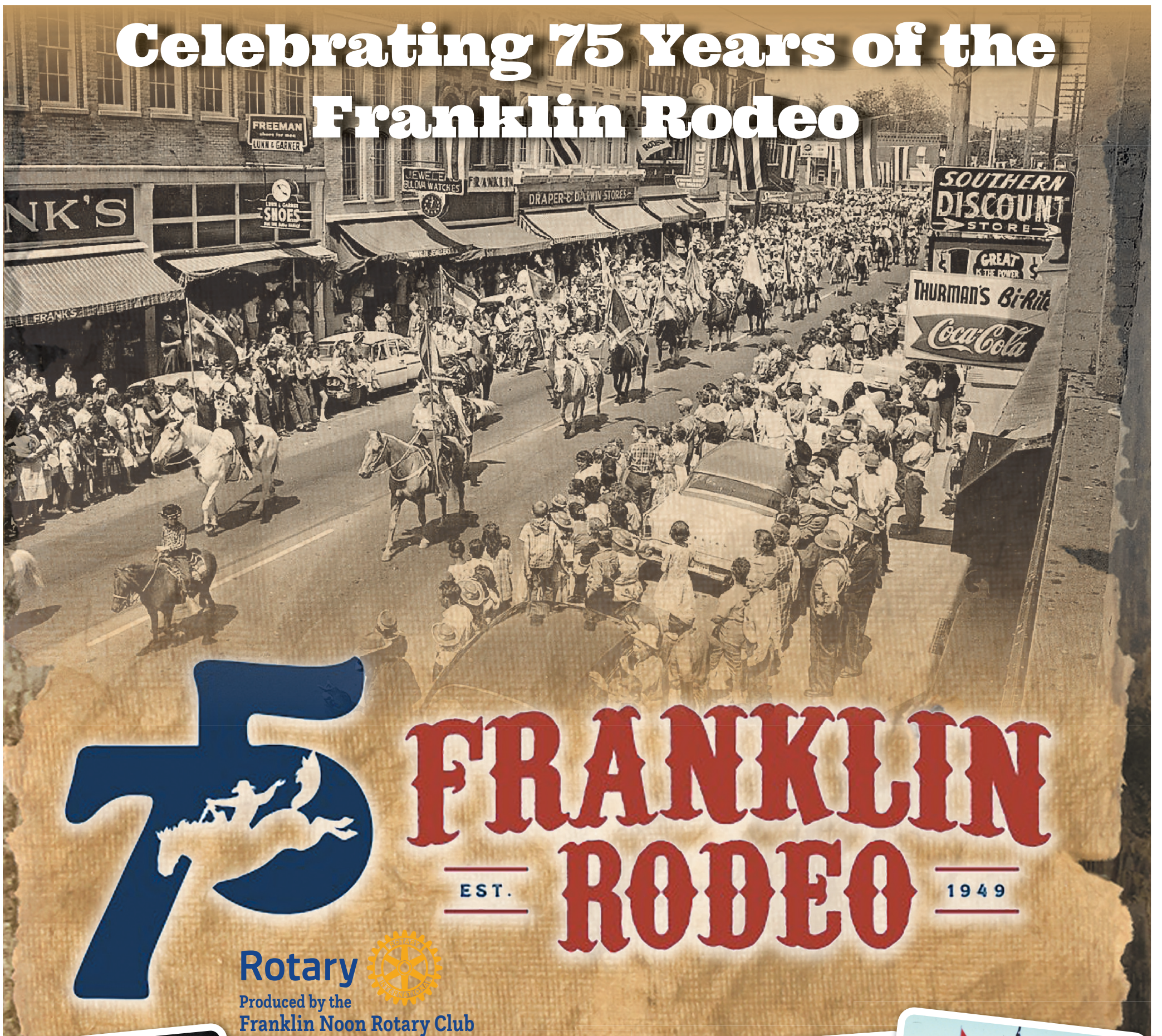


Celebrating 75 Years of the Franklin Rodeo



Rotary
Produced by the
Franklin Noon Rotary Club

FRANKLIN RODEO

EST. 1949



Built on Tradition

Franklin Rodeo celebrates 75 years of rodeo, family, and fundraising

BY RUTH NICOLAUS
FOR THE HERALD

From horse show to unplanned cattle drive to nationally recognized rodeo, the Franklin Rodeo has packed a lot into its 75-year history.

Begun in 1950 as a project for the newly formed group, the Franklin Noon Rotary Club, there were few cowboys in Franklin and Williamson County. Franklin was a typical Southern town, with its commerce based on agriculture; the town's population was 4,500.

The Rotary Club was looking for a fundraiser, and John Fowlkes, who had just moved to town from Texas, had an idea: put on a rodeo. He enlisted his brother, Preston Fowlkes, known as a "top rodeo hand," to help.

So the Rotarians decided to go with it.

They organized and worked, donating their time and talent, to make the first rodeo happen.

On May 6, 1950, the Franklin Rodeo became a reality, and since then, it's never looked back.

Some of the early organizers were civic leaders in the community: Dr. Harry Guffee, Bob Corley, and Ed Moody. Their influence with the Rotary Club and the rodeo helped get the event off the ground and keep it going.

The weather was always a factor to contend with when the rodeo was held outdoors, and it seemed to always rain on rodeo weekend.

Bill Fitzgerald, a former rodeo chairman, remembers hearing the story of the rodeo's first year, in 1950. Saturday was a deluge; there was no way the rodeo could happen. So it was moved to Sunday afternoon.

"Seventy-five years ago, in the South, you didn't do anything on a Sunday but go to church," he said. But when Sunday rolled around, the stands were packed, and the Rotarians realized they might have a winning event on their hands.

For its first twenty years, the rodeo was held at the County Center, which was the community's football field and now houses the



2014 Franklin Rodeo Parade



Jim Warren Park - 1980's

Community Center near Fowlkes Street. It moved to Jim Warren Park in 1970 and was there for thirty

years. In 2001, it moved into the newly constructed Williamson Co. Ago Expo Park.

With climate control and the threat of rain removed, it eliminated the need to deal with muddy arena conditions. But, ironically, in the first year, an ag expo employee turned on the arena's water system, overwatering it. The arena was soaked! It drained and dried out enough for the rodeo to go on.

So many memories were made at rodeo time.

Charlie Fox, a banker and a Williamson County native, remembers one year when, after the parade ended, Dr. Guffee asked six or seven boys to ride to a nursing home on Carter's Creek Pike. Residents were on the porch, while the horseback riders made three laps around the building, "with the people waving and cheering as we went," Fox said. "Dr. Guffee remembered what was really important, like us bringing the parade down to the folks who couldn't come to see it for themselves."

The late Boyce Magli made another lifelong memory at the rodeo. An expert realtor and accomplished equestrian, as a

young man, Boyce rode a bull at the rodeo. He got bucked off and landed hard on his shoulder, popping his arm out of the socket. As he leaned against the arena fence, hurting, Dr. Guffee was standing there. He reached through the fence, put his hand on Boyce's shoulder, and jerked downwards. "It popped back into place, and it was good as new," Boyce remembered.

Leadership for the rodeo has been consistent through the years.

For the first sixteen years of the rodeo, it was led by Ed Moody. Mr. Moody had a servant's heart and never a discouraging word. His impact is so great that the committee still asks itself, "What would Mr. Moody think?" to stay grounded and mindful of keeping the good of the club first and foremost.

After Mr. Moody, Jim Short served as chairman for a couple of years before four men stepped into leadership roles: Ralph McGee, Charlie Fox, Eddy Woodward, and Stewart "Brother"

>>>TRADITION,
Continued on Page C7

Celebrating 75 Years of the Franklin Rodeo

Franklin Rodeo celebrates 75 Years of history and changing lives

BY CAROLE ROBINSON
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

The Franklin Rodeo was established 75 years ago when members of the newly formed Franklin Rotary Club sought a fundraising project. Since then, it has transformed from an amateur event into the largest professional rodeo east of the Mississippi River. Every May, competitors and fans from across the nation and 11 different countries gather for a genuine American experience.

Like many towns across the country in 1948, Franklin was still recovering from the effects of World War II. Lives and businesses were working hard to rebuild and move forward. That year, 19 civic-minded businessmen in Franklin aimed to promote service in business and community by establishing a Rotary Club in Williamson County.

