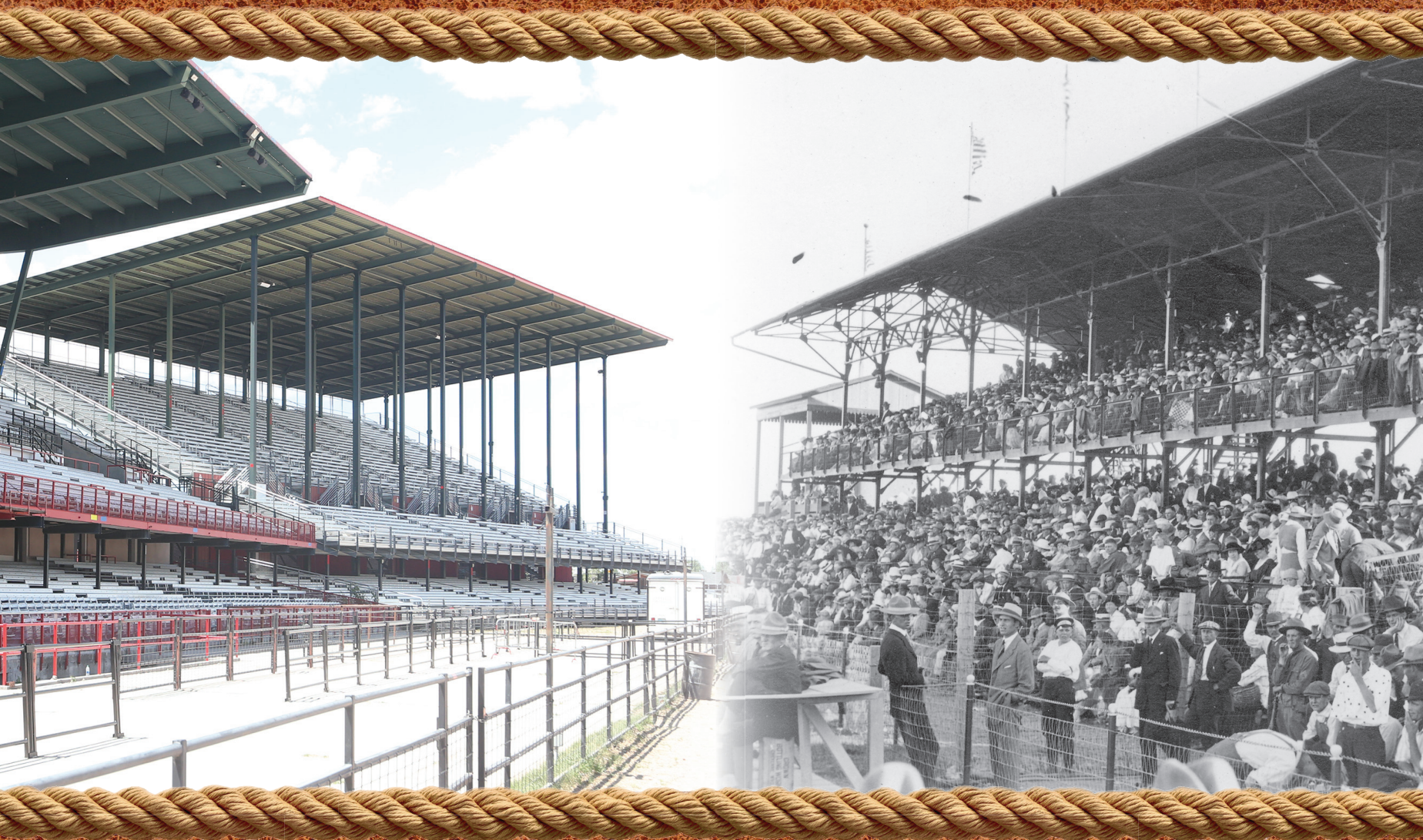


July 17, 2020

CHEYENNE FRONTIER DAYS

For the first time in its 124-year history,
the "Daddy of 'em All" was cancelled in
light of the COVID-19 pandemic.



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JJ Elshere of Hereford, S.D., competes in saddle bronc riding July 27, 2019, during the 123rd Cheyenne Frontier Days Rodeo at Frontier Park Arena in Cheyenne. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, CFD officials concluded they would have cancel the 124th "Daddy of 'em All" for the safety of patrons, workers, volunteers and competitors. For CFD to move ahead with its decision to cancel, the event's General Committee, composed of several volunteers in different areas, first had to make a recommendation to the CFD Board of Directors. The board then made the ultimate call to hold off until 2021. Wyoming Tribune Eagle/file

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Perseverance

Cheyenne Frontier Days has stayed strong through all crises but one



**Michael
Kassel**

Cheyenne, like so many other communities across our nation, is no stranger to crisis.

There is little else to do in the face of misfortune but to face up to a bad situation and do what must be done. Stepping up to a challenge is what

we, as Americans, seem to be particularly good at, and our current circumstances with COVID-19 are no exception.

For Cheyenne, difficulty prompts

us to find a better way of doing things or demonstrate qualities that are a source of pride and accomplishment that will carry our community through the worst of times.

For its 124 years of existence, Cheyenne Frontier Days has been an exemplar of both of these talents.

The event itself was born out of adversity. In 1893, the nation collapsed into the greatest depression it had yet seen. In that crisis, railroads buckled after making a series of bad investments, dragging banks, businesses and the rest of the economy down with them. The government did not have the resources to help, and citizens and communities

alike had to claw their way back to prosperity.

This crisis seized Cheyenne, a good railroad town, and by 1897, everyone was desperate for a boost to the economy. Fortunately, an enterprising railroad ticket agent was touring the Rocky Mountain Front Range, creating small community fairs to draw holiday seekers out of Denver. When Frederick Angier approached Cheyenne business leaders for ideas to create such an event, they struggled to help. Unlike other communities, Cheyenne wasn't a farming town, so it seemed they had little to offer.

Fortunately, while waiting for his

train to leave town, Angier saw a contest that changed everything. He witnessed a group of surly cowboys attempt to wrestle a determined horse into a boxcar. Angier was thoroughly entertained and noticed that a large crowd had gathered to see the spectacle, cheering as much for the horse as for the cowboys.

Struck with an epiphany, he rushed to see Edward A. Slack, the editor of the Cheyenne Daily Leader newspaper, and together they formulated something new: a festival that celebrated the wild lifestyle of the cowboy. When Angier and Slack approached the city business leaders again, the men realized that

Cheyenne's own past was a perfect story of a passing frontier experience, the stuff legends were made of.

The rest is history. On Sept. 23, 1897, the first Cheyenne Frontier Day was celebrated, and drew a crowd of around 4,000. The experience of those 4,000 people was spread through newspapers and by word of mouth that this was an authentic Western experience and a ridiculously good time.

From that first day, Cheyenne Frontier Days continued and expanded year by year to become the great celebration of the American West we enjoyed through 2019.

To say that CFD's success was preordained is to ignore several close calls that nearly spelled its demise. The first major threat to its survival came when the event's owners (you read that right) decided that they could no longer afford to personally run the show after its 1905 season. They offered the Cheyenne Frontier Days celebration and grounds to whoever was willing to carry on the spectacle.

Surprisingly, no one came forward for a long time. There was concern about how city funds had been spent by CFD, and it wasn't until June 18, 1906, that these financial concerns were explained to a large group of concerned citizens gathered at the Laramie County Courthouse. They had come together to settle, once and for all, whether Cheyenne Frontier Days would continue.

With a satisfactory explanation by the CFD treasurer, businessmen, including the renowned Joseph M. Carey, resolved for Cheyenne Frontier Days to continue. To that end, calls went out for the mayor and the president of the Frontier Association to create a committee that would take over the effort. As a result, the Cheyenne Industrial Club, the precursor to our Chamber of Commerce, was born. Cheyenne Frontier Days became a community event. The crisis was averted, and the new leadership took CFD to ever greater heights.

The next calamity that seemed to spell certain doom for CFD was the entry of the United States into World War I. Immediately, speculation abounded as to what this ominous development would have on the future of the rodeo. Would all the cowboys be called up to serve? Would it be better to forego celebrations in light of this grave new reality?

T. Joe Cahill, secretary of CFD,



put people at ease when he announced that there would be no delay in moving forward with the event. Many cowboys, not yet touched by the draft, had already pledged to challenge each other for the title of World's Champion at the rodeo. Eddy McCarty of Goldsmith, Wyoming, was already planning to bring horses and cattle to CFD.

The celebration of the city's 50th anniversary and plans for a Wyoming pageant with the largest parade of automobiles in the state's history was already being arranged. Headlines cheered the continuation of CFD: "War Without Terror to Committee Which Will Direct Coming Frontier Day Shows."

The CFD celebration of 1918 was

equally exuberant, but the arrival of the scourge of the Spanish Flu in October looked ominous. At the height of the outbreak just before the beginning of 1919, people were wringing their hands in anxiety. Would CFD be held under the specter of quarantine? Fortunately, the disease burned itself out by March, and by the time CFD was held in July, there was no mention of the pandemic in local newspapers, and the event went happily along.

For 10 more years, Cheyenne Frontier Days grew more lavish and important in the public view. Hollywood actors, stars of the popular silent Westerns, descended on the city in droves to promote their films and to rub elbows with the living heroes of rodeo.

Above: By the summer of 1919, the Spanish Influenza was a distant memory. The crowds returned to Cheyenne Frontier Days, as can be seen by this parade photograph in front of the Wyoming Stock Growers Bank on Capitol Avenue. CFD Old West Museum/courtesy **Left:** Three Chiefs at Cheyenne Frontier Days in 1933. The man at left is Jonathan High Eagle, the last living survivor of the Battle of Little Big Horn. Wyoming State Archives, Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce Collection/courtesy

CFD thrived even though the rest of Wyoming silently slid into economic depression after 1919. When the rest of the country followed in 1929, the celebration seemed untouched as people continued to flock to the city to see the rodeo action and forget their troubles. No one was kidding themselves, however, and the CFD Committee watched as the profit margins continued to decline year by year.

What seemed to be the death knell for our celebration came after the 1932 show. For the first time, CFD lost money, going in the hole for \$7,008. Cheyenne Frontier Days also didn't have the \$15,000 projected to put on the next year's show. The budget for 1933 was cut dramatically, but even this didn't seem enough to honor the contracts that had already been made.

Story continues on page 6



The first Cheyenne Frontier Days HEELS at the chutes in 1935. In that year, Ed Storey, third from left, made a comment to four of his friends: "Aren't we a bunch of heels to do all this work gratuitously when others are paid?" He and the others became the first HEELS, a group of volunteers who work selflessly to ensure CFD's success. From left to right are: Emmett Storey (Chute No. 9 Boss), F.W. Fitch (Timer), Ed Storey (Announcer), William DeVere (Timer), George Storey (Timer), T.R. "Townie" Townsend (Timer) and Morton "Burk" Nesbitt (Clerk of the Course). Cheyenne Frontier Days Old West Museum/courtesy



Despite the hard times brought on by the Great Depression and near bankruptcy in 1932, the 1933 Cheyenne Frontier Days celebration was a success and returned CFD to profitability. This group of champions, all of whom rode for a reduced purse to help, are happy to celebrate their victory with Miss Frontier Maysie Mackay, third from right, and Lady-in-Waiting Louis Crane, right. Standing between the two queens is famed cowboy Turk Greenough, who won the saddle bronc contest and would do so again in 1935 and 1936. Cheyenne Frontier Days Old West Museum/courtesy



A bronc rider is seen in front of the bucking chutes at Cheyenne Frontier Days in 1917. Wyoming State Archives Meyers Collection/courtesy

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There seemed no way out but to declare bankruptcy and fold. But the people of Cheyenne did not let this happen.

