

ELLENSBURG Rodeo

Since 1923
Labor Day Weekend



Rodeo board honors longtime fan

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Ellensburg, Wash. (Aug. 17, 2011) — Cliff Gage, a lifelong resident of the Kittitas Valley, once lived where the offices for the Kittitas County Fairgrounds now stand.

Born in 1915, 96-year-old Gage remembers when his family's home and orchard were used as a picnic area while community volunteers cleared the sagebrush and built the Ellensburg Rodeo grounds. He remembers a campfire and a big pot of lima beans. He was 8 years old.

The Ellensburg Rodeo Board of Directors has dedicated the Monday performance of this year's Ellensburg Rodeo to Cliff Gage.

"Cliff comes to the rodeo every year," said Rodeo Board President Bill Lowe. "He is very active."

Lowe said it's nice to recognize a longtime competitor, volunteer and rodeo fan.

"He's a really nice person," Lowe said. "I think he's been to the rodeo 70 years in a row or something."

Make that 88 years.

Gage went to Ellensburg's first rodeo in 1923 and hasn't missed a Labor Day rodeo in Ellensburg since. He even sits in the same seats every year right in the front row corner near the roping chutes. He's already got his tickets for this year's rodeo.

But rodeo isn't just a spectator sport for Gage. He did his share of competing in the arena over the years as a roper, bareback and saddle bronc rider and as a bull rider.

"Didn't do too well," Gage said about the bull riding. Once he broke his leg or shattered it, rather during a practice round at a neighbor's house in the 1940s.

"It's in your blood," Gage said about the sport of rodeo. "Our whole family, all my brothers took a chance at it."

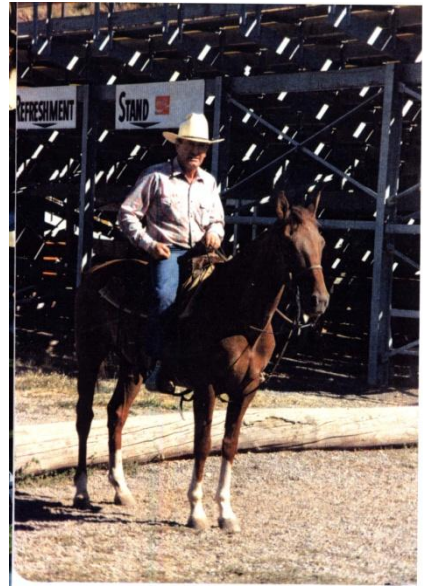
Gage never misses the Ellensburg Rodeo Parade either. He and his family have claimed a little spot on the route in the middle of Pearl Street across from Wood's Ace Hardware.

As for a favorite rodeo event, Gage says he can't really choose one.

"I kind of like the bucking horses," Gage said. "I got bucked off of a lot of them."

Gage also was the drillmaster for the Wranglerettes, a competitive horseback drill team that performed routines at high speeds. The group no longer exists, but Gage led the team to victory many times.

Gage is the last surviving founder of the Kittitas County Roping Club which started more than



60 years ago. He stopped riding horses when he turned 90 years old.

Gage's daughter Ruth Ann Olney said her father hasn't missed a year at the rodeo, but one year he had to miss a performance or two because he was in the hospital.

Gage married his wife of 75 years, the late Phyllis Rhe Gage, in 1935. Phyllis was the daughter of George and Mamie Ferguson. Cowboys competed in rodeo events at the Ferguson Ranch before the Ellensburg Rodeo was established.

Cliff and Phyllis' marriage brought together two families with a shared passion for rodeo and Phyllis accompanied Cliff to as many rodeos as she was able.

The Gage family was inducted into the Ellensburg Rodeo Hall of Fame for the various ways its members have contributed to and participated in the rodeo over the years.

This year's rodeo runs from Sept. 2-5, 2011. More information about its many competitions and events can be found online at www.ellensburgrodeo.com.

The Ellensburg Rodeo was founded in 1923. Held every Labor Day weekend, it is one of the top 20 professional rodeos worldwide. It features more than 500 competitors and a total payout of over \$400,000. Ellensburg, Wash., is located in the heart of Washington State, approximately 90 minutes east of Seattle.

Ellensburg Rodeo Spokesman: Brian Twardoski -- (509) 260-0129 -- brian@twardoski.com