In 1949, the newly organized club sought a fundraising project that would unite the community and provide funds for local service initiatives. At that time, John Fowlkes, a recent arrival from Texas, connected with fellow Rotarians Bob Corley and Dr. Harry Guffee, with whom he had attended Vanderbilt University. Fowlkes suggested a rodeo as a potential fundraiser, drawing on his and Corley's ample rodeo experience and contacts in Texas.

The idea was a long shot; other than Fowlkes and Corley, Dr. Harry Guffee was the only club member familiar with rodeos, and he had only attended one. During a planning meeting held at Rev. Henry Moberly's dining room table in early 1949, Dr. Guffee, Rev. Moberly, Jim Warren, and Howard Johnson listened to Fowlkes' proposal and agreed to pursue it, setting the date for the first rodeo on Saturday, May 6, 1950—the first weekend in May.



Ed Moody at City Fairgrounds

Fowlkes enlisted his brother Preston, a well-known Texas rodeo cowboy and stock contractor, as well as local cowboys Ralph and Riley Miller, to help. The new County Center football field, now the Community Services Facility on Fowlkes Street, was selected as the location for the first rodeo. The Rotarians came together to use donated materials to construct the fences and bleachers.

Despite having little understanding of how to host a rodeo, the Rotarians prepared the arena, managed advertising, printed tickets, and organized concessions and a parade, quickly learning the ropes of rodeo production. Their biggest challenge was finding livestock and cowboys, both essential components of the event. Local farmers provided the horses, mules, cows, and calves needed for the riding events. In the end, only a handful of experienced cowboys in Franklin—Corley, Ray "Kid" Marley, and the Fowlkes brothers—were available. However, since the rodeo was a new and unique event for Franklin, the lack of experience didn't dampen enthusiasm.

On the day of the rodeo, the weather started beautifully, but it quickly turned. Governor Gordon Browning led a parade that included the Franklin High School and Columbia Military

Academy bands, Rotarians, cowboys, 4-H youth, and residents on horseback. They marched through Franklin to the rodeo grounds, but were met with a torrential downpour that flooded the arena.

Most assumed the rodeo was over before it even began, but the board of directors convened and decided to hold the event the next day, Sunday. Although Tennessee Blue Laws prohibited certain activities on Sundays, rodeos were not specifically mentioned, allowing the board to proceed with their plans for May 7. More than 4,000 people attended, enabling the Rotarians to fulfill their goal of purchasing new uniforms for the Franklin High School Marching Band.

Rain proved to be an ongoing challenge for the rodeo over the years. The mud was often so deep that during the calf scramble, children would lose their shoes and boots, requiring assistance to exit the arena. In subsequent years, the arena preparation would uncover lost footwear.

For the next rodeo, John Fowlkes arranged for a herd of Texas cattle to be sent to Franklin. In the fall, about 500 head of cattle arrived at the train station located near the bend in the Harpeth River, where First Avenue meets North Margin. He enlisted several young men

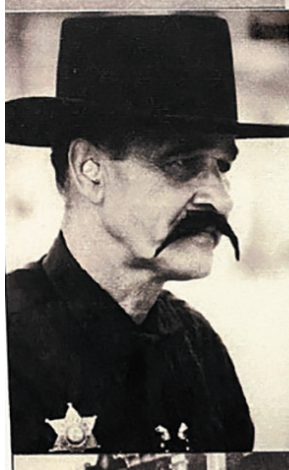


Dr. Harry Guffee — one of the founding members of the Franklin Noon Rotary and the Franklin Rodeo



The Shootout on the Square

A long-standing tradition where Rotarians reenacted the Shootout at the OK Corral, except this time it was on Franklin's Public Square. Complete with an undertaker using a horse drawn wagon, sheriff posse, a hero (Ed Moody) and a villain (Dr. Harry Guffee), saloon girls, and WAKM Radio calling all the action. In those days, all the downtown businesses dressed in western attire and hundreds of spectators lined the streets.



SUBMITTED

A Collage of photos of the Shoot-out at the OK Corral, on Franklin's Public Square during Franklin Rodeo weekend.

to help move half the herd to Carnton, where the Fowlkes brothers and their families lived, while the other half

was directed to "Meeting of the Waters" on Del Rio Pike. At that time, the now-beautiful house was nothing more

than a structure filled with hay.

The cattle headed for Carnton. >>>HISTORY, Continued on Page C6

Rodeo unites the community Gavin Moon has a passion for giving back

BY CAROLE ROBINSON
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

As a young boy, Gavin Moon watched the Franklin Rotary Rodeo Parade pass by while standing by his lemonade stand. He later found himself in the arena at Jim Warren Park, captivated by the rodeo. He never imagined he would one day be part of it.

"The rodeo has been the fabric of my whole life," Moon said.

Growing up on Old Hillsboro Road and at the family farm in Thompson's Station, horses, cattle, and farming were always significant parts of Moon's life. In 2002, the late Ed Moody, one of the founders of the Franklin Noon Rotary and a beloved community figure, invited Moon to join the Rotary.

"It fills the philanthropic part of my soul," Moon expressed. "Everything we do is on a voluntary basis."

His passion for giving back and his love for the rodeo made him a perfect fit for the organization. He quickly became part of the many Rotarian volunteers dedicated to bringing rodeo fun and excitement to the community for competitors and spectators alike.

"Once Bill Fitzgerald retired, we created the Four Horsemen of the Rodeo," he said. Moon joined Devin Gilliam, John Abbott, and Mark Tumblyn in planning and

organizing the event. They later added Armando Estrada, making them the Five Horsemen.

What is the appeal of rodeo?

Putting on a pair of jeans, boots, and a cowboy hat evokes nostalgia for childhood. It offers a glimpse into the past and the Western lifestyle—it's reminiscent of John Wayne and *True Grit*, Moon explained.

"Rodeo is a very unique sport," he added. "It's down to earth and farm-driven."

The rodeo reminds people of the "old ways of life" and emphasizes the value of community. It embodies the principles of God, Family, and Country.

"It's the core of what it stands for," Moon said. "The animals, cowboys, and cowgirls provide wholesome fun for everyone, regardless of age."

For several years, Moon felt that the significance of rodeo was fading. However, Taylor Sheridan's *Yellowstone* reintroduced the country to the Western lifestyle, honoring the ideals of integrity, respect for others, personal responsibility, and hard work.

"It's real—no fluff," he said. "Everybody has a little cowboy in them."

The rodeo attracts people from all over the United States and 11 other countries. For the past three or four years, a woman

from England has flown in just to volunteer at the Franklin Rodeo.

According to Moon, the rodeo "scratches an itch." It represents a part of American life based on country values—it's intertwined with the essence of Franklin. People want to be part of that, starting with the parade. And who doesn't love a parade?

This year, the Oscar Mayer Wienermobile and its "hotdogs" will join the parade.

"They participate in only 6 to 12 parades around the country," Moon noted. "We can't wait."

For Moon, being part of a volunteer organization that raises money for charities throughout the county is a source of pride, and the rodeo serves as the Rotary's primary fundraiser.

"We partner with Williamson Health for our 'Tough Enough to Wear Pink' night to support breast health," he said. "Last year, we assisted 60 to 70 different charities." Throughout the year, they work with One Gen Away to provide healthy food to those facing food insecurity.

"A lot of people don't get enough nutritious food," he added.

The committee has also increased the prize purse for winners.

"We believe in investing in the cowboys and cowgirls coming here," he explained. "Many trav-



The Franklin Noon Rotary getting ready for the Rodeo: Patty Bearden, Gavin Moon, Levei Dominquez and John Abbott.

el a long way and incur many expenses. You can't have a rodeo without the cowboys and cowgirls."

Over the years, additional activities have been added to enhance the event's fun. Those who attend the free "Down in the Dirt" event on Wednesday will find more activities and opportunities to see bulls and horses, visit the petting zoo animals, ride ponies, try the mechanical bull, and explore food trucks. There will also be real cowboys and cowgirls available to help future buckaroos practice their lasso skills.

"This isn't structured," Moon said. "It's just a way to say thank you."

On rodeo nights, fans will notice an expanded Fan Zone outside the arena, open from 5 to 7 p.m., featuring new games added for early arrivals. Additionally, mutton busting preliminaries

for kids weighing 50 pounds and under will occur outside in the sheep pen. There is a \$10 registration fee, and the top eight mutton busters will compete in another ride during the rodeo intermission.