A strong desire to save CFD came to the rescue. The Chamber issued bonds at a generous 5% interest to garner support and even put up the Chamber of Commerce Building as collateral. Everyone was suffering, however, and few bonds were sold. The banks of Cheyenne stepped in and made generous loans to keep the 1933 show afloat.

The CFD Committee implemented a combination of creative and draconian actions to stretch re-

sources as far as they could. One day was shaved off the schedule, a second parade was planned to keep public interest aroused, contractors accepted a reduction in their rates, and the cowboys were willing to ride for a smaller purse. By its close, the new measures were a success. The 1933 show earned a \$1,500 profit, and bonds to support CFD became a hot investment. By 1934, CFD earned enough money to pay off its debts and was once again on firm, profitable ground.

Another positive feature of the Great Depression was the rise of another organization determined to support CFD, regardless of its fu-

ture challenges. In 1935, a group of men finished a hard day working the rodeo and gathered at a small social to relax. One of the men, Ed Storey, commented that he and the rest of the gang were a "bunch of heels" for working for free while others were getting paid. The men were all volunteers, but wouldn't have it any other way. They vowed to do anything to keep the rodeo successful. Thus began a long tradition of a volunteer spirit at Cheyenne Frontier Days.

Today, there are several thousand people who dedicate their time without pay every year for the organization. Their efforts, and large

numbers, are the envy of rodeos around the nation and beyond. The small group of men who made that initial pledge has grown to become the famed HEELS organization, and they remain true to their creed: selflessly donating their time and resources towards CFD's success.

Through their efforts and those of many others, Cheyenne Frontier Days thrived through the rest of the Great Depression. When World War II arrived, everyone knew that the fight against Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany would be a far greater contest than the previous world war.

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Like communities around the nation, Cheyenne did all it could to support the war effort. With gas, tire and automobile shortages, many thought that it was impossible for people to come to the rodeo, not to mention the difficulty of getting cowboys due to the draft.

The Cheyenne Chamber of Commerce sent a letter to the War Department asking if it would recommend the cancellation of CFD for the duration of the war. Much to everyone's surprise, a telegram returned from the government stating that there was no need to shut down the rodeo due to the war.

Instead, it was seen as a great patriotic boon to have events like Cheyenne Frontier Days continue to keep up morale. It was also, according to the War Department, a great opportunity to offer a unique recreational experience for the 20,000 soldiers training at nearby Fort Warren.

On April 4, CFD Chairman Rudy Hoffman made the announcement that CFD and all the other rodeos in the state would continue. While the margins were smaller during the war, local citizens and soldiers alike thrilled at the spectacle, and Cheyenne Frontier Days' legend grew.

After the war, the popularity of the sport of rodeo and the golden age of the American Western flashed across movie and television screens across the nation. Cheyenne Frontier Days profited handsomely with this newfound popular interest. Through the 1950s and the tumultuous 1960s, CFD continued to grow, and success seemed almost inevitable year by year.

In 1977, a disaster befell CFD that threatened the event with its most immediate threat of closure. The tragedy struck at 6:45 a.m. July 25, the third day of the show. A USAF Thunderbird T-38 Talon jet aircraft, piloted by Capt. Charlie Carter, lost control and plummeted toward CFD's grounds shortly after takeoff. The fuselage of the stricken plane made impact in the cowboy campground east of the stands, narrowly missing two trailers. The bulk of the wreckage tumbled into in the stock pens, and debris was scattered everywhere.

Capt. Carter was killed after ejecting when his body struck a nearby food stand. His crew chief, Staff Sgt. Edward Foster, landed in the arena and suffered lacerations, yet survived. A young Cheyenne High



An unidentified U.S. Air Force official stands next to the wreckage of Capt. Charlie Carter's T-38 on July 25, 1977. What remains of the cockpit is closest to the camera. With the aircraft blocking the stock return runway, 200 volunteers had to re-route how animals were able to return to their pens. In two hours, and despite deplorable weather conditions, the pens and chute lanes were reconfigured, and the rodeo was able to continue without interruption. Cheyenne Frontier Days Old West Museum/courtesy

School band member who was cleaning the stands at the time was hit by some of the wreckage and suffered a broken arm. Two prize bucking bulls were killed at the point of final impact, and the stock pens and handling chutes were thrown into disarray.

News of the calamity spread quickly, and hundreds of volunteers and response teams from F.E. Warren Air Force Base descended on the site. Some couldn't imagine that CFD could continue. After Don Kensinger (serving as chute boss, committee representative and stock contractor) and Col. Bruce Krieder of the 90th Missile Wing had a brief discussion amid the wreckage, it was agreed that the Air Force could do a preliminary investigation and the volunteers would make necessary repairs to be ready for the show.

In a Herculean effort, 200 volunteers rerouted chute lanes and helped Air Force personnel clear

the debris from the stands and arena. By 1:30 p.m., the regular start time of the rodeo, everything was ready. The wreckage of the plane was covered with tarps, and the flag over the stands was flown at half-staff. The resourcefulness of the volunteers and the stalwart aid of the United States Air Force made the best of a horrific situation. The show went on.

For the four following decades, Cheyenne Frontier Days enjoyed good times and endured lean times, but it seemed that nothing could stop the joyful juggernaut from carrying forward. With due pride, Cheyenne and Cheyenne Frontier Days could celebrate the success of their event, which survived depressions, pandemics, tragedies and wars. It lived a charmed life, being missed by great calamities or somehow finding the means to carry on in spite of adversity.

As we now know, its remarkable streak of luck was not to last.

COVID-19 didn't seem like the thing that could give pause to the "Daddy of 'em All," but it did. The virus presented the CFD community its first no-win scenario. Citing concern for our community, visitors and volunteers, the Cheyenne Frontier Days Committee made the difficult decision not to hold the 2020 celebration to keep everyone healthy and safe.

The big question is what the community of Cheyenne, CFD's legion of fans and multitude of selfless helpers will do now that this year's event is canceled? There can be no doubt that this silent catastrophe will not keep a good show down. If nothing else, we can (and will) yet again make the best of a bad situation, reset our countdowns and charge forward toward next year.

Michael Kassel is associate director and curator at the Cheyenne Frontier Days Old West Museum and an adjunct instructor of history at Laramie County Community College. Email: mike.kassel@oldwestmuseum.org.

BOWING OUT GRACEFULLY

RODEO ORGANIZERS IN WYOMING DECIDE CANCELING EVENTS IS THE SMART DECISION AMID PANDEMIC

By Tom Coulter
Wyoming Tribune Eagle

The more Tom Hirsig thought about holding Cheyenne Frontier Days this summer, the less realistic the option appeared.

Eventually, Hirsig, who serves as CEO and president of Cheyenne's biggest annual event, had to accept a difficult fact: Even if CFD were to continue, it wouldn't be the event that residents know and love.

"With parades and carnivals and beer gardens and street dances and all those things, it's pretty hard to accommodate social distancing in those types of events," Hirsig said after the cancellation. "It's not so much the rodeo canceled, but all the things that make each event special. When you start peeling those things back, you become very common."

**"More work with
less volunteers
isn't a good recipe
for a great event."**

Tom Hirsig

CEO and president of
Cheyenne Frontier Days

this summer. But, eventually, the rodeo officials reached a broad consensus: they would all be making the individual decision to cancel their events.

Wyoming Gov. Mark Gordon, with representatives from the rodeos flanked behind him, explained the group's decision during a news conference May 27.

"In the end, going off half-cocked, in the collective minds of everyone up here, just wouldn't be worth it," Gordon said, holding back tears. "Holding these events without their night shows, their parades and their carnivals just wouldn't be the same."

The volunteers were a major point of concern when deciding whether to hold Cheyenne Fron-

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Hirsig and representatives from several other Wyoming rodeos met multiple times in April and May to discuss the possibility of holding their events



Cheyenne Frontier Days CEO Tom Hirsig speaks during a press conference May 27 inside the Capitol in downtown Cheyenne. Gov. Mark Gordon, while joined by rodeo leaders from across the state, announced the cancellation of the six largest rodeos in Wyoming due to COVID-19 concerns. Michael Cummo/Wyoming Tribune Eagle

tier Days, Hirsig said. The 10-day event normally includes more than 2,500 volunteers to ensure everything goes smoothly, and Hirsig said many from that volunteer group are older and more at risk of catching COVID-19.

"There have been a lot of our volunteers that couldn't participate this year, with the added workload of all the sanitization measures that we need to take," Hirsig said. "More work with less volunteers isn't a good recipe for a great event."

It's also worth considering the scale of CFD, compared to some of the state's other rodeo events. The summer nightly rodeos in Cody, for example, were allowed to begin June 15, but Hirsig noted the attendance is much smaller for those events, which mainly draw tourists en route to Yellowstone.

"When you do a festival or Cheyenne Frontier Days, everybody comes in, they drink beer, they hang around the beer tents," Hirsig said. "But the Cody Night Rodeo is typically tourists that just come out there, watch the rodeo and then go back to their hotel or wherever, so it's easier to control that type of a situation."

Though the governor's staff was on hand for discussions about the rodeos, the coordinators of each event had to make their own decisions on the cancellation. For CFD to move ahead with its decision to cancel, the event's General Committee, composed of several volunteers in different areas, first had to make a recommendation to the CFD Board of Directors. The board then made the ultimate call to hold off until 2021.

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Wyoming Gov. Mark Gordon speaks during a press conference May 27 inside the Capitol in downtown Cheyenne. Joined by rodeo leaders from across the state, Gordon announced the cancellation of the six largest rodeos in Wyoming due to COVID-19 concerns. Michael Cummo/Wyoming Tribune Eagle

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Other rodeo officials on the task force ultimately made the same call, as events in Laramie, Thermopolis and elsewhere were also canceled this year. As president of the Sheridan WYO Rodeo, Billy Craft said his team's decision to cancel stemmed from concerns about keeping people safe and risking a potential economic setback in the area.

"We're just now to the point where we're starting to open up a little bit again, and some things are starting to happen for some of the smaller Main Street-type businesses that haven't happened for a period of time," Craft said in early June.

"Our fear was that if we move forward, and for whatever reason ... we saw a spike in the COVID-19 virus,

At a glance

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, CFD President and CEO Tom Hirsig and representatives from several other Wyoming rodeos met multiple times in April and May to discuss the possibility of holding their events this summer. But, eventually, the rodeo officials reached a broad consensus: they needed to cancel their events.

that we ran the risk of shutting things back down for possibly an extended period of time, beyond what we've experienced already," he continued.

Such a fiasco, Craft said, could unintentionally "kill off" many of the businesses already struggling

"Our discussion is let's just kick the lid off of 2021 and plan every exciting thing we can plan for and hope by then we're back to some sense of normalcy."

Billy Craft

President of Sheridan WYO Rodeo

to survive.

Additionally, the insurance policies for the rodeo put a strain on the decision-makers. Craft noted his event's insurance policy would've required strict adherence to every public health directive sent by the state and the Professional Rodeo

Cowboys Association, at the risk of being held liable for an outbreak.

"If we were unable to comply with any one of those, they declare our liability coverage null and void," Craft said. "We could not risk what has been the largest event in our community for 90 years and risk eliminating that for good if something went wrong."

Next year will mark CFD's 125th year of existence, and Hirsig's team has already started planning for the event. Craft, meanwhile, has met with his board to get ready for next year's rodeo in Sheridan.

"Our discussion is let's just kick the lid off of 2021 and plan every exciting thing we can plan for and hope by then we're back to some sense of normalcy," Craft said.



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Family tradition

CEO TOM HIRSIG'S TIES TO THE "DADDY OF 'EM ALL" RUN DEEP

By Jeremiah Johnke
WyoSports

When he won the Cheyenne Frontier Days steer roping championship in 2002, Tom Hirsig did just about the only thing a member of his family hadn't done in Frontier Park Arena.

From providing stock to serving as Miss Frontier, the Hirsig family has been involved in nearly every facet of the "Daddy of 'em All" since its inception.

