

# Baker County Fair - Halfway Celebrated 50th Anniversary in 1971

by Gail Kimberling  
of the Hells Canyon Journal

The Baker County Fair - Halfway and Panhandle Rodeo is celebrating its 100th year in 2021. As part of the preparations for the centennial event, the HELLS CANYON JOURNAL is pleased to offer this series highlighting the history of the fair with information gleaned from fair board minutes, premium books, newspaper stories, personal recollections from the PINE VALLEY VIGNETTES and other sources.

## Part V

The Baker County Fair - Halfway celebrated a huge milestone in 1971 as locals and visitors marked the 50th anniversary of the event.

The occasion was a testament to the tenacity and hard work of hundreds of volunteers who ensured the annual fair and rodeo not only survived, but thrived, in its first half-century.

The only time the fair and rodeo took a complete hiatus was during World War II, from 1942-44, and the Korean War in 1954. (Later, the fair and rodeo were also canceled during the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2020.)

Melody Huff, current president of the Pine Valley Fair Association, said, "My queen's court list says no fair in 1954, and there [are] no girls' names for that year. But there must have been at least a rodeo in all the other [years] because there was a queen's court for all of them."

Rodeo royalty for the 50th annual Baker County Fair included Joann Harris, Sandy Hampton and Barbara Gardner.

The specialty act for the semi-centennial was the Comancheros Riding Club Drill Team led by Lola Bryan.

A "Jackass Race" was also held, and Zeb Bell was the featured announcer for the 50th annual rodeo.

## Royalty Share Memories

Former rodeo royalty Lynda Bird and Barbara Gover Barton shared their memories in "Queens Recall Reigns," an article written by Vonnie Bennett for the August 29, 1975 edition of the *Democrat-Herald* in Baker City.

Bennett wrote, "In talking to a number of [royalty], I learned that no matter how



HCJ file photo; original photo courtesy of Beth Payton

**EARL THOMPSON** served as grand marshal of the 1981 Baker County Fair - Halfway and Panhandle Rodeo. In a 1984 interview with Sybyl Smith, Thompson said he had never missed a fair since they started in 1921.

many years have passed, their memories of "that special year" are still bright and shining not only for them but for members of their families who have pictures, programs, etc. as keepsakes. A number of them still have an avid interest in horses and the out-of-doors."

Bennett continued, "Barbara Gover Barton, selected as the first queen in 1938, still lives in Halfway and for the past 30 years has divided her time between raising Gover and Barton registered Angus and working in the Idaho Power Co. office. Tending stock takes her out early and late where she still enjoys a love affair with nature.

"Does she still take an interest in the fair? If selling tickets for 25 years means anything, she does," Bennett added.

Bennett called Lynda Bird, at 4 feet 10 inches, "surely the smallest queen." Lynda reigned over the court in 1958 and her sister, Cheryl Thomas, was queen in 1961. Bennett noted both sisters became teachers, Lynda at Pine Eagle High School and Cheryl in the small town of O'Dell, near her home on a Hood River-area fruit ranch.

"When I asked Linda [sic] if she was still interested in horses, she replied 'of course,'" Bennett wrote. "Along with husband, Dave, she takes every opportunity to get out into the mountains on a horse. In the past few years she has taken up painting, her subjects mostly mountains, horses and riders, and now enters prize-winning pictures, vegetables and canned goods in the fair. Linda [sic] has also acted as an official timer for, as she says, 'years and years; well, at least 10.'"

The event schedule for the 1975 fair lists a steak feed at the Eagle Valley Grange/old high school park for \$5.00 per person, a beef barbecue at the Masonic Hall for \$1.00 per person and the Lions huckleberry pancake cowboy breakfast at \$2.00 each.

Two evening dances, held from 9:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m., featured music by Dick Cates and The Rubber Bands. (An internet search failed to find this particular group; however, Pacific Northwest Bands lists Dick Cates and The Chessmen as a popular garage band from Boise who played many types of venues



**LYNDA BIRD, LEFT, AND BARBARA GOVER BARTON** as pictured in a 1975 newspaper article titled "Queens recall reigns." Barton was selected as the first queen of the Baker County Fair and Rodeo in 1938 and Bird was queen in 1958.

in Idaho, Oregon and Washington from 1960-66.)

As part of the *Democrat-Herald's* fair coverage, the newspaper also reprinted the Oregon Wheat Growers League 1975 Official Recipe, "Wheatheart's Chocolate Prune Cake," an interesting concoction that includes two jars of strained baby prunes and a cup of "Zoom" instant wheat (see below).

In 1977, the royal court featured Tammy Immoos, Leslie Landers and Robin Buchan and, in 1978, all former royalty members were invited back to Halfway to participate in the parade and grand entry. There is no formal record of how many, or who, attended the gathering.

Grand marshals during the 1970s included Walter Tarter (1977), Barbara Barton (1978) and Charley Whiteley (1979).

## Into the 1980s

The special attraction at the 1980 Baker County Fair and Rodeo was a performance by Johnny Tillotson, an American singer-songwriter from Jacksonville, Florida who had nine top-ten hits on the pop, country and adult contemporary Billboard charts.

The following year, a Jackpot Pack Horse Race took place from Richland to Halfway, and an "old fashioned pit barbecue" was featured at the fair in 1985-86.