After 20 years of trying, last year was the first year beer was sold in the arena.

"There are 730 rodeos in the country," Moon noted. "Only three or four don't sell beer. We used to be one of them—until now."

For collectors, a ninth barrel of Jack Daniel's straight from the barrel at 120 proof, known as Rodeo Whiskey, will once again be available for sale in a laser-etched bottle.

"It's Lightning in a Bottle," Moon said. "It's been a hot item. It's not sold in stores, and this year we have two barrels."

Celebrating 75 Years of the Franklin Rodeo

Pat Dunn: *The heart of the Franklin Rodeo*

BY CAROLE ROBINSON
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

Pat Dunn grew up with horses. Her father raised, trained, and rode Tennessee Walking Horses on their farm in Dickson County, while her best friend owned Quarter Horses just down the road. "I fell in love with them," she said. "They were more fun."

When Dunn was six years old, her parents took her and her sister to the Franklin Rodeo, which began an annual family tradition. Young Pat discovered her passion for rodeo through her friend's father, who took her to various local rodeos.

From 1950 to 1969, the Franklin Rotary rodeo was held on Friday evenings and Saturday at noon and 7:00 p.m. on the first weekend in May at the County Center. The weather during this time could be extremely hot, very cold, or quite wet. After years of battling the elements, the date was moved to the third weekend in May, where it has remained ever since.

Every year, Franklin's population swelled to 10,000 during the rodeo. Rain or shine, a traditional parade kicked off on Saturday before the noon show, led by John and Preston Fowlkes Sr., followed by the Franklin High School Marching Band and a variety of floats. "When I was little, [the parade] had more pageantry, more color, excitement, and music; lots of horses and the stock contractor," Dunn recounted.

The parade began at the corner of Highway 96 and Hillsboro Road (Fifth Avenue), traveled to Main Street, circled Public Square, returned to 11th and Boyd Mill Avenue, then proceeded out to Jim Warren Park and into the rodeo arena. A collective group of young Black musicians, known as the Watermelon Man Jazz Band, joined the parade all the way to the arena.

"It was a long day for Rotarians," Dunn said. "There was a lot of fun in the old days at the County arena. It was a pretty Wild West deal." She recalled an incident when a bull named Blue jumped into the grandstands at the County Center. "Blue was notoriously dangerous," Dunn said. "He could have hurt people." Fortunately, he didn't injure anyone and was eventually roped and returned to the corral.

For many years, Tex Townsend from Nashville served as the rodeo announcer. "He was quick-witted and could ad-lib with the clowns," Dunn said. Lecile Harris from Memphis was one of the first rodeo clowns. He later moved on to perform at the National Finals and appeared in several films: *Walking Tall, The Final Chapter, The Last Days of Frank and Jesse James,* and on the television show *Hee Haw*. He continued clowning until he was 80 and passed away at a rodeo in Jackson, Mississippi, between performances.

In 1981, Pat met Wayne over a horse, and they married in 1982. She learned team roping and

competed with Wayne at rodeos. "We entered rodeos together," she shared. "There weren't too many women competing. I roped against men when I rode with Wayne."

Pat and Wayne were operating the Cowboy Store in 1999 when Ed Moody invited Pat to join the Rotary. His initial invitation was intended for Wayne. "[Wayne] told Ed, 'You don't want me. You want Pat. She'll be a much better choice than me,'" she recalled.

In 2004, just five years after becoming a Rotarian, Pat Dunn was appointed the first female Rodeo Chairman. She served in that role until 2010, when the Rotary transitioned from a chairman model to an executive director model, placing Bill Fitzgerald in that position, much to Pat's relief. He held the role for ten years.

In 2020, the rodeo planned its inaugural indoor event at the new Williamson County Agricultural Center, but the coronavirus pandemic changed those plans. "We had to keep our focus on the mission—supporting charities," Dunn stated. "We are dedicated to rodeo charities."

For Dunn, the rodeo feels like a family reunion. "We get to reconnect with people we don't see often or haven't seen in a while," she said. "And so many new people are coming. Sometimes I long for the nostalgia of the past. I enjoy the excitement of seeing the arena fill up. I even like the work and the long hours."



Pat Dunn of the Franklin Noon Rotary Club rides in the Franklin Rodeo Parade.

FILE



New home for the Rodeo - David Haas, Pat Dunn, Zane Martin



Debbie Gaidos and Pat Dunn

FILE



Proud to be delivering cowboys and cowgirls for future generations of the Franklin Rodeo.



Celebrating 75 Years of the Franklin Rodeo

Can't have a great rodeo without great stock

BY CAROLE ROBINSON
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

Most people see cowboys as the stars of a rodeo; they don't shine unless the stock shines. In 1992, then J Bar J Ranch owners Jim and Margaret Zinser began providing the Franklin Rodeo with high-quality stock that challenged the cowboys and thrilled the audience.

In 2008, the Zinsers sold the J BAR J to Marlene and Mark "Sparky" Dreesen, who were located near Circle, Montana, and ran an already top-quality rodeo company. The Dreesens merged their top-performing stock with the Zinser high-quality herd, developing a rodeo string with even

more heart and power. The new generations of "born to buck" horses and bulls are known to provide a ride their riders don't forget.

"We're always trying to improve our stock," Sparky said.

As rowdy as they are in the arena, J Bar J horses "are like a football player; a pretty nice guy on the street, but on the field - not much fun," Sparky said. "A lot of the bucking horses - you can pet them. Bucking is their job; they're bred for bucking. They're really no different than people athletes."

Rodeo was a childhood dream for Dreesen. The dream was born when Dreesen watched the movie *The Great American Cow-*

boy. He was in sixth grade, but he knew in his heart he would have something to do with the rodeo. The dream began to come true when he was 10, entering his first rodeo as a bareback rider.

"I was a daredevil by heart," he said.

By the 1980s, he was a professional bareback rider and an established bucking horse breeder. In 1992, he was the SDRA (South Dakota Rodeo Association) Champion Bareback Rider. According to Sparky, he and Marlene are looking forward to arriving in Franklin.

"We thoroughly enjoy coming to Franklin," he said. "We get some wonderful Southern hospitali-

ty."

They look forward to the hospitality and kindnesses they receive from the Rodeo Committee, and even from the cowboys.

"This time we want to do some sightseeing," he added. "Before we just came to work, but this trip we want to take in a lot of the Civil War stuff."

The Dreesens also look forward to warmer temperatures. On the day of this interview, it was 25 degrees at their ranch in Northeast Montana. There's still snow on the ground, the horses haven't begun to shed their heavy winter coat, and things are getting busy with foals dropping. It's a perfect time for a rodeo.



FILE
Mark "Sparky" Dreesen of J Bar J Ranch is interviewed by Tom Lawrence of WAKM.

Franklin Rodeo inspired Larry Dale to pursue rodeo activities

BY CAROLE ROBINSON
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

Larry Dale joined the Franklin Noon Rotary Club in 1980, mainly for its charitable efforts supporting various organizations in the community. However, since he was a young boy, he has always reserved the third weekend in May for the local rodeo.

Dale's first chance to ride his horse in the parade came during high school. Unfortunately, he did not have a pair of cowboy boots, and no amount of begging could convince his family to buy him a pair due to financial constraints. Devastated at the thought of wearing his "school slippers," he was relieved when his understanding mother suggested

he wear his Sunday shoes instead. While they could pass for boots, there was one condition: he had to polish them after the parade.

With a growing interest in rodeo, it was no surprise that after meeting a few cowboys while attending the University of Tennessee at Martin, he decided to participate in several rodeos. His event was bareback riding, and he earned the nickname "The Seven-Second Man" because he consistently struggled to hold on for the full eight seconds.

After graduation, Dale returned home and became a member of the Williamson County Jaycees. A few years later, in 1980, he joined the Rotary Club and became a member of the rodeo committee, where he provided

input and assistance with rodeo planning for many years. Additionally, Dale served as the club's treasurer for about ten years.

"That kept me really involved for thirteen months of the year," he said with a smile.

For about a decade, Dale had the honor of carrying the American flag to lead the Franklin Rodeo Parade. "The club asked me to carry the American flag at the front of the parade, and for me, that's an honor," he remarked. "That humbles me."