Hirsig – CFD's chief executive officer – briefly touched on his family history May 27 when he stepped to the podium to speak on behalf of Wyoming's six biggest rodeos and an-

nounce their joint decision not to hold their 2020 events because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"My family has been a part of CFD since the day it started," Hirsig said. "I have been every year since I was born. My sister was named lady-in-waiting for Miss Frontier, and soon after died in a traffic accident.

"My story is not unlike many of the people that work or volunteer to put these amazing events on and have put their hearts and souls into these celebrations."

This summer is the first since 1896 without Cheyenne taking at least one day to celebrate the Western way of life. The Spanish Flu, Great Depression and two world wars couldn't stop CFD, but the novel coronavirus did.

That fact is not easy for Hirsig to stomach.

He never wanted to stand before CFD's board of directors and suggest the rodeo not be held. He spent weeks after the country shut down as the outbreak ramped up trying to figure out how a smaller-scale event could be held, whether it would diminish the experience too much and whether a pandemic-friendly event was cost-effective.

In the end, fan safety and the fan experience won out.

"Seeing people come to town and all the joy and fun they have is something you never want to miss after you've been part of Cheyenne Frontier Days," Hirsig said. "It just gets in your blood. Our community of 60,000 people has an event that's a bucket list item for people across



Cheyenne Frontier Days President and CEO Tom Hirsig poses for a photo inside Frontier Park Arena on July 2 in Cheyenne. Michael Cummo/Wyoming Tribune Eagle

the world.

"That's really neat to think about. Unfortunately, we just wouldn't have been able to provide that experience this year."

■

A family of Hirsigs left Ansglogger, Switzerland, in 1872, seeking a new life in the United States. They ended up in Monroe, Wisconsin, before brothers Charlie and Fred Hirsig were drawn farther west.

The pair settled in Laramie County and bought adjoining ranches west of Cheyenne. Fred – who is Tom's great-grandfather – bought the Happy Jack Ranch, while Char-

lie bought the Polo Ranch on Crow Creek.

Charlie helped organize the inaugural Cheyenne Frontier Day. One of his horses won the half-mile race that day, while some of his cattle were among the first roped at CFD. He later served as general chairman.

Fred assisted in the arena, served on the committee and, in 1905, also judged the bucking contest.

Charlie and his wife, Ida, did not have children. Fred and his wife, Mary, had four sons and a daughter, which is where the Hirsigs' ties to CFD really took off.



Charlie Hirsig was the chairman of Cheyenne Frontier Days in 1919 and again in 1925. Courtesy

All volunteered for the event in some capacity. Most started at an early age. Fred Jr. (better known as Beanie) eventually ascended to arena director. It's a post he held until he turned it over to his son, Buddy.

Buddy's service to CFD started while he was still in elementary school. CFD didn't have phones at the time, so Buddy would ride a horse between Chute 9 – where the timed events start – and the bucking chutes to let the leader of each area know how many cowboys were remaining in each section at the other end of the arena. Buddy's presence let the timed event cowboys know they needed to get ready to run because there were only a few roughstock rides that hadn't left the bucking chutes.

Buddy took the arena director's reins from his father in 1958. Knee surgery kept Buddy from being able to mount a horse in 1964. Beanie filled in as arena director that year. Buddy handed the arena director's reins to his son, Tom, in 1992.

Buddy continues to volunteer with CFD by driving a golf cart to shuttle cowboys and their families from the parking lot to the arena if they need to get to another rodeo in a hurry.



Fred "Beanie" Hirsig Jr. Courtesy

"I wasn't sure I would like it, but it's actually been a lot of fun to meet a lot of the current cowboys and their families," Buddy said.

Buddy's sister, Margy, served as Miss Frontier in 1954. His daughter, Sandy, was name Miss Frontier's lady-

in-waiting in 1979, but was killed in a car accident later that year. Another daughter, Debby, was a member of the Dandies equestrian drill team that performs before Frontier Days rodeos, carries sponsor flags through the arena and promotes the rodeo around the region.

Buddy's wife, Glenna, has been part of the W-HEELS committee which oversees the carriages that roll through the CFD parades.

When he was hired as CEO, Hirsig heard jokes about inheriting the family business. He doesn't want to negatively impact his family's legacy, but he has greater influences in his current post.

"There's added pressure with how tied my family has been to this show, but I feel even more pressure from the community of Cheyenne," he said. "Cheyenne Frontier Days is so important to this community. I feel pressure and urgency to maintain this from the community and volunteers more than I do anything else."

The tone and increasing volume of Frank Thompson's voice as he drives down the highway makes it clear he has been asked about Tom Hirsig one

too many times in the weeks after the 124th "Daddy" was canceled.

"So many people who are unhappy this year was canceled have called to ask me what I really think about (Hirsig)," Thompson said. "I have told them all the same thing, which is, 'Tom Hirsig's family has been part of Cheyenne Frontier Days since the very first one. He wants nothing more than to have a show, so if he is onboard for not having a show, then it's the best thing for Cheyenne Frontier Days.'"

"He's not a suit that's making a decision that's not based on the Western way of life, the heritage or tradition that Cheyenne stands for. He's not that guy."

Thompson should know.

He was a young steer wrestler embarking on his rookie campaign on the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association circuit when he first met Hirsig in 1988. Thompson traveled to his first CFD with another bulldogger from South Dakota, who intended to head back home and hit up a few rodeos once they were done in Cheyenne. Thompson had entered a handful of rodeos in Idaho, and thought he had arranged for a ride west.

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Instead, Thompson was left seeking refuge from a rainstorm inside one of CFD's barns while waiting for a ride that never came. A friend just happened to drive by and spotted Thompson and his gear bag in the barn. He stopped to see if Thompson needed help.

"I told him I needed someplace to stay," Thompson said. "He told me he was headed out to Tommy Hirsig's place, and that he was sure Tommy would give me a place to stay for the night. We only met that night and have been friends ever since."

Thompson has called Cheyenne home since the early 1990s, and succeeded Hirsig as arena director a few years ago.

Evidence of Hirsig's determination to make the right choice for CFD is when he joined the call for the rodeo to start saving in the event something catastrophic happened. The discussion centered around a tornado wiping out a grandstand. Instead, a virus wiped out the entire event this year.

CFD had already invested \$2 million in this year's event by the time it was canceled. It estimated an additional loss of \$5 million to \$6 million because of the cancellation. The losses will nearly exhaust CFD's emergency fund.

"A lot of people like to say, 'Boy, that Cheyenne Frontier Days sure does make piles of money. They just make millions of dollars every year,'" Hirsig said. "What happened this year put all of that into perspective. What we've built up over the past 124 years is basically gone."

"The board of directors was incredible in its leadership for doing that. I guarantee you if this would have happened eight or nine years ago, we'd have probably been out of business, borrowing money or leasing a place. Now, we're positive we can have a show next year."

Hirsig was convinced he had done everything he could for CFD inside the arena when he stepped down as arena director. There wasn't another role he was passionate about, and he thought a new arena director might inject fresh ideas and energy into the show.

Hirsig's time away from CFD didn't last long. He eventually took a post on the board of directors. The board tabbed him CEO when Dan Cheney, CFD's first CEO, was hired for the same post at RodeoHouston.

Serving on the board and being named CEO breathed life into Hirsig. He now had more to worry about than what was happening in the arena.

"I started looking at everything



Tom Hirsig, right, with Lady-in-Waiting Marcy Morris in 1985. Hirsig served as Contestants Committee chairman from 2001-03 and won the 2002 Steer Roping Championship at Cheyenne Frontier Days. Courtesy

from the carnivals to parades to pancake breakfasts and everything else that happens with Cheyenne Frontier Days," Hirsig said. "I have to look at everything from a bigger perspective of the whole event and the customer experience."

Improving the customer experience and treating them to an "Old West Disneyland" have been priorities for Hirsig. Experience gained in all of his other posts helps Hirsig as CEO, Rodeo Committee Chairman Chad Mathews said.

"He has seen the rodeos from so many different angles," said Mathews, who has volunteered as CFD for 20 years. "His experience in the insurance business and as the state's insurance commissioner also help."

"He is able to work in some circles other CEOs may not have. He is comfortable with the people you need to know to get the things done we need to get done. He also has a really unique ability to present his ideas and – when they're good ideas – get people to take them and run with them. They get just

as excited about his ideas as they do their own."

Hirsig's vision of an "Old West Disneyland" have started to come to fruition as the vendor tents that used to welcome visitors into the midway on the west side of Frontier Park have been replaced by permanent structures that look like they were ripped from the set of a John Wayne film.

There now are plenty of places for attendees to get out of the July heat and enjoy refreshment. CFD also has had its rodeo broadcast nationally by RFD TV, and attendance for night shows and the rodeo have increased.

Despite the success, Hirsig remains unsatisfied. He knows there is still untapped potential, especially when it comes to attracting younger people.

"They've been disconnected from Frontier Days," said Hirsig, who finished sixth in the PRCA's steer roping world standings in 1987. "They're not huge rodeo fans, but they come here for the music at the night shows. We want to get them to experience some

Western culture here.

"Somehow, we have to connect with them through the media they feel comfortable with. One of the big challenges in the future is how to accomplish that."

One young person who isn't disconnected from CFD is Tom's youngest daughter, Justene Hirsig. Justene and her older sister, Jordan, grew up volunteering at the "Daddy." Jordan now works at a marketing firm in New York City. Justene has been attending the University of Wyoming, where she qualified for the 2018 College National Finals Rodeo. She has continued to help out in the arena over the past few years.

Could she be the next Hirsig to serve as arena director?

"I don't know about if she plans on that," Tom said with a chuckle. "But she does love Frontier Days, and she likes to get out there in the arena and do a lot of things I used to do out there. She's pretty passionate about Cheyenne Frontier Days."

She is, after all, a Hirsig.

THE *NEW* NORMAL

Without rodeos every weekend, Cheyenne natives enter uncharted waters

By Michael Katz
WyoSports

For better or worse, Brody Cress has gotten the full pandemic shutdown experience over the last couple of months.

The 24-year-old Cheyenne native is among the best saddle bronc riders in the country and won the event at Cheyenne Frontier Days each of the last three years. Cress, who ranked No. 2 in the 2019 world standings and first in the 2019 NFR rankings, also recently finished his collegiate career at Tarleton State University in Texas. Professional cowboys can, of course, compete collegiately while

earning money, as rodeo is not an NCAA sport.

Cress was in the middle of a rodeo, about to start his third day of competition in Houston on March 10, when the unthinkable happened. The world was, of course, put on hold due to the coronavirus, and Cress was unable to finish the competition. It didn't stop there for Cress, however: His collegiate season was canceled, as well, meaning he wouldn't get to finish out his fifth and final year of eligibility. And, to add insult to injury, Cress had to finish his degree online.

Cress finally competed in his first rodeo since the shut-

down in late May, more than two months after his last official rodeo. He's been practicing at home as best he can in Texas, but the thrill just isn't the same without the competition and the camaraderie of his fellow cowboys.

Rodeo travel can certainly be a grind, with events seemingly every weekend all across the country. But you're never going to hear Cress complain about that again.

After finding various projects around the house to keep himself busy in the recent months, Cress is ready to get back in action full-time.

