

MOUNTAINEER STAMPEDE



High School Rodeo Event Draws Competitors to Winfield Riding Club

(Winfield, W.Va.) - Students from seven states packed the Winfield Riding Club for the “Mountaineer Stampede” youth rodeo March 31-April 2.

The event included 180 individual competitors from grade school to high school competing simultaneously in two arenas. Besides West Virginia, participants came from Ohio, Kentucky, Virginia, Maryland, North Carolina and Michigan.

The schedule included a full slate of rodeo events, including team roping and bull riding. The Fellowship of Christian Athletes led a “Cowboy Church” on Sunday morning.

“These kids are competing for championship buckles and points to qualify to go to the national championships in Gillette, Wy., or the junior high [championships] in Lebanon, Tenn.,” said Stampede Event Director Steve Asbury.

“Mostly kids don’t get the chance to compete against other states. It gives them a chance to find out ... where they stand against the other states. There’s a whole bunch of kids here that will be going to nationals. I can guarantee you I know of at least three kids that are going to college next year for rodeo,” he said, pointing out that the current breakaway roping national champ was involved in the Winfield competition.

He also noted that there are about 250 schools throughout the country with rodeo programs and that the national high school rodeo finals is the biggest single rodeo in the world with over 1,500 competitors.

Commissioner of Agriculture Kent Leonhardt addressed the youngsters during the contestants' meeting Friday evening.

"The high school rodeo association is another great venue where our youth can enter agriculture," he said. "It's the fourth year for that event ... it's been very well attended and the contestants are enthusiastic."

One of those contestants, an alumna, is Emily Parent. Her mom is the rodeo secretary, her dad is the rodeo vice president and her sister is a contestant this year.

"Ever since I've been in rodeo, it has taught me a tremendous amount about agriculture. It's given me a much greater discipline and I've learned so much responsibility," said Parent, who grew up on a farm and has been riding since she was about two years old. She began barrel racing at around age 11 and is currently studying agriculture education at Potomac State University.

The event is also an economic driver for Winfield. "You've got all these people coming here to compete," said Asbury. "They have to eat, they have to buy fuel. The hotels up the road are pretty much full. As you can see, our parking lot is packed with trailers."

Proceeds from this rodeo are going to the barn-building fund at Camp Virgil Tate in Kanawha County to construct a state-of-the-art horse facility that will encourage even more ag-related events.