During the rodeo, Dale, his late wife, Patti, and their daughter, Christi, managed the Mutton Bustin and Calf Scramble events for many years. Patti's experience as a kindergarten teacher made her the ideal person to han-



FILE
Larry Dale at the Boots and Buckles event.

dle excited children before they entered the arena. According to Dale, she was also "the brains behind the Mutton Bustin," organizing the event.

"When we moved to the Ag Center, we were relieved



FILE
Larry Dale on Firecracker, carries the American flag leading the Rodeo Parade.

to be out of the rain," he recalled. Or so they thought. The workers had turned on the water hoses to dampen the arena dirt but forgot to turn them off, leading to yet

another muddy situation the following morning.

"We were back to mud," he said. "The thing about working the rodeo is that you don't get to enjoy it."



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Celebrating 75 Years of the Franklin Rodeo

To Bill Fitzgerald, rodeo is more than just a production

BY CAROLE ROBINSON
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

The fields, barns, fresh hay, and the sound of cows chewing their cud while his grandfather milked them inspired a deep love for animals in Bill Fitzgerald and set the course for his life. When he was about six or seven years old, Fitzgerald attended his first rodeo.

As a student at Franklin Junior High and later at Franklin High School, he often accompanied his older brother, who played the tuba in the Franklin Marching Band. Before the parade, Fitzgerald persuaded the band director to let him walk behind the band to pick up drumsticks that drummers might drop along the parade route.

The band marched directly into the rodeo, providing entertainment for years. Once through the gates, Fitzgerald's job was finished, and he could enjoy the rodeo itself. "In the four years of picking up drumsticks, I probably picked up just one," he recalled. "There was something compelling about the

rodeo."

By the time he reached high school, his brother had graduated, so Fitzgerald tried playing the trumpet, but that only lasted a year. When he was a sophomore, the rodeo found other entertainment, and since he had a job, he could buy a ticket for himself.

"In high school, I worked around various farms in Williamson County," he said, gaining valuable experience with animals.

After high school, Fitzgerald joined a construction crew. Soon after, Mike Smiley invited him to join the Franklin Noon Rotary Club, which needed help remodeling Jim Warren Park, the rodeo's venue since 1970. At just 20 years old, Fitzgerald was the youngest member of the Rotary.

The next year, following the sudden death of rodeo chair Ralph McGee the day before the event, Fitzgerald was appointed grounds chairman. His responsibilities included overseeing construction projects before the rodeo, such as renovating the concession

stand, repairing the bleachers and fences, and leveling the arena dirt.

After completing his work for the rodeo, Fitzgerald assisted Jim Zinser, the stock contractor and owner of J Bar J. His tasks included moving the horses, bulls, calves, and steers used in the competitions. This experience led to a job working with the Zinsers, traveling to rodeos across the country, and learning about animal care in the rodeo world.

"Working with them taught me what really happens at a rodeo," he said. "Understanding the behind-the-scenes efforts involved in getting a horse, bull, calf, or steer into the arena is essential."

The chute area is known to be one of the most dangerous parts of the rodeo, and Fitzgerald has the scars and stories to prove it. "Rodeo is a dangerous job, but it's also an honorable one," he stated.

According to his wife, Jill, who has worked with the Franklin Rodeo for many years, "It's a production. Every part is choreo-

graphed, from the flags to the sponsor banners, and each event."

For the average person, the rodeo is fun, exciting, and entertaining, which is great. But according to Fitzgerald, there's much more to it. "It's like a play or a production," he explained.

For competitors, stockmen, and rodeo producers, the rodeo serves as a lesson about God, country, family, and community. It begins with a prayer, followed by a flag presentation and the National Anthem. The show is a collaborative effort by rodeo competitors, producers, and stockmen who work together as one large family.

"The rodeo community is like one big family, and we put on this event for the community," Fitzgerald remarked.

There are two primary reasons for a true rodeo, both centered around community: the charitable aspect and entertainment. "I have two professions—rodeo and the Franklin Fire Department," Fitzgerald said. "No matter where



SUBMITTED
Bill Fitzgerald and the late Ed Moody at the 60th Franklin Rodeo - in 2010.

you go in the world, you know someone nearby. With the rodeo family and the brotherhood of the fire department, you never feel alone."

Traditions and the opening ceremony embody what rodeo stands for, setting the tone for the program,

the action, and creating a thrilling experience. "The traditions are what truly make rodeo special," he said. "A good ride and a high score elevate the excitement and transform spectators into rodeo fans. That's what we aim for—fans who will come back."



SUBMITTED
Bob Corley and Dr. Harry Guffee make a trip around the Preston Fowlkes Arena where the Rodeo was held from 1970-1999.



SUBMITTED
The Franklin Rodeo in the Preston Fowlkes Arena at Jim Warren Park

History

Continued from Page C2

nton were herded through the edge of town to Lewisburg Pike, while those destined for Meeting of the Waters went right down Main Street to Del Rio Pike.

Along the way, they did what cows do: wander through yards, gardens, and fences. Despite the mess, residents enjoyed the excitement and never forgot the cattle drive through Franklin.

With the Fowlkes brothers providing rodeo livestock, several professional cowboys joined the scene to

compete, attracting numerous spectators. To accommodate the growing audience, the Rotarians introduced a Friday night show. When the date of the event was changed to the third weekend in May, they added an evening show on Saturday, earning the Franklin Rodeo the title of the Largest Amateur Rodeo East of the Mississippi.

From 1968 to 1984, the late Ed Moody, co-owner of Moody's Tire & Service, served as the rodeo's chairperson, contributing to its ongoing success. After years of struggling with inclement weather, the Rotarians decided to move the rodeo date to the third weekend in May.

Although this change did not eliminate the rain, it did provide warmer weather for the event.

In 1970, after successfully negotiating a lease with the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), the rodeo built a new, modern arena in the newly established Jim Warren Park. Weather, however, continued to pose significant challenges; it rained every year, and in several instances, the wet conditions affected both the proceeds and the Rotarians' ability to support the community.

In 1976, tragedy struck when Preston Fowlkes Sr. died after a bull pushed a tree over, which landed on him. His son, Preston Jr.,

took over the responsibility of producing the Franklin Rodeo until 1987.

Before the 1990s, the Rodeo Parade would pause for an old-time western shootout on Public Square, featuring gun-toting Rotarians. Clyde Stephens from Williamson Memorial Funeral Home dressed as an old-time undertaker, complete with a horse-drawn funeral wagon.

In 2001, the rodeo relocated to the new indoor, climate-controlled Agricultural Exposition Park (also known as the Ag Center), which served as the building's first event. For those involved, this move meant no more rain and mud—at least, that was the hope.

However, before the inaugural show, an employee accidentally turned on the water system to dampen the dirt and reduce dust, then went to lunch. When he returned, he found the arena flooded.

When the rodeo committee learned of the mishap, there was a collective sense of disappointment. Fortunately, there was enough time for the water to drain, allowing the event to proceed despite the initial setback.

That same year, the schedule changed from two shows on Saturday to a Thursday, Friday, and Saturday lineup. In 2005, the rodeo was sanctioned by the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association,

enhancing its prestige and providing greater opportunities for participating cowboys and cowgirls.

The 75th Franklin Rodeo has introduced several new components. Yet, it still serves as a time to escape the hustle and bustle of modern life, revisit the mystique of the Old West, and embrace a sense of childhood wonder. It also offers a chance to be part of something greater, with the funds raised benefiting neighbors, families, and the entire community.

For more information, you can contact Carole Robinson at crobinson@williamsonherald.com.

Congratulations Franklin Rodeo on 75 years!

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Celebrating 75 Years of the Franklin Rodeo

Tradition

Continued from Page C1

Campbell. McGee passed away suddenly in 1992, but the other three ran the rodeo from 1992 to 2004, as it grew into the biggest outdoor rodeo east of the Mississippi.

In 2004, the first woman to serve as rodeo chairman, Pat Dunn, was asked to lead the group. She asked Bill Fitzgerald and Bill Foley for help.

By 2010, the rodeo had grown so much that Bill Fitzgerald was hired as executive director. He served in that role during the COVID years of 2020-21, when the rodeo was canceled due to the pandemic.

In 2022, four men took over leadership roles for the rodeo: Devin Gilliam, Gavin Moon, John Abbott, and Mark Tumblin. Armando Estrada became the "fifth horseman" three years ago.