Story continues on page 17



Brody Cress smiles after winning the saddle bronc riding championship during Cheyenne Frontier Days on July 28, 2019, at Frontier Park Arena in Cheyenne. Michael Cummo/Wyoming Tribune Eagle

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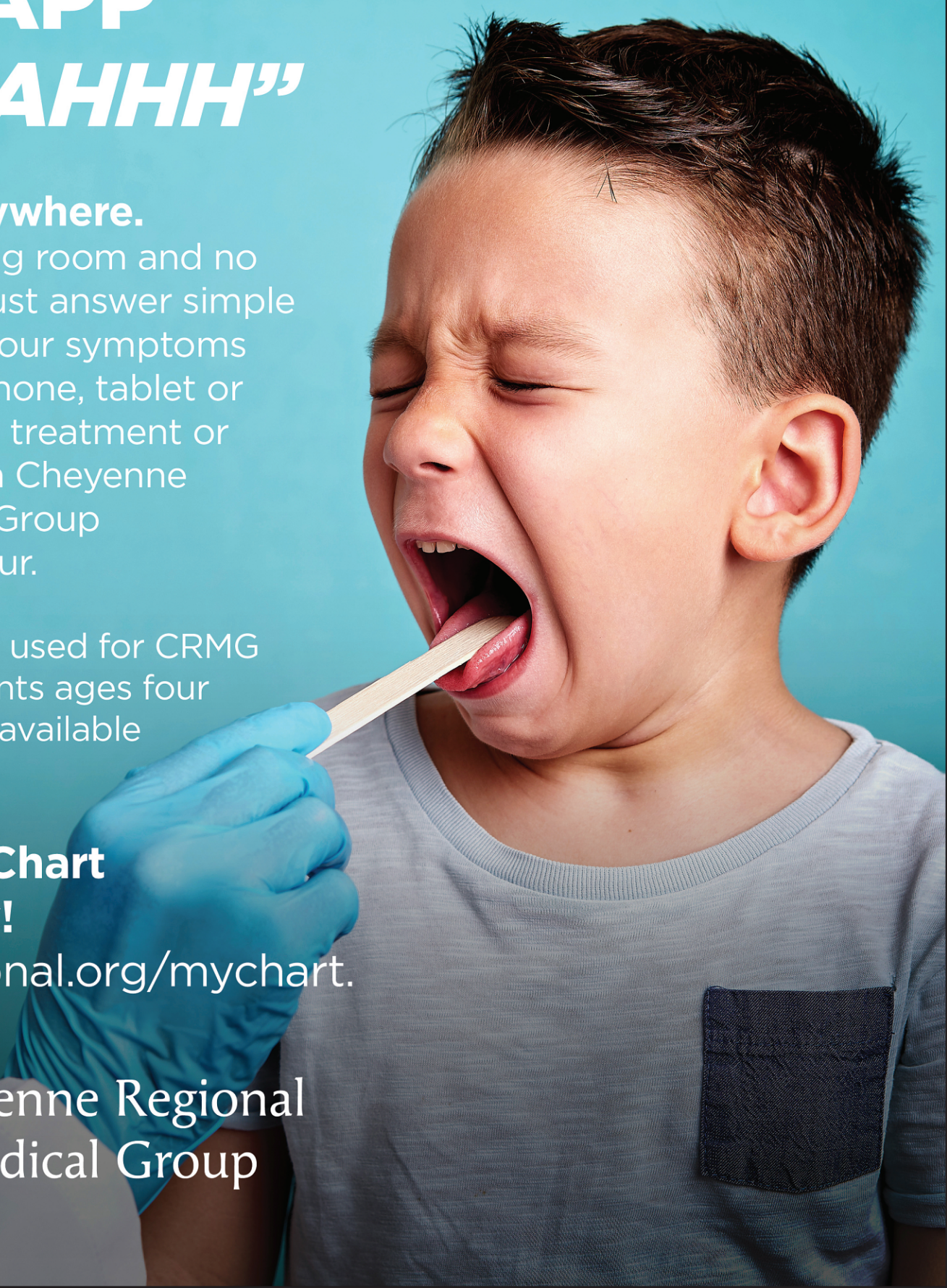
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Continued from 15

Playing the waiting game is admittedly difficult; he's been on the edge of his seat like everyone else, waiting for a return to something resembling normalcy.

With the somewhat stunning cancellation of Frontier Days, the first time in the event's history it will not take place, Cress is still waiting for whatever "normal" is. He won't get the chance to defend his title for a fourth straight year at his hometown rodeo.

"Sometimes we complain about having to be on the road, but it's the complete opposite now," Cress said. "Nobody is going to complain about being on the road ... you don't really realize how lucky you are."

Like everyone else around the world, the life of rodeo cowboys has been turned upside down in recent months due to COVID-19. Without competition, and the uncertainty of when it might come back permanently, Cress and his peers have had to make changes, knowing full well that it could be a while before life returns to normal.

Cress was on a hot streak of sorts before the pandemic, with positive momentum going into his spring season. In the same way a batter might get hot at the plate for an extended period of time, Cress was in that sort of zone.

Instead of competing for large pots of money in cities across the country, though, Cress has been confined to at-home projects and mounting the occasional bucking horse for practice.

"When you're winning and doing good, you want to be getting on bucking horses every day. You're not fighting your head at all, you're just having fun," he said. "It's huge when you get on a roll."

Cress considers himself fairly fortunate, all things considered. Though he estimates he has potentially lost upwards of \$50,000 over the past few months without having rodeos to compete in, Cress said he has made enough money over the past few years so he doesn't have to look for work to make ends meet.

That same comfort is not shared by Cheyenne's Aaron Vosler.

Vosler, who just turned 40, is aware his days as a steer wrestler are somewhat numbered. But he's certainly hoping it isn't a pandemic that tells him it's time to hang up his cowboy boots.

Vosler has been rodeoing since he was 12 years old, and, minus time he has missed due to injuries, he, like Cress, has been on the longest hiatus from regular rodeo competition of his life, though he's recently been driving to smaller rodeos on week-ends. He recently made the trek to Arizona and Oklahoma. Having

Frontier Days canceled was an extra gut punch for Vosler – the loss of his hometown event is beyond disappointing.

"It sucks. It's crazy. I just never would have guessed it," Vosler said. "I don't know what else to say than I'm shocked and saddened."

Since big-time rodeos were put on hiatus, Vosler has had to find additional work. He has been working for his girlfriend's father's landscaping business

"Sometimes we complain about having to be on the road, but it's the complete opposite now. Nobody is going to complain about being on the road ... you don't really realize how lucky you are."

Brody Cress
Bronc rider



Kalane Anders competes in steer wrestling during the fifth performance of the 122nd annual Cheyenne Frontier Days Rodeo on July 25, 2018, in Frontier Park Arena. Wyoming Tribune Eagle/file

during the recent months to try and make up for the money he's lost without competition. It's an interesting balance for Vosler: The money he normally makes at rodeos goes right back into entry fees for subsequent rodeos. So, while he isn't making the same kind of money he normally is, he also isn't spending it as he normally would.

Combine working a "normal 9-5 job" and trying to get practice reps in, and Vosler admits he's a little more sore than he might normally be. That's when he starts to feel his age the most. Chasing down steers and trying to tie them up is a little more difficult with the aches and pains of a daily work shift. Still, he's making sure to work his two younger horses and practice steers every other day to stay fresh.

"You work all week, then you get a check ... and you get a check that you usually make (in rodeo) in like 3.8 seconds," Vosler said with a laugh.

Vosler was also on his way to Houston when he heard the rodeo he was traveling to was canceled; he was literally an hour away from the event. He admits his body doesn't recover quite the same as it used to when he was younger, but he still feels like he has competition left in him. But if the pandemic were to drag out and cause him to sit out a full year or so, it might ultimately force his hand.

His most trusted horse, now 20 years old, isn't going to be able to do this forever, either. And even

his horse seems to be getting anxious, bucking more than usual. After a long trip, Vosler said his horses usually want nothing to do with him. Now, they're appearing eager for work, and Vosler has had to do his best to keep himself and his steeds in shape.

"It's just such a different situation than I've ever been in," Vosler said. "There's been times where I've been mad at rodeo ... when you don't have the option, it's insane. I don't even know how to put it into words. ... It's kind of forced me to look at what I'm going to do."

I don't know what will go first, my desire to do it or my body. Or my horse."

Helping keep Vosler sharp is his roommate, 24-year-old Kalane Anders, who is also a steer wrestler. In a way, Anders reminds Vosler of days past. The hunger and drive that his roommate shows is in part what keeps Vosler going, despite his days on the rodeo circuit being numbered.

Anders' youthful energy is contagious; after a hard day of work doing landscaping, he has the horses ready for Vosler to practice. At that point, Vosler can't help but put any body pain aside and just ride.

And even when Vosler does decide to hang up his boots from competition, he won't really be giving it up completely, he said. He still intends to go around to local rodeos. Why? He loves the lifestyle too much. Plus, his roommate is keeping him young.

He just hopes that time doesn't come for a while.

"I might be one of those guys that keeps going around close to the house, because that's how much I love it," Vosler said. "He's going to be the motivation. His passion for it is as strong as mine. I'd probably go just to help him out a little bit, too."

"FULL STEAM AHEAD"

PRCA says it's in position to host the National Finals Rodeo

By Tyler Poslosky
WyoSports

Like a never-ending nightmare, COVID-19 has bucked the way of life for millions of Americans and the rest of the world.

Major League Baseball was frozen before spring training came to a close; the National Basketball Association and the National Hockey League hit the pause button on their respective seasons in mid-March. The latter two have or will have finalized plans to resume play later this summer, while MLB and the players association continue to iron out a deal for what will inevitably be a truncated season.

The Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association is no different. In fact, the coronavirus may have hit this sport the hardest.

This spring and summer are unlike any other for the PRCA, which has lost between \$17 million and \$20 million off an operating budget just north of \$45 million and has seen close to 200 rodeos wiped out because of the pandemic.

"The hardest thing for me is the impact on the communities and the cowboys because these are amazing gatherings in small-town America and large towns that are meaningful to the people that go to them," said PRCA CEO George Taylor, "and it provides a means of people pursuing their passion around rodeo in terms of our cowboys and cowgirls.

"Those are hard things that keep me awake at night."

Taylor, who is in his third year at the helm of the PRCA, said around 185 to 195 rodeos have been canceled so far this year.

Cheyenne Frontier Days is one of the casualties, among other big-name rodeos like Calgary Stampede and Greeley Stampede. Yet as states continue to loosen safety restrictions, allowing business to re-open and more and more people to gather in one setting, Taylor believes the PRCA will get busy again.

Taylor expects to be "directionally around 50% of our total rodeo count for the full year," with the majority of those rodeos taking place in August and September.

The pandemic has certainly been the biggest challenge of Taylor's PRCA tenure. From financial impacts to canceling rodeos and everything in between, Taylor has worn many hats to help weave the PRCA through these difficult and stressful times.

"The governors of the states that we do business with have been very gracious in terms of working with us and trying to find every way possible to have rodeos occur," he said. "The bigger the rodeo and the more people that come through, the more challenging that is. It's one of those things, right? If you



Hunter Cure of Holliday, Texas, competes in the steer wrestling event during the seventh go-round of the National Finals Rodeo on Dec. 12, 2018, in Las Vegas. Associated Press

think about Cheyenne Frontier Days, you know, having over a million people come into grounds like that is a huge challenge, as opposed to a rodeo that might have 4,000 or 5,000 people."

PRCA's main event – the National Finals Rodeo – is still on for later this year in Las Vegas, said Pat Christenson, Las Vegas Events president.

"The plan is just as it's been every other year," Christenson said of the NFR, which has been held every year since its inception in 1959. "We're planning as if the NFR ... with the possibility of guidelines that might have to be implemented for the COVID-19."

Some of those guidelines could very well involve fewer fans or no fans. However, Christensen said he would prefer the NFR to be fully operational and not limited to a certain number of fans.

"I don't envision the NFR working with 50% attendance or 25%," he said. "We either have to a full attendance – our sold-out normal event, or who knows what the option would be."

That could prove tricky if COVID-19 flares up again in the fall and winter, and coincides with the flu season.

"It would be a discussion we'd have to have with the PRCA then," Christenson added. "It's completely different than how our agreement with the PRCA

is set up."

