

LABOR DAY

OPINION/EDITORIAL

Tough enough to compete — Sporleder, Walton prove they're winners

By Christina Boyce
Special to The Chronicle-News

Anne Sporleder and Micheli Walton knew they had what it takes to win. As the only contestants in the two divisions of the 105th Annual Trinidad Round-Up Rodeo Queen Contest, each was sure to get the title. Both wanted to prove they deserved the win. The competition is open to residents of Las Animas, Otero, Huerfano and Baca counties in Colorado, and Colfax and Union counties in New Mexico. This year's contest was held August 22 at the A.R. Mitchell Museum of Western Art.

Rodeo and fair queen contests are proving grounds for girls and young women developing skills in equine care, horsemanship, public speaking and the ability to serve as ambassadors for their towns and counties, for rodeo and the agricultural way of life. Big smiles and beautiful outfits are part of the package, but if you can't ride a horse you can't enter the ring. Local winners can continue on the queen's path to compete at the national level where the winner earns the title of Miss Rodeo USA. At each step, contestants represent their communities.

While working for KRTN radio in 2013, I had the good fortune to interview Colfax County Fair Queen Ashlee Rose Mills. Mills produced and delivered a weekly rodeo report for the station. The project helped her hone speaking and production skills as she prepared to compete for the title of Miss Rodeo New Mexico. She was also working on her undergraduate degree with a major in criminology and a minor in psychology from the University of New Mexico at Taos.

Mills had a clear understanding of the important role fair queens have in promoting their communities. She produced a trunk show, inviting fellow fair queens to participate in a display of their contest wardrobes. Each queen gave a speech promoting her county. The event demonstrated how competition encourages cooperation amongst contestants and showed me how valuable these queens are in promoting tourism and attracting new people to their counties.

Mills became Miss Rodeo New Mexico and went on to compete in Las Vegas, Nevada for the Miss Rodeo USA title, promoting Colfax County and New Mexico all the way. She



Photo by Tim Keller / The Chronicle-News

Micheli Walton and Anne Sporleder, from left, are the 2015 Junior and Senior Trinidad Round-Up Rodeo and Fair Queens.

made it to the semi-final round and won the Peoples Choice Award, given by fellow contestants. I came to recognize that the contests help young women develop skills, character and connections to propel them forward in their lives.

So, earlier this summer when Trinidad Round-Up Rodeo Association's Karen Buhr and Kristy Bennett asked if they could hold the 2015 TRA Queen Contest in the Mitchell Museum and mount their historical display of queen photographs in our window, an annual tradition, I said yes... absolutely yes!

Buhr and Bennett and their team spent a day setting up an exhibit of more than 72 portraits, an engaging view into Trinidad's history for visitors in our downtown historic district. On the morning of the contest I had the honor of welcoming the gathering to the museum and expressed my admiration for Sporleder's and Walton's insistence on participating in the full contest though no one challenged them for their crowns. Sporleder and Walton were tough enough to compete by themselves. 2014 Senior and Junior Queens Mikayla Arlint and Jackie Jolly cheered them on. I encouraged the girls to speak throughout the year ahead about their competition experience to inspire more participation in 2016.

The A.R. Mitchell Museum is proud to have a role in this fine tradition by hosting the annual contest. Trinidad Round-Up Association's queen contests build women of

character. They give girls and young women the opportunity to demonstrate skills, knowledge and confidence. In supporting the younger girls coming up behind them, contestants learn compassionate leadership.

The A. R. Mitchell Museum Board of Directors and I congratulate Anne Sporleder and Micheli Walton on their new roles as 2015-2016 Trinidad Round-Up Rodeo Fair Senior Queen and Junior Queen. Have fun this year! Take every opportunity to show people that you've earned your crowns. You are exactly the right girls to wear them.

As for Miss Rodeo New Mexico 2013, Ashlee Rose Mills is in her second year of law school at the University of New Mexico. Last year she ran for office, becoming the youngest elected official in the history of her home town of Eagle Nest, New Mexico: Today she is that town's municipal judge.

Riding in last weekend's rodeo and parade, Sporleder and Walton looked happy in their new jobs. Their journeys are just beginning and they'll arrive at success. Our two queens make this clear: The win is not in the crown but in the character gained through determination and effort.

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Crowds fill the streets for annual downtown parade

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