The rodeo, as a project of the Franklin Noon Rotary Club, has always raised funds for area organizations. In the 1950s and 60s, money raised went to the Franklin High School band, the school library, Williamson County 4-H Clubs, and a host of other activities. In the 60s, there was a shortage of doctors, dentists, and nurses in the county, so the rodeo raised funds for scholarships in those fields. Millions of dollars have been given to charities through the rodeo's proceeds.

As the world has changed throughout the last 75 years, so too has the rodeo. The city of Franklin has gone from a sleepy town of 4,500 to one of the most prime residential areas in the nation, with a population of 83,000. The rodeo is no longer a small one-day event but three days of pro-



SUBMITTED

Rain was always a problem at Jim Warren Park.



SUBMITTED

Bud and Dub Grant lead the parade in the 1980's.



Rotarians setting up chairs at Jim Warren Park.

fessional competition.

But some things never change: the opportunity to enjoy time spent with family and friends at the rodeo, the commitment of Rotary members to serve their fel-

low man through fundraising, and the western heritage that once was part of Williamson County.

And now the rodeo is woven into the fabric of Franklin.



SUBMITTED

Franklin Rodeo Cowboys in 1980's



SUBMITTED

Williamson Ag Expo Park 1 - 2001 to present.

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Celebrating 75 Years of the Franklin Rodeo

Joan Bledsoe, Franklin Rodeo's favorite fan

BY CAROLE ROBINSON
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

Joan Bledsoe has been a fan of the Franklin Noon Rotary's Rodeo since she was just 15 years old, attending the Rotary's first rodeo on May 6, 1949, at the County Center off Fowlkes Street. "I went with my dad; he knew the Fowlkes Brothers," she recalled.

The Fowlkes brothers, John and Preston Sr., hailed from Texas and were well-versed in rodeos and rodeo stock. "During one of the first rodeos, a horse joined us in the stands," she said. "People scattered everywhere. My dad and I caught the horse on about the third tier. We weren't afraid; we didn't run like everyone else." They remained calm, approached the horse slowly but confidently, and eventually, the horse settled down.

Joan also remembers the rainstorms at Jim Warren Park and the time she and her preacher took a few Sunday School kids to the rodeo. "Halfway through the show, we couldn't find one of the boys," she said. "We finally looked over where the trailers were parked, and there he was, talking with some cowboys. I knew he was safe there."

Although her father trained Tennessee Walking Horses for pleasure riding, young Joan was captivated by quarter horses—the breed most commonly used in rodeo events. Now, 75 years later, the 93-year-old Joan remains the Franklin Rodeo's biggest fan. She hasn't missed a rodeo and attends every performance.

"I love the parades, too," she said. "I rode Dr. Traugher's horse a couple of times in the parade. He lived near



FILE PHOTOS

Joan Bledsoe has a special seat in the parade. She is the Franklin Noon Rotary Rodeo's biggest fan. Joan was about 14 when she attended the Rotary's first rodeo in 1949. She hasn't missed a rodeo in 75 years.



Franklin Noon Rotary member Meghan Guffee; Joan Bledsoe, one of the rodeo's biggest fan - since the first rodeo in 1949, she has never missed a rodeo; and Williamson Herald publisher and Franklin Noon Rotary member, Derby Jones

us, on Moran Road, along with my late husband."

For her dedication, Joan earned her own box seats right by the chutes, close to Dr. Monty McInturff, DVM, which she emphasized with a smile. From that section, Joan can't miss any of the action—from the controlled chaos at the chutes to the gates swinging open and the excitement at the other end of the arena.

Throughout all the years of rodeo excitement, Joan takes a moment to remember "the three major riders

who were killed during the rodeos I've attended." They died doing what they loved, and she makes sure they are not forgotten.

Joan's early years were spent on her family's poultry farm in Nashville. "But I rode horses in Williamson County," she said. "I spent a lot of time riding at General Patton's farm on Clovercroft Road; he was Nancy Patton Conway's father. I spent more time in Williamson County than in Davidson."

She recalled long rides on Clovercroft Road to Wilson



LaQuita Scaife, left, Joan Bledsoe and Tina Issette with one of the horses at the Franklin Rodeo Boots and Buckles 75th Anniversary event on March 28 held at the Bicecentennial Park. Bledsoe was honored for attending the past 74 Franklin Rodeos.

Pike, then on to the store on Concord Road, where they'd get a Coke before heading back to the farm. The excitement and traditions of the rodeo sparked her childhood curiosity and sense of adventure, a feeling that hasn't changed. It's also what the rodeo represents that keeps her returning.

"Rodeo is the one true American sport," Joan said. "Most sports originated in other countries. Mexico may have its Gaucho, but the American cowboy is truly unique and authentically American. They still pray, and they still play."

Rodeo embodies God, country, and community, and these traditions are evident from the opening production to the final events. "I love the rodeo," she said. "It's so American, but I don't understand why we don't have American Indians in our rodeo."

Joan's passion for rodeo isn't limited to Franklin; it extends to rodeos across the country, some of which in-



Joan Bledsoe (front, far right) and her family enjoy the Franklin Rodeo in 2019. Bledsoe has never missed a performance of the rodeo since it began.

corporate local traditions. In Florida, for instance, a rodeo involves local participants riding their horses around the arena while holding balloons. The goal is to pop the balloons from the other participants' arms, and the person still holding a balloon at the end of the game is the winner. Joan noted, "One woman would win every year. She was in her 50s, but she had the best

horse."

In Clovis, California, they embrace the old-fashioned rodeo, she shared. In more recent years, her daughter and grandsons have started accompanying her. This year, her two-year-old great-grandchild will attend, and Joan is eager to inspire him to become another rodeo enthu-

>>>BLED SOE,
Continued on Page C11

FRANKLIN RODEO



JACK
JOHNSON
STATE SENATOR

PAID FOR BY JOHNSON FOR STATE SENATE, TOMMY NELMS, TREASURER

Celebrating 75 Years of the Franklin Rodeo

Rodeo honored with state proclamation for 75 years of tradition

BY RUTH NICOLAUS
FOR THE WILLIAMSON HERALD

The Franklin Rodeo was honored recently with a state resolution, honoring its 75th year.

Gov. Bill Lee, Sen. Jack Johnson and Reps. Jake McCalmon, Lee Reeves, Jay Reedy and Lowell Russell recognized the Franklin Rodeo with the presentation of a Senate Joint Resolution commemorating the anniversary.

“It was a true privilege to be able to honor and bring recognition to the Franklin Rodeo and 75 amazing years,” Rep. McCalmon said. “The rodeo is truly a jewel in the crown of what makes Williamson County so amazing. I’m happy to support it, and I can’t wait to be there in attendance.”

Several Franklin Noon Rotary Club members were in attendance for the presentation on March 17, including Gavin Moon, a Rotarian and rodeo committee member. “This is a meaningful tribute to the legacy and impact of the Franklin Rodeo,” Moon said. “We are



Franklin Noon Rotary Club members and rodeo committee members gather at the state capital after the presentation of the Senate Joint Resolution commemorating the rodeo’s 75th anniversary. From left to right, Mark Scott, Nancy Scott, Mark Tumblin, Catherine Lamson, Gavin Moon, Sen. Jack Johnson, Devin Gilliam, John Abbott, Robin Baldree, and Don Bufalini.

sincerely grateful for this recognition from the State of Tennessee, and we are proud to continue serving our community.”

“Seventy-five years in, and the Franklin Rodeo still draws a crowd better than just about anything else in town, and that tells you all you need to know about what it means to Williamson County,” Rep. Reeves said.

The rodeo, a project of the Noon Rotary Club, is a service project for the Club and raises money each year for area charities and non-profit organizations. Last year alone, the rodeo donated funds to more than 70 organizations, ranging from educational opportunities to feeding the hungry to providing transportation for those without.

This year’s rodeo is May 14-16 and will be held at the Williamson County Ag Expo Park (4215 Long Lane, Franklin). Shows start at 7 pm each night. Tickets are \$18-\$52 and can be purchased online at FranklinRodeo.com.

For more information, visit the website.



Bill Foley, Cassie Jones and Laura Musgrave at Franklin Rodeo.

Bill Foley keeps rodeo fans fed

BY CAROLE ROBINSON
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

Bill Foley had a Molly Maid business in Franklin when Scott Harrison, who owned a Kawasaki motorcycle dealership, invited him to join the Franklin Noon Rotary in December 1998. By that time the rotary had grown to about 200 members meeting weekly at the Williamson County Recreation Center in Franklin.