Christenson said the NFR has not set a deadline for itself in terms of making a final decision. Having other professional sports, such as the NFL, MLB, NBA and NHL, resume play beforehand will offer a glimpse into what the NFR could look like from an attendance and safety standpoint.

"It's early now," he said. "... we wouldn't have the benefit of looking at what everyone else is doing if we decided what to do now. ... We're planning as usual for the NFR to be bigger or better than it's ever been with watching what's going on with the virus."

The hope for everyone is to have the NFR run as scheduled. If not, more than \$200 million could be lost, Christenson said.

As the NFR inches closer with each passing day, both Las Vegas Events and the PRCA are doing their best to make sure there won't be any interruptions or further cancellations.

"We're full steam ahead, right now," Taylor said. "And I think we'll stay there, provided Las Vegas continues to open. We're working with them on a regular basis to ensure that we can have a safe and successful NFR. I tell people all the time, 12 weeks ago nobody really expected us to be where we're at. Right now, we believe we're going to be in a good position."

By Tyler Poslosky, Jeremiah Johnke
and Michael Katz
WyoSports

We asked current and former rodeo participants to share what Cheyenne Frontier Days means to them. Here's what they said.

Cody Webster (bullfighter)

Fighting bulls and traveling the country is something that I do day in and day out, somewhere around 180 to 190 days a year. Basically in the arena every other day of the year. We get to travel a lot of miles and get to see a lot of different country and go to a lot of really good rodeos, but there's something about that Sunday purse that's at Cheyenne that there's no other feeling like it.

Especially to a kid like myself growing up and watching... '8 Seconds' was one of my go-tos every day, and Cheyenne was a big part of that deal in that movie, and Lane Frost and transitioning into my teenage years and getting to meet Lane's parents and everybody, his family and doing bullfighting and bull riding schools there. When I got to go to Cheyenne for the first time and be there in the sunshine in front of them white chutes, it's quite the deal. It's Cheyenne. I don't know any other way to put it other than it's Cheyenne.

It's one of the best rodeos of the year. It's one that everybody wants to get into. It's one that everybody wants to go to. And getting to be one of the two guys getting to fight bulls at such a great, great rodeo, that speaks for itself. There's hundreds and hundreds of bullfighters in our industry that would give anything to get to go work a day there, much less year after year. For me, it is very, very special. It's a rodeo that is at the top of my list, and somewhere I get to go and hang out for 10 days and be a rockstar.

Seth Hall (tie-down roper)

It's just a great outdoor rodeo (with) a huge arena, and it's the 'Daddy of 'em All.' It's the one

CFD COWBOY MEMORY CAPSULES

rodeo you really look forward to going to all year and to win it.

Brody Cress (saddle bronc rider)

My brother and I used to sneak behind the chutes when you're not allowed to. It's surreal when you're a little kid.

Just kind of getting to be around what you see as your dreams in the future. ... I've been around that my whole life.

Aaron Vosler (steer wrestler)

Frontier Days is probably the reason I am a steer wrestler.

For me, Cheyenne is steer wrestling... that's where I fell in love with it.

When you give those steers that much of a head start... you have a lot of time to think about it before you get there. ... There's a fear factor.. you just kind of have to cowboy a little bit more.

The first time I made the short round in 2004, that's always been a huge memory.

I used to sneak under the old wooden stands and watch the saddle bronc riders get ready. ... The reason I rodeo

now is because of those memories.

Frank Thompson (former steer wrestler, current arena director)

If you grew up in the rodeo world, you heard about Cheyenne Frontier Days from the time you're old enough to remember. The old guys would try to scare you and tell you all

kinds of horror stories about it. I remember going to my first one and being amazed at how fast it ran. The rookie (saddle) bronc riding and steer wrestling were wild. I never had a lot of luck here.

Todd Suhm (former steer wrestler)

My grandfather used to have a team of horses that participated in every parade, so he spent all week in Cheyenne. Before the finals, they used to have a calcutta in one of the horse stall barns. It was pretty small back when I first started coming to Cheyenne.

My second year, I made the finals, but I was pretty low in the (aggregate). I went out there and won the (final go-round) and placed second in the (aggregate). I catch up with all my family, and my grandfather is absolutely beaming. He's just smiling this big grin from ear to ear. I thought he was proud of me for winning second at Cheyenne. He says, 'I am, but you also won me \$3,000 (in the calcutta).' He only spent something like \$150 or \$200, and ended up with \$3,000. He giggled about that every Christmas.

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By Niki Kottmann
Wyoming Tribune Eagle

We asked current Cheyenne Frontier Days committee chairmen to share what CFD means to them. Here's what they said.

General Chairman Jimmy Dean Siler



Siler

Last year was Jimmy Dean Siler's first as general chairman of Cheyenne Frontier Days, and the 25-plus-year volunteer said he's still humbled by the responsibility and the chance to spend so much

time with many of his favorite people in Cheyenne. It's the camaraderie he has with not only volunteers, but CFD fans that's kept him coming back.

"When I first started, I was on the Parades Committee, and I spent some time working corners during a parade and interacting with customers ... the people you meet, it's amazing," he said. "It's just that feeling that you belong, and that you all do it for the same reason. What a great feeling to be around a group of individuals that are so positive about an event. It'd be like being around 3,000 people who just won the lottery. Everybody's happy."

His love for CFD made it that much harder to deal with the cancellation, but he said he and his fellow volunteers have learned a great deal about event planning through this process, and he's confident that CFD's 125th anniversary next summer will be worth the wait.

"Everything happens for a reason ... so it affords us the opportunity to come back even bigger and better and maybe closer together," he said. "It also tells us never take anything for granted ... look at this in a positive light and say, 'You know what, we're going to miss this year, but it'll make it even more special when we go into the future.'"

Concessions Committee Chairman Brad Westby

Brad Westby first got involved with CFD 19 years ago, when he had just moved back to Cheyenne from Washington, D.C. His brother was volunteering on the Concessions Committee, and he encouraged Westby to jump on-board. He's been involved ever since,

CFD CHAIRMEN MEMORY CAPSULES



Westby

and said he loves spearheading one of the smallest committees because of the family-like relationships that develop among the volunteers.

Asked about some of his favorite CFD memories,

Westby laughed.

"This is going to sound a little weird, but I want to say it was about two years ago we had the big flood," he said. "That sounds like it wouldn't be fun, but I think it really bonded our team together ... we pushed water from 5 until about 9 p.m., so I think from a team perspective, I really liked that because everyone pitched in – we were all making sure exhibitors were taken care of."

That bond has made this pandemic even more difficult, Westby said, because he missed hanging out with his fellow volunteers. But he said the decision to not hold meetings for three months, and then ultimately to cancel the event, were the right ones.

"When something's been going on for 124 years, you don't want to be known as the chairmen who canceled the 'Daddy of 'em All,' but it was what we had to do," he said. "We feel for those individuals who won't have that revenue stream during the show. We will do everything we can to support our community ... whether that means helping Habitat for Humanity, driving around and helping elderly people ... those are some of the things we're really looking forward to."

Contract Acts Committee Chairman Randy Krafft

A decade ago, a friend of Randy



Krafft

Krafft's asked if he wanted to work the beer tent at the Buckin' A Saloon. One year turned into two, then three before he found himself completely entrenched in the CFD community – an experience he sees as being part of something bigger than himself.

"You're all there for one reason – not to get rich, to give back to Cheyenne," he said. "You're doing something that you can see a direct impact. And we have fun – it's one of those we work hard, we party hard type of deals."

One of Krafft's favorite CFD memories is bringing his daughter to her first concert when she was a preteen. Now she's also a member of the Contract Acts Committee, and he said there are plenty of other multi-generational volunteer families that make it a fun family affair.

Krafft fully understood how hard-working his volunteer family is a few years ago when an executive from one of the Las Vegas resorts was in town.

"I told him I have 34 people who work on the stage itself," Krafft said. "(The exec said) that same six shows would need 300 people in Vegas. The dedication of our folks – they have to go above and beyond – that's one of the biggest things that keeps you coming back. They want to be there, they want to do this. And they don't want anything for it."

Indians Committee Chairman Bob Mathews

Before Bob Mathews was even born, his dad was performing at every CFD



B. Mathews

pancake breakfast with the Chugwater Philharmonic String Quartet. When he got older, Mathews' band joined his father onstage, and when he eventually joined the Indians Committee that organizes

said breakfast, his dad's friend took him around the grounds yelling, "This is a future chairman here!" So, it didn't surprise anyone when Mathews was chosen as chairman three years ago.

"Once I got involved, I realized how special the (Indian Village) is and the dancers we bring down – it's just been a really neat thing to share that culture with people who come here and have never experienced that," Mathews said. "If we're trying to have an authentic Western experience, we need to have that."

One of the most rewarding parts of holding the position, Mathews said (even though it's a tricky balance as a father), has been traveling to other rodeos and constantly meeting people who say CFD is on their bucket list.

"Doesn't matter where we go, everyone knows CFD," he said, which makes the cancellation that much more heart-breaking. But he's accepted the change in plans. "I was able to make peace with it – that we love it so much, that five years from now, when there is still a show, I will know it's because of the decision we made. You're not going to get your name on a wall, there won't be a plaque, people won't applaud that, but we made that decision for the longevity of this."

Military Committee Chairman Col. Brian Rico



Rico

Col. Brian Rico is one of the few members of the Cheyenne Frontier Days General Committee who is not originally from Cheyenne – or even Wyoming.

"It's a little bit different for me, because I didn't

grow up here."

Rico has lived in numerous different states, including New Mexico, whose state fair is the only event he's attended that even comes close to the excitement

of Frontier Days.

When Rico first moved to Cheyenne in 2004 to start work at F.E. Warren Air Force Base, he didn't fully understand what Frontier Days was all about.

"I thought it was more like a state fair or a carnival," said Rico, who recalls the joy of taking his children to the Indian Village, the rodeo and the carnival all for the first time. "But as I worked more on the base, I realized this was a huge part of the community. I began to understand what it really meant."

Rico moved away from Cheyenne in 2007, but moved back in 2018. That's when he was offered the position of Military Committee chairman.

"I recognized that this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. We figured there's no better way to get our children involved in the community," he said.

"It enlightened me to the cowboy way of life," which Rico said is the fading social contract that your word should be as good a bond.

When he and the other committee members had to make the decision to cancel Frontier Days for the first time in its history, he said it was disheartening, but he has his sights set on planning an unforgettable 125th Frontier Days celebration next year.

Parades Committee Chairman Ruthanne Hubbard



Hubbard

For Ruthanne Hubbard, chairing the Parades Committee is all about the celebration and preservation of Cheyenne's Western heritage.

"I love the parades," she said. "I love the history, I love the cari-

ages—everything about parades—and I was just interested in a leadership role in helping preserve that."

As someone who came up through the ranks (started as committee volunteer, then a coordinator, etc.), Hubbard said her leadership is anchored in her understanding of what it's like to be a volunteer. She keeps her roots in mind while leading, which helps her be an effective communicator and advocate for all volunteers.

Asked about her favorite memories, she said there were too many to pinpoint, but one overarching feeling comes to mind.

"I would say just rubbing shoulders

CFD CHAIRMEN MEMORY CAPSULES

with all the volunteers," Hubbard said. "We're a family, and just to be able to have that camaraderie and know so many talented, good people in the community is a privilege and a lot of fun."

Although she said the decision to cancel this year's event was heart-breaking, both economically and in every other aspect, she wants Cheyenne residents to know that the volunteers are planning to help the city in any way they can this summer.

"People put their hearts and souls into Cheyenne Frontier Days, and so to have to make that decision was not taken lightly," she said. "We as a committee, as volunteers, are committed to our mission statement, and that is to promote economic growth in Cheyenne, to preserve our history and our heritage and the education of those things, so even though the decision to not have a show this year was a tough one, we're still here and we're still going to be here."