Royalty members on record for the decade were Josi Dillman, Jody Davis and Linda Oster in 1982, Konia Kamaunu, Linda Oster and Jennifer Gulick in 1983 and Raquel Traw, Leah Bouchard and Aneke Traw in 1984.

Meticulous record-keeping by Lynda Bird, who now serves as secretary of the Pine Valley Fair Association, has every grand marshal listed for the 1980s. They were:

Lewis and Percy Laird (1980); Earl Thompson (1981); Paul Brooks (1982); Con Rowen and Buck Saunders (1983); Vernon Thomas and Bob Steward (1984); Helen Gover and Grace Gulick (1985); Orville Woods and Hank and Betty Bunyard (1986); Grace Ritter and Estella Summers (1987); George Moody and LeRoy Stacey (1988); and Don Whiteley and Hershel Jones (1989).

A photo of Earl Thompson on his horse, "Old Bob," is featured in Pine Valley Vignettes, where Thompson recalled his long life in the area. Born in 1904 in Promise, Oregon (20 miles north of Wallowa on the breaks of the Grande Ronde River), Thompson came to Pine Valley with his family in 1910.

He played on the very first football team at Halfway High School ("The game was a lot different then - we had a big old hard football," he said); ranched for a time with his wife, Billee, a local teacher and principal, and their two children on 80 acres where the Grange Hall now sits [near the sharp turn on Lone Fir Road where it transitions between north-south and east-west] and then spent 27 years working for the Forest Service.

"A working cowboy at 80," Thompson said in the first volume of Pine Valley Vignettes, "In 1981 I was made Grand Marshal for the 60th Baker County Fair and Rodeo. I felt honored to be chosen. I have always helped with the fairs. I've helped put them on in good weather and in the mud. I have been Arena Director for the past three years.

"The very first two fairs, in 1921 and 1922, were held in the streets of Halfway. I attended those, too. I've been going for sixty-three years - never missed a fair since they started. I felt this last fair [1984] was one of the best we had."

## Oregon Wheat Growers League 1975 Official Cake Recipe

### Wheatheart's Chocolate Prune Cake

- 2 cups unsifted flour
- 2 tbsp. cocoa
- ½ tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. cinnamon
- 1 tsp. soda
- 1 tsp. cloves
- 1 tsp. nutmeg
- 1½ cups sugar
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup milk
- 1 cup salad oil
- 2 small 4-ounce jars strained baby prunes with tapioca
- Two-thirds cup chopped raisins
- 1 cup Zoom Instant Wheat Hot Cereal (100 percent) or Instant rolled Wheat

Sift all dry ingredients into mixing bowl, including sugar. Add liquid ingredients and mix well. Add instant wheat and raisins. Beat about four minutes. Pour into nine-inch round cake pans which have been greased and floured. Bake at 350 degrees for 35 minutes.

(Note: The raisins will chop much easier if you first put them in a small plastic bag with two tablespoons of extra flour and shake them well.)

## NEED ASSISTANCE PAYING YOUR TELEPHONE BILL?

### You may qualify for the Oregon Telephone Assistance Program

Snake River PCS is your local wireless provider and a participant in the Oregon Telephone Assistance Program (OTAP), which can provide low-income households discounts of up to \$12.75 off our basic service rate. To find out if you qualify, visit [www.puc.state.or.us](http://www.puc.state.or.us). Qualifying low-income households may apply for the OTAP program online at [www.rspf.org](http://www.rspf.org) or [www.puc.state.or.us](http://www.puc.state.or.us).

We provide our customers reliable, quality cellular service with our basic mobile mini-plan at a price comparable to that of our local basic wire-line service.

### Basic Cellular Service available from Snake River PCS

Our basic mini-plan includes 200 daytime local minutes, 40 travel minutes, free incoming texts, unlimited long distance (within your minute allotment), voicemail, caller ID, and unlimited mobile-to-mobile minutes (with all other SRPCS customers). This plan is available for \$23.31 per month, taxes included. Our taxes do not change from month to month, this is a set rate. The OTAP credit is available on all of our service plans. If you have questions regarding our plans or assistance programs, please contact us at 541-893-6115 or stop by our office at 349 First Street, Richland, Oregon. For more information regarding the Lifeline/Link Up America telephone assistance programs, please visit [www.lifeline.gov](http://www.lifeline.gov). This program is limited to one discount per household. Use the household worksheet if there are multiple subscribers at one address. The service is not transferable, and only eligible customers may enroll in the program. Federal lifeline supports are paid entirely by the Federal Lifeline Program.

## Snake River PCS

WIRELESS SERVICE WHERE YOU LIVE & PLAY  
349 First Street Richland, Oregon  
541-893-6115 [www.eagletelephone.com](http://www.eagletelephone.com)



# STILL #1

## IN CUSTOMER SATISFACTION



**Les Schwab was ranked #1 in Customer Satisfaction for Aftermarket Tire Replacement 2 years in a row**

For J.D. Power 2021 award information, visit [jdpower.com/awards](http://jdpower.com/awards)

## LEW BROTHERS LES SCHWAB

210 Bridge Street, Baker City 541-523-3679

Walk-Ins Welcome