“It was an opportunity for me to give back to the community,” Foley said. “If you’re a part of the community, you need to support the community.”

His first Rotary experience was the May 1999 rodeo at Jim Warren Park. His job that year was to set up the box seat area; rope it off, unload the chairs and set them up chairs - in the pouring rain. He remembered it by the maroon jacket that turned pink from the rain.

“Back then, if you were a rookie your assignment [during the rodeo] would be cotton candy and popcorn, but I was well connected so I was able to work in parking,” he said.

Then the coronavirus hit the United States in 2020 and everything shut down just two months before the rodeo. The next rodeo would be in 2001 at the new Williamson County Agricultural Exposition Center.

As a member of the Rodeo committee, Foley was involved with advertising sales.

When the Rodeo team of Eddie Woodard, Charlie Fox and Brother Campbell stepped down in 2008 the team of Pat Dunn, Bill Fitzgerald and Foley - known as the Three Amigos, lead the rodeo committee for the next eight years.

“I was basically the food and beverage director,” Foley said, who took over for Russell Little. “I would deal with bringing in all the cokes - they call it commissary now - I was commissary and restock.”

He made sure there was enough food and utilities to make the food for the cafe; and enough snacks and drinks to keep concessions stocked during the rodeo. Students from Franklin High School’s Culinary Class with culinary coach Coach Gillespie also helped preparing and cooking food for the cafe.

For several years additional help was provided by a few trustees from the county jail to make popcorn, restock concessions and with the set up and take down before and after the rodeo.

During one rodeo Foley introduced. After the Rotary purchased



BILL FOLEY

the rig Steve and Debbie Griffin used when they had their Viking Store in The Factory, Foley introduced tri-tips in the cafe.

“We realized it took a long time to cook the pork butts, but with the rig you could cook this tri-tip steak in an hour,” Foley said. “We started serving them at the Rodeo.”

Later the tri-tips became BBQ in a Cup.

“It’s like a BBQ Sundae,” he said. “The base is beans, the BBQ is next and the mashed potatoes go on top. Drizzle with BBQ sauce, shredded cheese and top with a cherry tomato.”

Foley recalled when someone almost set the Ag Center on fire cooking popcorn outside.

“We were done using the smoker - it was Friday,” he said. “They realized it was taking a long time to cook the popcorn [in the popcorn machine] so they heated up ready-made popcorn on the cooker.”

The BBQ smoker was still hooked up to Scott Hubbard’s trailer, which was parked right under the intake fan to the Ag Center and right by the cooker. Some of the grease from the BBQ smoker caught on fire and all that smoke went billowing into the building.

“It’s 5:00, people are heading to the rodeo and it’s on fire,” Foley said. “[The popcorn people] said they were trying to make it smell like fresh popcorn.”

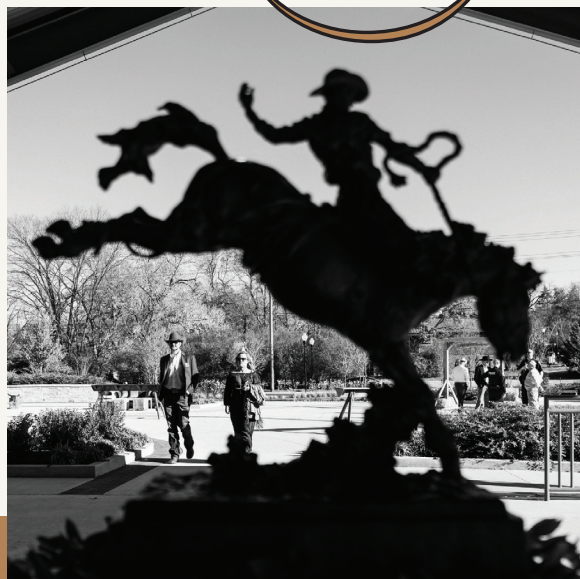
That’s up for debate. Fortunately the only thing affected was the smoker, which turned out to be a blessing when, while the BBQ crew was cleaning it after the fire, they discovered it was about to fall apart.

On Saturday nights, after the last cowboy and patron left the facility, members of the Rodeo committee were treated to a steak dinner. Foley recalled his father helping marinate 90 steaks in his kitchen.

“I’ve been in the Rotary since 1998 and have yet to see a full rodeo,” he said.



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Photos by Rebecca Renee, Celis Taylor, and Arklight Media Co.

Celebrating 75 Years of the Franklin Rodeo

Franklin Rodeo planning committee goes the extra mile

BY RUTH NICOLAUS
FOR THE WILLIAMSON HERALD

A year-round endeavor for club members. Franklin Noon Rotarians and several hundred volunteer's work to produce the Franklin Rodeo.

When the 75th edition of the Franklin Rodeo kicks off May 14-16, several hundred people will be in the background, working to produce the event.

And it takes an army to make it all happen.

From ushers to concession stands to ticketing, parking, advertising, and so much more, it takes a lot of people to put on the three-day event.

The core of the group who produce the rodeo is the 25-member rodeo committee, a sub-set of the Franklin Noon Rotary Club. Those people are assisted by about 150 Noon Rotary Club members and 300 volunteers, who show up the week of the rodeo and every night, to work.

For Rotarian Gavin Moon, it's been part of his life since childhood. He remembers having a lemonade stand in



SUBMITTED

Members of the Franklin Noon Rotary and the Rodeo committee at a previous Main Street Festival in downtown Franklin. The club was back this year promoting the upcoming Rodeo.

his front yard as the Franklin Rodeo parade passed by, years ago.

Moon's duties for the rodeo include marketing, promotions, signage and social media. The committee creates a monthly calendar of everything that needs to be done for the rodeo, "so we aren't consumed by being overwhelmed," he said. "It's an evolving workbook that keeps us on point and organized."

He's thankful for the 300 volunteers from outside the club who help make the rodeo happen. "They're an invaluable part of our production," he said. "Without them you couldn't have a rodeo. People volunteer every

year, and they love it."

Rotarians and volunteers put in a tremendous number of hours setting up prior to the rodeo, working the actual event, and tearing down afterwards. And that doesn't count the thousands of hours the rest of the year, preparing reports for sponsors, garnering new sponsors, setting up advertising campaigns, and the hundreds of other little details that need to be done.

The can-do positive attitudes among the Rotarians are contagious; everyone is prepared to work hard and do their best, Moon said.

"We're big cheerleaders, and people are motivated by it," he said. "When ev-

erybody owns their job and takes it to heart, we will all be greater together."

Once the rodeo's bills are paid, the money left over is given to local charities. As a service organization, this is the mission of the Noon Rotary Club. Last year, the club supported more than 75 non-profits in the community.

Patty Bearden is another rodeo committee member who, as director of community relations and marketing, makes sure the rodeo isn't far from the public's mind all year long.

"We make sure the rodeo is visible year-round," she said, "not just at rodeo time." She sets up and mans



SUBMITTED

The Rodeo Committee attends the Rodeo Convention in Las Vegas each December to learn more about rodeos and meet with potential acts.

marketing booths at various events in Williamson County and beyond: the Main Street Festival, the Williamson County Fair, the Pumpkin Fest, Leiper's Fork Christmas parade, and more.

"There's so much going on in this community, and we want to connect with as many different groups and people as we can," she said.

Devin Gilliam has been heavily involved with the rodeo since 2022 in a variety of ways. Planning is year-round, he said, with the eight weeks after rodeo a slower time, but by July and August, "you're back at it again," he said.

He's proud of the rodeo and what it means to people. "It's been a source of entertainment and a way of giving back to the communi-

ty," he said. "We do our best to put on the best possible show we can, while generating money for charities."

Rotarian Mark Tumbler first attended the Franklin Rodeo as a college student.

While at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, he would come to Franklin on the weekends with his college roommate, who was a Franklin native. He attended the rodeo, and said, "I was just enthralled with it," so much that he joined the rodeo team at UT-Knoxville as a team roper.

His duties at the rodeo include technology, point of sale, ticketing (he and fellow Rotarian Armando Estrada are known as the "ticket czars"), and internet.

"We have our committee

>>>PLANNING,
Continued on Page C13

Bledsoe

Continued from Page C9

siast.