Public Relations Chairman Mike Smith



Smith

Mike Smith joined the Public Relations Committee 17-some years ago at the suggestion of several participating friends, but his first sense of what it means to be a CFD volunteer came even earlier.

"My wife's parents had been longtime volunteers on the art (Western Art Show & Sale) side, so when I met my wife, I was told I should volunteer," he said. "I was lucky enough to marry into a CFD family."

In his nearly two decades as a volunteer, Smith has done everything from

stocking public and VIP areas to handing out close to 800 press credentials, and he said he enjoys it all because of his love for interacting with people.

Growing up in Laramie, several of Smith's favorite CFD memories come from heading over the hill as a child for CFD concerts and other events. But the list of favorite memories as a volunteer is even longer.

"The ones that stand out are when we're able to take sponsors and their guests down to the chutes during a roughstock event, to show people who have never been to a rodeo to get that close to the animals and the athletes—helping them have a great experience is awesome."

Smith said he was very disappointed by the cancellation, but he's proud of how the committee handled the difficult decision. He's also looking forward to not only a bigger and better event next year, but being able to give back to Cheyenne with his fellow volunteers this summer.

"We'll have many opportunities to do things differently with the extra time we have to prepare for not only what we think will be a blockbuster 125th, but this summer helping the community in other ways," he said. "I'm looking forward to watching that group of volunteers come up with ways to engage the community and still fulfill our mission of being a positive economic influence."

Rodeo Committee Chairman Chad Mathews

When Chad Mathews decided to get involved with CFD 18-some years ago, he "didn't have an option" of what committee to be a part of. The answer was clearly rodeo.

"I've been around rodeo all my life," he said. "I've rodeoed since I was 4 or 5 years old."

Mathews said he's worked his way up



C. Mathews

from volunteering behind the scenes and then getting in on the action in the arena, but the specific tasks have never been important. He just loves being part of a tradition that's lasted since the very first

CFD.

"It all started with the rodeo," he said. "The tradition, to me, (is remembering) that ... there is basically four groups—rodeo, military/Union Pacific, the city and Native Americans—and those four entities have always been a part of Frontier Days. Rodeo is one of the original ones, which makes it so special to me. It's the heart and soul."

His favorite memories of CFD are bountiful, but the one that sticks out the most is when Billy Etbauer won the saddle bronc riding title in 2009.

"You hear about big crowd noise in other sporting events—you go to Mile High and when the Broncos are doing well, you can't hear yourself think, and that happens Saturday and Sunday afternoons on our arena floor," he said. "When Billy Etbauer won, watching him ride Painted Valley and feeling the electricity and not being able to hear (was memorable)."

"It was like a punch in the gut," he said of being part of the cancellation of the event, but he knows it was the right decision. And next year, he assured, will be even bigger and better.

Security Committee Chairman William "Buck" Reisner



Reisner

About 25 years ago, William "Buck" Reisner's daughters suggested he come with them to do some car counting at Frontier Park. They'd already been out there with some friends and had a blast, and once

they convinced him to join, he did, too.

"Next thing I know, I'm on the golf cart working traffic ... and I was like, 'Wow, that's fun,'" Reisner said. "On my days off, I'd go work the park, and it became something fun to do as a way to

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CFD CHAIRMEN MEMORY CAPSULES

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get involved with the community, meet folks not only from town but out of town, out of country, and then you just start building camaraderie, and it becomes family.”

Reisner was working (he’s since retired) as a Wyoming Highway Patrol officer when he first got involved with Frontier Days, and he said it’s that background in crowd and traffic control that gave him the ideal experience for the Security Committee. It wasn’t until he started volunteering with CFD and climbed the ladder, however, that he realized just how much goes into keeping all the fans safe – and how vital the Security Committee is.

“Now I see it from a chairman view, and we do a lot of behind-the-scenes work,” he said. “My people in the parking lot, they’re the folks who get the job done, and without them, we can’t do the show.”

Thinking back, he said plenty of wonderful CFD memories come to mind, but two of his absolute favorites were

taking Frontier Nights performer Wynonna Judd around the park as her personal security guard one summer, as well as an epic traffic division versus parking division prank war that escalated from a super soaker fight to spraying the traffic folk with the nozzle of the water truck.

Although he’s looking forward to the 125th anniversary next summer, Resner wanted to make one thing clear: The committee is always equally committed to putting on the highest-quality show possible, regardless of the circumstances.

“It’s the 125th, so there’s going to be a lot of pageantry with it, but really it’s going to be another show,” he said. “We worked just as hard on the 123rd as we were working on the 124th, and we’re going to work just as hard on the 125th.”

Tickets Committee Chairman John Svoboda

Like many chairmen, John Svoboda



Svoboda

“I was an officer in the Air Force, so I was drawn toward leadership positions,” he said. “I feel like I have some good skills to give to CFD and the community in those regards, so it was a natural fit to keep working my way up. When there was an opening, I was always one of the first to jump up.”

The chance to give back to his community was the original draw of volunteering, but the longer Svoboda did it, the more friends he made. Eventually, it didn’t seem like an option to not volunteer, because these people were family.

was first attracted to the Tickets Committee because some friends recommended he join. But it wasn’t until he got involved he realized his years in the U.S. Air Force gave him great chairman potential.

In fact, he got so close to his fellow volunteers that his Tickets Committee put on his wedding – just one of several favorite CFD-related memories.

“We used to use fire hoses to wash the stands before the shows, and that was lots of fun – lots of water fights and having a really good time with each other,” he recalled. “Also, just meeting everybody from all over the world who comes and being able to help them have a good time. It’s pretty exciting to ... talk to them and show them how Cheyenne is and what Wyoming is like and give them the experience of a lifetime.”

Although Svoboda admits he was just as bummed out as the rest of the committee to be part of the decision to cancel the show, he thinks this summer will remind both locals and visitors alike what they’re missing.

“What I’m really excited about is that even if it weren’t an anniversary (next year), this is an opportunity to show people how much they take CFD for granted and how much they love it,” Svoboda said.

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By Kathryn Palmer
Wyoming Tribune Eagle

We asked local residents to share what Cheyenne Frontier Days means to them. Here's what they said.

Glen Chavez

Local barber and Cheyenne native Glen Chavez still remembers the good old days of the world-renowned Cheyenne Frontier Days celebration.

Back in the 1970s, when Chavez was still in his coming-of-age years, he and a gaggle of other youngsters performed in the big parade downtown with a group called "The Mavericks."

"We were horrible. We couldn't march or drum worth anything," Chavez remembered, a veneer of nostalgia cloaking his laugh.

"That was also the time to make a little money. I would walk up and down the street selling newspapers, shining shoes – that was before they made you get a permit," Chavez said.

It's true, before the elaborate Frontier Days headquarters was built on the outskirts of town, the bulk of the socialization happened downtown. Now, Chavez, who has volunteered for CFD for the past 20 years, thinks the "Daddy of 'em All" has become too commercialized.

"It was a really good time for the local people to come out and get together. Now, it's not so much. They switched it. They took everything from downtown," said Chavez, whose youth is filled with memories of square dancing performances downtown and an Old West-themed fort called "Hell on Wheels," which sat near the Indian Village in Holiday Park.

"We used to have staged hangings, gunfights – it was a blast," he said. "Now, they've made it an enterprise. They've taken away the true meaning of Frontier Days, which is all about honoring the old Wild West way of life – to live freely and respect one another."

Despite CFD's evolving image, Chavez said he is looking forward to next year.

Virginia Brinkerhoff

When Virginia Brinkerhoff opened her clothing store, Just Dandy, nearly 50 years ago, Cheyenne Frontier Days was already one of the most highly anticipated annual events in the West.

"I miss the wilder days. I miss the block parties downtown," said Brinkerhoff, recalling the days when most of the festivities happened in the

LOCAL RESIDENTS MEMORY CAPSULES



This undated photo shows Native Americans performing in the Frontier Parade on 18th Street between Capitol and Carey avenues; the Boyd and Riner buildings are in the background. Wyoming State Archives/courtesy

heart of historic Cheyenne. "We used to have the country-western dance clubs – that's one of my fondest memories of Cheyenne Day. They didn't have such strict laws about open containers back then."

These days, "it's changed a lot," she said. "It went from the Wild West to the More Calmed Down West."

Although the party has largely been relocated to Frontier Park through the years, CFD just keeps attracting bigger crowds from a wide range of other states and countries.

"We get a lot of worldly travelers in here – from Australia, Europe and all over. We'll miss that camaraderie we develop every year," said Brinkerhoff. "My fondest memory is the diversity of people who come out here for (CFD) and want to indulge their curiosities about the West."

For Brinkerhoff, "keeping the leg-end of the Old West alive" is what Cheyenne Frontier Days is all about. "That, and making extra money."

Marietta Dinneen

Marietta Dinneen didn't grow up in Cheyenne and had only heard about Cheyenne Frontier Days throughout her school days living on a ranch near Saratoga. That all changed when she married into the Dinneen family – whose ancestors were involved in organizing the first Frontier Day in 1897 – in the early 1950s.

Dinneen, who is now 90 years old, has become a fixture of the event.

She doesn't remember too many details from the Frontier Days festivities of the 1950s or early '60s, but she remembers 1966. That was the first year

she participated in the big parade.

"That was before they had telephones to send their messages up and down the parade route," she recalled. "So, my job was to ride a horse up and down the parade route and carry messages between the carriages to make sure the timing was right."

Since then, Dinneen, and many of her family members, have served Frontier Days in numerous ways, including amassing a mammoth historic carriage collection.

"It just keeps getting better and better – until this year, that is," she said, lamenting the pandemic-induced cancellation of the revered Cheyenne tradition.

For Dinneen, Frontier Days has a few different meanings to the city she's called home for most of her life.

"It's one of the things that brings a lot of income to the community," she said. "It also brings a lot of pleasure, and a lot of opportunities to get acquainted with one another. It's major."

Carmen Hess

Carmen Hess' first experience with Cheyenne Frontier Days was back in 2001 – and it was more hectic than she ever could have imagined.

"They had told me what to expect, but it blew my expectations," said Hess, who had just moved from Newcastle to Cheyenne and started a sales job at Wyoming Home, the Western decor outlet downtown that she now owns. "At that point, we didn't have a computerized point of sale, so we were still handwriting tickets and ringing up orders by hand. ... Finally getting to experience it was really cool."

She's long since adjusted to the fast pace of operating a small business during the highly anticipated rodeo event, but she's careful to remind herself that "every year is always special and different."

For one, Hess said, Frontier Days attracts people from all walks of life – including celebrities.

"We've met some actors and musicians who've come into the store. That's always special when they come in and sometimes repeat their appearances the next year," said Hess, who's met the musician Red Steagall and the actor Martin Kove, among other notable people.

This year will be memorable in a different, far less exciting kind of way. For the first time in 124 years, Frontier Days isn't happening due to concern over the global COVID-19 pandemic.

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Hess, who is staying optimistic about the negative economic impact of a canceled CFD, has taken some time to reflect on the meaning of it all.

"It's not just a rodeo, it's not just a concert, it's something for everyone in the community to feel deeply invested in," she said. "It's a community. It's a family. It's a friendship."

Joe Darling

You never know who you might run into at Cheyenne Frontier Days.

Every July—except this July, of course—the annual event transforms the little city of Cheyenne into a sought-after destination for tourists, award-winning bull riders and big-name musicians.

Nine years ago, Mötley Crüe headlined one of the night shows. Joe Darling, who is a member of the nonprofit Old West performance group known as the Cheyenne Gunslingers, had to work during the concert and was slightly disappointed to miss seeing one of his favorite bands perform live in his hometown.

"I went to the Outlaw Saloon later that night. I heard people telling me to move. I turn around and see Vince Neil, the lead singer of Mötley Crüe, walking behind me," said Darling, who "completely fanboyed out," but worked up the courage to talk to the rocker for a few minutes.