"It's a family event," she said. "I used to invite 12 people, and we would all be in a box. Now it's down to 10 people—often, they're friends who have never been to a rodeo. This year I'm bringing a young boy who's never been before."

She reminisced about when parent volunteers from local schools would set up concession booths at the County Center, and the Jim Warren rodeos to raise funds for school projects and programs, and how people used to bring their dogs to the rodeo. "That was before the Ag Center," she remarked.

Joan spoke of her admiration for trick riders. "They perform moves that cowboys used more than a century ago during trail drives and while escaping attacks from enemies," she said. "I even tried trick riding. Mr. Ferns on Franklin Road had a big Percheron. I stood up four or five feet on him—that was enough for me." After that, she taught her horse to dance. "I love animals," she said. "I think I probably could have pursued trick riding, but I enjoyed trail riding more. Rodeo is something everyone should experience."

Joan deeply admires bull riders as well, recalling that her son was a bull rider in his younger years. Her son was a bull rider in his younger years, then he got smart. Her biggest "see" was the lady bull rider from Liberty, Texas. She was impressed.

Now she's looking forward to making new rodeo memories at this year's rodeo.



FILE

Joan Bledsoe, who has been to all 74 Franklin Rodeos, will be at this year's as well.



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Celebrating 75 Years of the Franklin Rodeo

'Americana, all the way' - Franklin Rodeo partners make it happen

BY RUTH NICOLAUS
FOR THE WILLIAMSON HERALD

When fans pour into the Franklin Rodeo this weekend, they'll see cowboys and cowgirls, bronc riding and bull riding, racing and roping.

But behind the scenes, it's the dozens of sponsors, hundreds of volunteers, and thousands of hours that make the rodeo happen.

The sponsors are crucial to the success of the Franklin Rodeo, said Devin Gilliam, rodeo director and a member of the Franklin Noon Rotary Club, which has produced the rodeo since 1949.

"We rely on the support of our many generous partners," he said. "They help us as we raise money for the many charities and organizations the Noon Rotary Club Foundation supports."

One of the major sponsors of the rodeo, Schneider Electric in Franklin, uses the rodeo as a fun family outing for its employees, said Joseph Metcalfe, general Manager.

"We like to do events during the course of the year that are in tune with our people and their families," he said. "We appreciate our people and their families for the hard work their family leader is doing."

Schneider Electric provides tickets to employees and families to attend the rodeo.

Metcalfe appreciates the rodeo atmosphere as well.

"I know how wholesome they



Barrel racer Sally Young at the 2024 Franklin Rodeo.



Waylon Bourgeois competes in the bareback riding at the 2024 Franklin Rodeo.

are," he said. "Pride for the U.S. and our military is evident, as is respect for our elders."

Tractor Supply has partnered with the rodeo for more than a decade, said Kimberley Gardiner, chief marketing officer, and they love the connection the rodeo has with community.

"With our headquarters in Middle Tennessee, this event is especially meaningful," she said. "It's an opportunity to come together

as neighbors to support charitable efforts that make a real impact locally."

They are pleased to support Rotary through the Franklin Rodeo.

"We admire how the Rotary brings people together to support local causes and create meaningful change," Gardiner said.

Because of its partners, the Franklin Rodeo is able to provide a professional rodeo event with an affordable ticket cost, Gilliam said.

And the Noon Rotary Club is able to give back to the community. Since the rodeo started, millions of dollars have been given to area charities and nonprofits. Last year alone, the Franklin Noon Rotary Club Foundation granted more than \$300,000 in donations to more than 60 organizations.

Metcalfe, his family and Schneider Electric employees enjoy the rodeo.

"It's Americana, all the way."

Other major partners with the Franklin Rodeo include Farm Credit/Rural First; Uber Eats; Williamson Health; Columbia/Fayetteville Dodge; Bone and Joint Clinic and Southern Events.

The Franklin Rodeo is May 14-16 with shows starting each night at 7 p.m. Gates open at 5:30 p.m.

Standing room only tickets are available online at FranklinRodeo.com.

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Celebrating 75 Years of the Franklin Rodeo

Franklin Rodeo to establish permanent park

BY RUTH NICOLAUS
FOR THE WILLIAMSON HERALD

The Franklin Rodeo is getting its own piece of the park.

A triangular piece of the Jim Warren Park in Franklin, consisting of 1.4 acres, will be dedicated as the Franklin Rodeo Plaza.

Situated between Boyd Mill Avenue and Culverson Boulevard, it will include a bronze statue of a cowboy riding a bucking horse.

The rodeo park will also include benches, lighting, landscaping, historical markers, and a walking trail with signage that tells the 75-year history of the rodeo.

It's a partnership between the Franklin Noon Rotary Club and the City of Franklin Parks and Recreation Department, said Lisa Clayton, director of Parks and Recreation.

"We wanted to share the

story of the Franklin Rodeo," she said. "The rodeo has so many stories, so many people, and so many things they've been involved in. It made sense to allow for this space. It's a place to come in, sit, ponder, remember, and learn more about the Franklin Rodeo."

Because it's in an athletic park, with sports activities, the area sees, on average, 4,000-6,000 people every weekend, Clayton said, with more than 100,000 visitors annually.

Judy Hayes believes it's fitting that the location is at Jim Warren Park, the same place where the rodeo took place for 51 years. Hayes' late husband, Jim, was a former member of the Franklin Noon Rotary Club and a rodeo volunteer.

"It's certainly worth the effort to have the statue where the rodeo first started," she said. "Rodeo has

been a vital part of our community," and it was a large part of her and Jim's lives. Jim was the rodeo announcer in the late 1960s and promoted it on radio stations WIZO and WAKM, both of which he co-owned.

"I certainly wanted my husband's commitment, and therefore my commitment, to be involved with the statue."

The rodeo celebrates its 75th anniversary in 2026; since its inception in 1949, it has raised over \$3 million for charities in Williamson County and middle Tennessee.

But for Pat Dunn, a Franklin Noon Rotary Club member and a rodeo volunteer, it's more than just the donations.

"The rodeo is not just where we raise money for charity," she said, "but it's something we give to the community through hav-



Rendering of Franklin Rodeo Plaza

ing a fabulous event. It's wholesome entertainment. It's clean: God, country, and family, and that's what we represent."

The statue is being designed by Scott Rogers, a nationally recognized monument and western art sculptor from Logan, Utah. It will stand 12 feet tall and 9 feet wide, surrounded by a native Tennessee fieldstone wall and landscaping.

The bronze is scheduled to be installed in the park in June 2026.

There are numerous ways for people to be part of the Franklin Rodeo Plaza, from funding a portion of the sculpture to dedicating a park bench or historical marker to a family member or business. For further information, contact Pat Dunn (patdunn@usit.net.) Clayton, director of the

City of Franklin Parks and Recreation Department, says it's a fitting tribute.

The rodeo is part of the history here, and you can't deny it.

"The rodeo is Franklin." The 2026 Franklin Rodeo will be held May 14-16. For more information, visit the website at FranklinRodeo.com.



SUBMITTED

Tough Enough to Wear Pink night- Rotarians donate to the WMC Breast Center.



DERBY JONES

The ladies of the Franklin Noon Rotary club work year-around to promote the Rodeo. Club members are Judy Herbert, Patty Bearden, Anne Rainey, Catherine Lamson, Robin Baldree, Ali Adair, and Nancy Scott before the 2024 Veterans Day Parade.

Planning

Continued from Page C11

of 25," he said, "and each person has a designated job to do and a committee to help with it."

One of the newest members of the Noon Rotary Club is Robin Baldree, who joined in 2022. For the rodeo, she assists with sponsorships, graphic design, social media, and the website.

She loves being part of the rodeo team. Rodeo week, which this year kicks off on May 9 with the parade, "is like birthday week," she said, where a person "celebrates all week long. It's a lot of fun."

There's a strong sense of fellowship among the workers, both Rotarians and volunteers.

"The camaraderie, working with our volunteers is a big bonding thing for us," Moon said. "You get to know each other the week of rodeo."

Baldree agreed. "If you want to get to know everybody in this club, work the rodeo," she said. "You make friends. One of my closest friends is Christine (Wilson, a Noon Rotary Club member), and it's because of rodeo."

It's also a labor of love for everyone involved.

For Baldree, she loves giving back. "I see the work we do, and what we give back," she said. "And I see the people whose lives you've touched in giving of yourself."