"What other time of the year other than Frontier Days could that happen?" Darling asked rhetorically, still excited about the encounter almost a decade later.

Darling is well aware of how magical Frontier Days can be, celebrity sightings or not. His earliest memories of it date back to the 1980s, when his late father, Dick, became one of the founding members of the Gunslingers. During CFD, the Gunslingers dress up in authentic Old West gear and, in full character, mill about the big crowds.

"I was that kid watching my dad do it. As cheesy as he sounds, he was my hero," said Darling, who is now Chief



This undated photo shows people partaking in nighttime street dancing during Cheyenne Frontier Days at the corner 17th Street and Central Avenue in downtown Cheyenne. Wyoming State Archives/courtesy

Marshal of the Gunslingers. "I joined a couple years after he passed away. I felt like I was keeping his spirit alive."

Darling, who has since performed stagecoach robberies and other playful vignettes of Old West life, said that Frontier Days "is the one week a year where we kind of feel like a big deal. It's the one thing that puts us on the map."

Rory Mack

Winning even the smallest award can be a thrill. But winning best float of the week during Cheyenne Frontier Days just might be Rory Mack's own personal "Daddy of 'em all."

Mack, who has been volunteering with the Cheyenne Little Theatre for 20 years and helps orchestrate the Old-Fashioned Melodrama performances at the Atlas Theatre during Frontier Days, still remembers every detail of winning best float a few years back.

"We always build a float that ties in with whatever show we're doing. The year I'm thinking about, we built one called 'Shootout at Sadie's Saloon,'" Mack said, recalling how he and other volunteers spent hours building an elaborate set on top of a flatbed

truck. They had actors performing both in and around the truck, as they made their way through the parade route.

"That's always a blast to be able to be in the parade and interact with the folks who are watching and do a little improv with them," Mack said. "This particular year, we didn't realize we'd won. At the end of the parade, we were going down the road, and they stopped us. We wondered why they were stopping us. They told us to head to the rodeo grounds, where they would present our ribbon for float of the week."

Mack, like most Cheyenne residents, was disappointed to hear about the cancellation of Frontier Days this year. Even still, "the show must go on," said Mack, who will be keeping the spirit of the Old West alive this summer with performances at the Atlas Theatre.

Kris Haberman

Kris Haberman, who owns Downtown Mercantile in Cheyenne, has seen Frontier Days from several perspectives.

Originally from Sidney, Nebraska, she attended Frontier Days a few times when she was a teenager and young

adult. "It was a big party," said Haberman, who remembers, like many others, when most of the celebration still took place downtown.

When Haberman and her family moved to Cheyenne many years ago, they got involved with the parade through their daughter, who served as Dandy for a couple of years. The Dandies are ambassadors for CFD, and represent the event at rodeos, fairs and other celebrations across the Rocky Mountain region.

"As parents, we participated in every event. It was a lot of work," said Haberman, who recalled the constant cycle of washing and ironing costumes and videotaping the performances.

Haberman, who's owned the store downtown for several years, has also seen another side of the event as a business owner. "Not only does CFD bring in sales, it also creates a platform to meet people from all over the world," she said.

"It's amazing to me how people love Cheyenne and the whole Frontier Days event."

What she first thought of as a big party during her youth, Haberman knows now that Frontier Days has a much deeper meaning and purpose.

"There's more to it than just a party," said Haberman, who

has, in recent years, cherished taking her granddaughter to CFD and indulging her appetite for carnival food. "The whole community comes together to make it happen."

Lisa Marie

"I have seen some fantastic acts at CFD. I missed CFD so much when I was stationed in England (that) I flew back to Cheyenne every summer just so I wouldn't miss it. It is a huge part of me."

Melinda Cummings

Melinda Cummings was born to celebrate Cheyenne Frontier Days—literally.

"My mom went into labor at the parade downtown," said Cummings, who has celebrated her July 23 birthday at Frontier Days every year of her life. "Every year, I have a whole week of celebration for my birthday. We do the rodeo, night shows—we do it all. I've been celebrating it for 42 years that way."

When she was a kid, the carnival games and food were the main draw of Frontier Days.

When Cummings got older, she became more interested in the main event—the rodeo. "We don't typically travel to go see rodeos. We just saw it at CFD. We'd go every day to see the different acts," including local champion Brody Cress.

Since having her own children, she's been able to pass on her love of those two weeks in late July.

"My older one is definitely a night show kid. And my 15-year-old is definitely more interested in the carnival," said Cummings, who also looks forward to the annual pancake breakfast and riding on parade floats.

"This year would have been my son's first time doing the parade," said Cummings, who added that she's not sure how she'll celebrate her birthday this year, after the COVID-19 pandemic forced the beloved event's only cancellation in 124 years.

"It's not Cheyenne without Frontier Days," she said.

"A very special rodeo"

CFD Hall of Famers reflect on lifetime of memories

By Margaret Austin and Isabella Alves
Wyoming Tribune Eagle

For pro barrel racer and Cheyenne Frontier Days Hall of Famer Kristie Peterson, the atmosphere at Frontier Park is unlike any other.

The open spaces and the adrenaline from the crowd even led CFD to become her horse, Bozo's, favorite rodeo – and the dynamic duo loved competing even more when it rained.

The pair went on to win titles at nearly every major rodeo in the country, earning the crown at CFD three times in a row from 1996-98. But even with a lifetime of rodeo accomplishments, Peterson said Cheyenne Frontier Days still holds a place in her heart, and she was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2020.

"It's a very special rodeo. I don't think there's any cowboy or cowgirl ever that didn't think that it was a big deal to win Cheyenne," Peterson said.

Having persisted through recessions and world wars over the past 124 years, CFD didn't get the name "Daddy of 'em All" for nothing. The grand, 10-day display of Cheyenne's rich Western history takes countless hours of planning from more than 2,500 volunteers to pull off each year.

From huge night shows with global phenomenons like Dolly Parton and Johnny Cash to world-class rodeo

events, Cheyenne Frontier Days has become known as the best 10 days of the year in Wyoming's capital city. And because of the economic impact from hundreds of thousands of rodeo-goers, the event has even been described as a "second Christmas" for local businesses.

But for the first time since its inception in 1897, the city will face a summer without Cheyenne Frontier Days.

For the people who have dedicated decades of their lives to the rodeo, earning spots in the CFD Hall of Fame for their contributions, the reality is a bit harder to soak in.

Peterson said she went to Frontier Days every year until she retired, and growing up, she would make the trip up to CFD from Colorado with her parents. To her, CFD has been a family affair and was like a hometown rodeo.

When she heard CFD was canceled, Peterson said it was heart-breaking. But despite this bad news, she said she still plans on making the trip back to Cheyenne for the 125th "Daddy of 'em All" next year.

For many rodeo goers, whether they're participants, volunteers or attendees, CFD has become an annual activity.

Marietta Dinneen, who was in-

ducted into the CFD Hall of Fame in 2002, began working with the parade committee back in 1966.

She'd ride up and down the parade route on horseback, relaying messages about the parade status to other volunteers because they didn't have cellphones or other electric equipment, like they do nowadays.

Looking at both the meaning of CFD and the seriousness of COVID-19, Dinneen said she didn't know how to feel when she first heard of the cancellation. And while she'll miss her friends and the time they share at CFD, she realized the circumstances were out of anyone's control.

"You just love it so, and people come from all around to love it," Dinneen said. "But really, with this virus

that's going around, I think it was just a done thing that we couldn't have Frontier Days."

At its core, Cheyenne Frontier Days thrives off of big crowds, out-of-town visitors and camaraderie, which unfortunately pose public health risks from COVID-19.

Multiple parades bring the streets of Cheyenne alive during Frontier Days each year, which is when Dinneen found one of her true passions – historic horse drawn carriages.

The big barrel wagon wheels, covered tops and old-fashioned horse rigs that travel down the paved asphalt streets of downtown Cheyenne transport a person to what the city must have looked like in its past.

Story continues on page 26

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A wagon from Walla Walla, Washington, was part of the Cheyenne Frontier Days Grand Parade on July 20, 2019, in downtown Cheyenne. Wyoming Tribune Eagle/file

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The strict historical accuracy of CFD parades couldn't have happened without Dinneen's vision and execution. She realized the carriages she loved were beaten and worn down, so a group of volunteers called the Wagon Doctors was formed to restore the old wagons for the parades.

Ultimately, Dinneen went on to play a crucial role in the development of the Cheyenne Frontier Days Old West Museum and its carriage collection, which boasts more than 160 unique pieces, like the Deadwood and Yellowstone coaches.

The museum is open year-round, so both residents and visitors can relive the glory of CFD whenever they please.

"It's been a long time, but the carriages really are quite something. It's one of the best collections in the United States," Dinneen said.

The history of the West wouldn't be complete without the rich history and culture of Native Americans.

Nestled next to Old Frontier Town, the Indian Village hosts daily displays of hoop dancing, storytelling and drum circles that Native Ameri-



Native American performers make their grand entrance July 20, 2019, at the Cheyenne Frontier Days Indian Village. Wyoming Tribune Eagle/file

can tribes did in the Wyoming area. Wyoming is home to many tribes, including the Northern Arapaho, Cheyenne, Crow, Blackfeet, Shoshone and other Plains Indian tribes.

As visitors walk into the village, they're greeted by various booths selling Native American wears and food, while at the center of the village, benches are circled around a center hut and field where performances are held throughout the day.

The prosperity of the Indian Village wouldn't be here today without the help of longtime volunteer and former chairman Del Peterson, who was inducted to the CFD Hall of Fame in 2020.

With Peterson's directive, the Indian Village began to look more like how it does today, with culture-rich entertainment, storytelling and music, and vendor booths where attendees can buy Native jewelry and

souvenirs. When he started on the committee, the village wasn't making any revenue for CFD, and only about 400 people were walking through.

But now, "They're using dancers, storytellers and flute players, and they have 4,500 people come to the concert every day," Peterson said. "There must be 20 vendor booths now, and it's a major attraction. All that money is going back to help support Frontier Days, and the Indian Village is still free."

As many know, Frontier Days wouldn't be possible without the thousands of dedicated volunteers that spend months out of every year making this rodeo possible. When talking with CFD volunteers, it's common to find people that have donated their time for multiple decades.

CFD is the largest outdoor rodeo in the world, but it also has one of the largest groups of dedicated people in the world—just like the hall-of-famers embody.

"That's such a fine group of people that have been elected through the years that have helped make Frontier Days what it is today, and I'm really pleased to be part of that group," Peterson said.

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KEEPING THE CFD *SPIRIT* ALIVE TODAY

By Isabella Alves
Wyoming Tribune Eagle

Despite the event being canceled for the first time in its history, the spirit of Cheyenne Frontier Days lives on through Miss Frontier and her lady-in-waiting.

Miss Frontier Bailey Bishop and Lady-in-Waiting Savannah Messenger will both hold their titles for another year to represent CFD. The duo will be representing Frontier Days for three years, instead of

the usual two, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite the pandemic, Bishop said they've been able to do some pretty cool things already. They have already had the opportunity to represent CFD at the Fort Worth Stock Show and Rodeo and the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo earlier this year before the pandemic hit.

Bishop said she and Messenger have already had so much fun traveling and representing CFD, when

Miss Frontier and her lady-in-waiting will hold on to their titles for next year

leadership decided to let them continue in their current roles through another year, they were really happy about it.

Recently, they have been doing what they can to represent CFD virtually, such as using FaceTime to connect with kids at children's hospitals to read them stories and talk to them about rodeo.

"So what's actually been really cool about this whole pandemic for me is being able to do that virtually, because it actually has reached a lot more people than maybe even just going and traveling to all these rodeos that we normally would and talking to people that are

at rodeos about Cheyenne Frontier Days," Bishop said.

She said she was able to FaceTime each child at the hospital for the virtual reading, whereas if they did that in person, they might have only been able to reach a handful of those kids. She said they've also been able to send grade school students their autographs with information about CFD so the kids can still read about it.

"I want everyone to know about rodeo," Bishop said. "Because it can be looked at as a dying sport, which is

really unfortunate because, in my opinion, it's the best sport ever."

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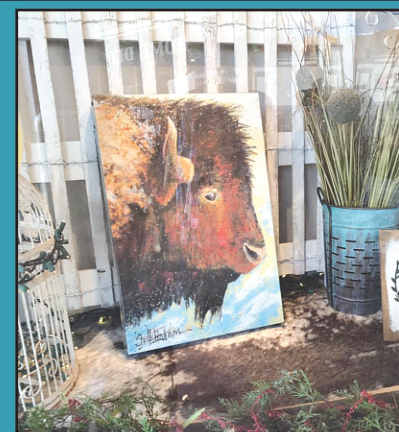
"So what's actually been really cool about this whole pandemic for me is being able to do that virtually, because it actually has reached a lot more people ..."

Bailey Bishop
Miss Frontier

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Miss Frontier 2020 Bailey Bishop, right, and Lady-In-Waiting Savannah Messenger pose for a photo inside Frontier Park Arena on June 16 in Cheyenne. Michael Cummo/Wyoming Tribune Eagle

Continued from 27

Bishop is from Burns, and comes from a family of team ropers that have a long history with CFD. Her grandfather, Cliff "Doc" Bishop, was a steer roping contestant at Frontier Days and later went on to be the arena veterinarian. Her grandmother, Gerrie Bishop, is also a co-founder of the Cowgirls of the West.

Messenger also comes from a family rich with CFD history. Her great-great-grandfather was a blacksmith in the Cheyenne area dating back to 1916, and her family has a history with draft horses, which they drive in the CFD parades.

Each woman tried out for Miss Frontier three times before landing the title. Messenger said ever since she was little, she always loved the Western part of everything. She said her family has always been involved in the parades, and she always loved waving to the crowds and being in the middle of the community.

As she got older, she tried out to be a Dandy,

"As disappointing, I guess, as it is (that Frontier Days was canceled this year), we both know how important it is to keep our community safe. And so we really respect our community leaders for the decisions that they've made."

Bailey Bishop
Miss Frontier

which she did throughout high school. The Dandies is an equestrian group that serves as goodwill ambassadors for the "Daddy of 'em All." Being more a part of the Frontier Days scene and family was amazing, which led her to interview for Miss Frontier.

Bishop remembered traveling to different ro-

deos growing up with her father and brothers team roping. She said horses, in general, have always been a huge part of her life, and growing up, she would look up to Miss Frontier as a little girl and think "I want to be that person someday."

"As disappointing, I guess, as it is (that Frontier Days was canceled this year), we both know how important it is to keep our community safe," Bishop said. "And so we really respect our community leaders for the decisions that they've made."

Following all public health orders set in place, Bishop and Messenger will still be able to hold the Little Miss Frontier clinics several times this summer. The girls will be able to learn what it takes to be Miss Frontier, and have a hair and makeup booth.

"Normally, in the past, (we would be traveling) all over the state, so it'll be actually pretty unique to be in Cheyenne for the summer," Messenger said.

The need for speed

Thunderbirds show with additional aircraft still on for July 22

By Tom Coulter

Wyoming Tribune Eagle

Cheyenne simply won't be the same this July without its world-famous rodeo. But at least one annual tradition – the U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds air show – will carry on, perhaps providing a small sense of normalcy to local residents.

The show, which is set to begin at 9:30 a.m. Wednesday, July 22, will also feature special demonstrations from other United States Air Force planes, including the F-22 Raptor, the F-35 Lightning II, the B-1 Lancer, the B-2 Spirit, the C-130 Hercules and the B-52 Stratofortress.

Officials announced earlier this summer the show would still be held at F.E. Warren Air Force

Base, which last year hosted the event for the first time in 26 years.

The base will open up an area for people hoping to see the show up close, though all bathroom facilities will be closed at the base due to precautions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Attendants will have to bring their own water, snacks, chairs and whatever else they might want for the show. For those who don't want to go to the base, most of the air show can be seen from other areas in Cheyenne.

As in previous years, the F-16 that makes up the Thunderbirds fleet are slated to perform their full show following their Monday arrival – July 20 this year – to Cheyenne.

Cheyenne Regional Airport Director Tim

Barth said he was thrilled to have the additional aircraft for the show, which will be held despite the cancellation of Cheyenne Frontier Days due to concerns about spread of the novel coronavirus.

"I've seen the Thunderbirds so many times, but to see that F-22 and F-35 and the B-1 come in, that's going to be awesome," Barth said excitedly. "We wanted to do this to make people feel good and be able to get out and enjoy a sense of community."

Air Force Col. Brian Rico, military liaison to the CFD General Committee, was relieved to see the annual air show continue, maintaining its decades-long streak of performing in Cheyenne.

Story continues on page 31

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Continued from 29

“The Thunderbirds have been a tradition in Cheyenne for 60-plus years,” Rico said. “They came in the ‘50s, and we were one of their very first shows.”

The demonstrations by the aircraft are something that can bring everyone together, Rico said, regardless of their background.

“When you put four planes within tens of feet of each other, flying at high speeds, it’s just amazing to see the precision they’re able to maintain,” Rico said. “It’s one of those things that kind of reverberates through your entire body and mindset when you see those aircraft going through.”

The Thunderbirds, along with the special features from the F-22s and other planes, will offer a great chance for the community to come together, Barth said, especially after such a turbulent year so far.

“After everything this community has been through with COVID-19, and after what the nation has been through with (the death of) George Floyd (in Minneapolis), Wyomingites have a very proud identity of their own, and they’ve always wanted to celebrate during the summer months,” Barth said.

“Our goal really, as a community, is to try to keep as much of that Cheyenne spirit alive as we can through the summer, while recognizing the hardships that we all went through.”



The U.S. Air Force Thunderbirds perform July 24, 2019, at F.E. Warren Air Force Base in Cheyenne. That year was the first time in 26 years the annual Cheyenne Frontier Days air show was held on base. Wyoming Tribune Eagle/file



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MHP has been involved with Cheyenne Frontier Days for many, many years. Every year, employees and family attend the rodeo together on Cheyenne Day. A variety of Partners have served on the Board and been volunteers. Retired Partner, Jim Hearne was inducted into the Cheyenne Frontier Days Hall of Fame in 2006 for his continuous contributions throughout the years.

It has always been a privilege to be involved with Cheyenne Frontier Days and show our support for such a grand tradition and we look forward to the years to come.

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Looking toward the future

CFD OFFICIALS EYE 2021 WITH EXCITEMENT, APPREHENSION

By Margaret Austin

Wyoming Tribune Eagle

As coronavirus cases continue fluctuating across the U.S., predicting how the situation will unfold into 2021 is incredibly difficult, especially when considering an event as large as Cheyenne Frontier Days.

So for CFD President and CEO Tom Hirsig, thinking about the “Daddy of ‘em All’s” 125th anniversary is both exciting and nerve-wracking. While Hirsig said they’re going to face some challenges along the way, they’re still planning on holding a great celebration of CFD.

Hirsig still cautioned, “We have no guarantees for what our world is going to look like.”

CFD has been preparing for the 125th anniversary for a couple years, but Hirsig said COVID-19 may cause them to explore logistics and other possibilities for Cheyenne’s biggest event.

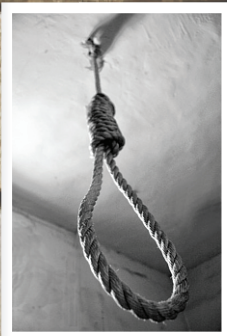
Story continues on page 34



Team ropers charge after a steer July 16, 2019, in front of the new Cheyenne Frontier Days event center at Frontier Park. The event center includes the rodeo headquarters, sponsor area and a new rooftop bar that is available with a premium ticket purchase. Wyoming Tribune Eagle/file

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Continued from 32

For CFD 2020, staff and volunteers began planning the event as usual before coronavirus hit, but looking ahead to next summer, the reality of the situation will play a role in planning.

"Now, we have to plan for maybe some different options of how we do business," Hirsig said.

Residents can expect to see a number of improvements at next year's event that would've been rolled out this year. Hirsig said they were working on a better way to bring buses into the secured area on the west side of Frontier Park, and they had a new food vendor with exciting, forward-thinking features, including VIP dining experiences at the carnival.

While CFD concertgoers would've had the chance to see Cardi B and Marin Morris at this year's event, Hirsig said next year's anniversary might draw some show-stopping acts, even though their budget isn't flush.

"We can't typically afford the \$4 million cost, but sometimes they're willing to come to a special event," Hirsig said.



In August 2015, Cheyenne Frontier Days leaders were in the early stages of creating a long-term plan that would bring a new entrance, new buildings, VIP seating and parking changes to the home of the "Daddy of 'em All." CFD officials worked with Denver-based architectural firm Mundus Bishop to come up with several proposed initiatives and design drawings. A new proposed eastern entrance off Carey Avenue on the park's east side would allow more buses to drop off and pick up visitors who use public transportation. Cheyenne Frontier Days/courtesy

However, Hirsig said the cancellation has effectively drained CFD's savings, which will put them back on the longterm plan for improvements at Frontier Park.

"Our board of directors have done

really a tremendous job looking at what happens if you can't have Cheyenne Frontier Days one year," Hirsig said. "But the one thing we didn't really calculate was the money that we saved in the stock

market. So not only do we not get to have the show, but our investments have dropped almost a third."

Overall, Hirsig said CFD has a solid business model that has served them well, although the utility costs of keeping Frontier Park up and running the other 355 days of the year is an added cost burden, especially without the 10-day CFD event.

While there is the possibility of raising ticket prices, Hirsig said it's likely that residents and local business may still be struggling financially when 2021 comes around, with no solid predictions of when life and the economy will return to normal.

With so many plans and so much uncertainty for 2021, Hirsig said hopefully this experience will make residents' love and appreciation of CFD even stronger.

"I think the little things that used to bother people kind of go away, and I think everybody starts looking more at the big picture. Sometimes people do take Cheyenne Frontier Days for granted," Hirsig said. "Hopefully, everybody will look at Cheyenne Frontier Days – and, really, all of life – in a bigger picture."

Looking forward to
next year.

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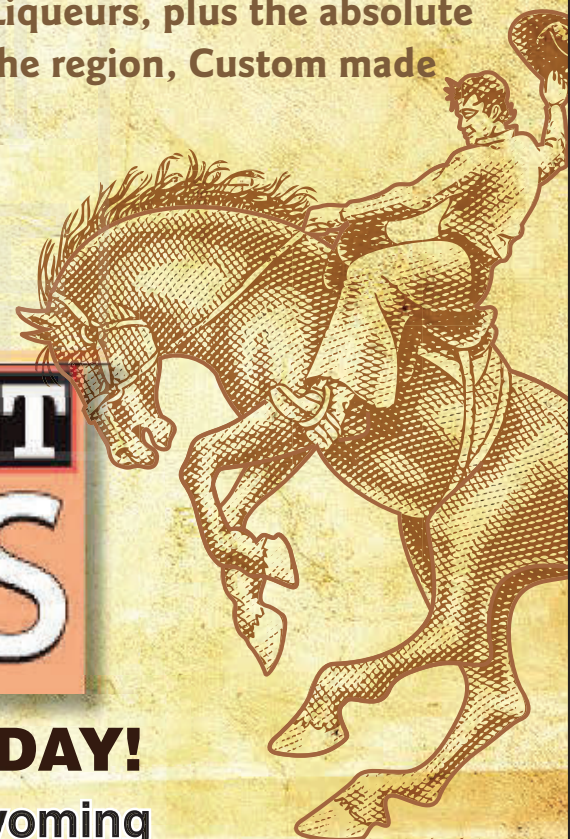
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