Bearden had the privilege last year of delivering rodeo proceeds checks to charities, and it was a moving experience. When she took the check to the Tennessee Baptist Children's Home, she was told the money would go to buy furniture for a boys' room. "I took the check to the house parents," she said, "and I thought they were going to cry." The children who come to the home have nothing but the clothes they're wearing, and to have furniture for their bedroom is so important.

For Moon, it's the same. "From a philanthropic standpoint, it makes you feel good to bust your rear end,

and turn around and give the money away to those who need it."

"We're making money for others who need it," he said. "That's a powerful thing, and it's fun. We love it."

This year's Franklin Rodeo, the 75th edition, is May 14-16 and is held at the Williamson County Ag Expo Center. Performances begin at 7 pm nightly.

Tickets range in price

from \$25-\$45 and can be purchased online at FranklinRodeo.com. All seats are

reserved. Fans are urged to buy tickets soon, as they sell out quickly.

For more information, visit it www.franklinrodeo.com

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Celebrating 75 Years of the Franklin Rodeo

Don Wade: A Franklin Rodeo legend

BY CAROLE ROBINSON
SENIOR STAFF WRITER

Don Wade was born in Linden, Tennessee, and spent most of his adult life in Franklin. Now at the age of 90, Wade proudly declares, "I am the only living person to have competed in all three [Franklin Rodeo] arenas," embodying the spirit of our hometown cowboy.

Wade's passion for rodeo began the day he attended his first event. He was immediately captivated by the cowboy lifestyle and knew it was what he wanted for his life. His journey started soon after that initial rodeo when he discovered his first rope. Nothing was safe from his roping attempts, including his father's small cow herd.

"I began chasing calves on foot around the pasture," he recalled. It was amusing for his dad—until young Don managed to rope a calf and couldn't get the rope off. "My dad got pretty annoyed after that and would take my rope away from me if I roped a calf," Wade said. "That just made me want to do it more. I always wanted to be a cowboy."

Eventually, Wade mastered roping. However, his dreams were put on hold when he married Sara "Sa-



TWO LOCAL COWBOYS WHO COMPETED IN FRANKLIN RODEOS - DON WADE AND RAY "KID" MARLEY

die" Wade and took a job as a salesman at Ambrose Printing Company, selling ledger books to county departments in West and Middle Tennessee—well before the era of computers.

With his cowboy passion still burning, Sadie encouraged Wade to buy his first roping horse, a roan named Buck. His rodeo career began shortly after, starting with small local events and entering steer wrestling. Unfortunately, this led to a trip to the hospital with a broken arm and a per-

manent bend in his arm, prompting a shift back to bulldogging.

While working in Nashville, Wade met Preston Fowlkes Sr., a Texas rodeo stock contractor who moved to Franklin and played a vital role in starting the first Franklin Rodeo. When the Wades moved to Nashville to be closer to Don's sales area, Fowlkes helped them find a small white house on Lewisburg Pike.

On the dawn of their first day in the new house, Fowlkes was banging on the

side of the building, yelling, "The bucking horses have gotten out!" Wade quickly dressed and jumped into Fowlkes's truck. They drove to Sneed Road, an area now called Laurelbrook, where Fowlkes rented land for his bucking horses. The two cowboys spent the day rounding up the strays and returning them to their field.

"When I got back, Sadie had the house all set up," Don remarked. "I didn't think that was a very bad trade."

After collaborating with Wade, Fowlkes hired him to haul stock for his Lone Star Rodeos across the country, providing Wade with invaluable roping experience that eventually led him to a professional career. "Preston taught me a lot about roping," Wade said. "I respected him a lot, and he respected me. He was a Master of Twine."

Wade reminisced about rodeos at the County Center, where bulls often escaped on Saturday nights. "I realized pretty soon that the cowboys were letting them out for a little excitement," he said. "When I threatened to tell Preston, they stopped doing that. Those cowboys didn't want Preston mad at them."

By the late 1960s, Wade



DON WADE IN 1976, A LOCAL COWBOY IS THE ONLY LIVING PERSON WHO HAS COMPETER AT ALL THREE FRANKLIN RODEO RODEO ARENAS.

met Wayne Dunn, and they began roping calves together at Howard Johnson's farm on Highway 96 West, where McDonald's and Alexander Plaza now stand, as well as at the Dunn family home on Franklin Road. While practicing, they tried Team Roping.

"I started heading, but when we couldn't find anyone to heal, I just took it upon myself to start heal-

ing," Wade said. Their partnership proved successful, with both competitors earning "lots of buckles and trophy saddles" from major rodeo events, including the Franklin Rodeo. Of all the Franklin Rodeo locations, the Williamson County Ag Center became his favorite venue. "It's a great facility," he said. "We are lucky to have it."

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Celebrating 75 Years of the Franklin Rodeo

A New Chapter for the next generation at the Franklin Rodeo

BY CASSIE JONES
SOUTHERN EXPOSURE MAGAZINE
PUBLISHER

Trace Alexander's first memory of the Franklin Rodeo is from his dad's shoulders. He was five years old, surrounded by his friends, looking out over the dirt and the lights and the noise of it all. That same year, he ran in the calf scramble and came home with a ribbon. He watched the family video of it on repeat for the better part of a year.

He and his family have been back every year since.

Trace grew up in south Franklin and went to Battle Ground Academy for all thirteen years, where he wrestled and ran track and won two state championships along the way. The Alexander name has been part of Williamson County for seven generations, most recently through Alexander Toyota. Trace is the first one to do something different.

What he did was oatmeal. It started when he was running competitively. He learned what every athlete eventually learns, which is that what you eat fuels how you perform and recover. What he found on the shelf was either bland or loaded with sugar. So, he made his own.

"When I was trying to become a better athlete, I Googled 'top 10 healthiest foods' and oatmeal kept coming up," said Alexander. "I became obsessed because I realized you could make it taste really good while still being good for you. Good energy, good fiber, good carbs. But when I wanted something quick, every store-bought option was either loaded with sugar or tasted like cardboard. I wanted to blend the two and make the best tasting oatmeal you've ever had



Complimentary Trace's Oats samples will be available at the 75th Franklin Rodeo.

that's also actually good for you. Once people online kept asking to try mine, I knew there was something there."

Alexander even started taking pictures and videos of his oatmeal creations. Eventually gaining millions of followers across Instagram and TikTok.

"I started my page January 1st, 2020, as a joke. My friends were tired of me texting them pictures of my oatmeal, so I figured I'd post them online. Then COVID hit, I started sharing more recipes, and about nine months in I posted my first TikTok. One went viral shortly after, and six years later I've grown to over four million followers across platforms."

"That set the stage for the brand because I'd already been the oatmeal guy for years. Launching Trace's Oats was a way to put everything I'd learned into one

product and show people that oatmeal can taste good and be good for you."

The result was Trace's Oats, which launched in 2025 and has been growing ever since. High protein, no added sugar, and flavors that taste like dessert.

This year, Trace is bringing the brand back to where it all started for him. Trace's Oats is sponsoring the mutton busting prelims at the 75th Annual Franklin Rodeo and setting up a booth in the fan zone.

The car business was one chapter. The oatmeal is the next.

"I learned at a young age that what you put into something is what you get out. As an athlete, you have to show up and get 1% better every day, even on the days you don't feel like it. That drive translates directly to building running a business. There are things you don't

want to do, things that take time, but with consistency you see the growth. I've always wanted to start my own business because I grew up watching my dad and my family do it. I was sweeping car floors and cleaning cars for the family business when I was a little kid, and that work ethic poured into me early," said Alexander.

Find Trace's Oats in the Fan Zone at Ag Expo Park during the 75th Annual Franklin Rodeo. Come grab a sample and see what Trace Alexander has built from the ground up.

Find out more by going to tracesoats.com and follow him on Instagram @eat-tracesoats.



Trace Alexander, owner and founder of Trace's Oats.

Congratulations on the 75th Anniversary of the Franklin Rodeo

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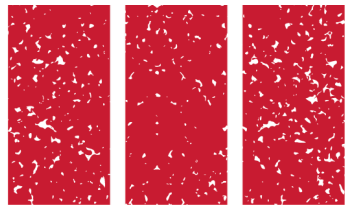
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CONGRATULATIONS TO THE FRANKLIN RODEO ON REACHING THIS INCREDIBLE MILESTONE!

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