

2016 Pioneers: Dan and Priscilla Schnell

The Elizabeth Stampede started with a simple phrase spoken in July of 1965: “Let’s have a rodeo.” The pioneers who dedicated their time, energy, ideas, and passion to make that happen laid the groundwork to make the Elizabeth Stampede, one of the finest rodeos in the country.



Celebrating these pioneers is a Stampede tradition. The winners of this year’s Pioneers Award are Dan and Priscilla Schnell of Elizabeth.

Like the family home they built south of town—a unique blend of art and history founded on faith and memories—this strong partnership includes Dan as the illustrator and Pris as the author of the Schnell family story. It’s a story rich in Stampede history. Dan and Pris have been involved since being convinced to join their friends — the Almquist, Snead, Williams, Dieker, Hudson, Glick and Morgan families — in volunteering. “With friends like that, how do you say no?” It is these valued friendships that define the Stampede for the Schnells.

Dan, who has been involved with horses and rodeo all his life has held a number of positions in the more than 20 years they have supported the Stampede, including timed events, helping run chutes and managing rough stock events.

“Twenty years. That’s about how many rain slickers Dan has lost at the rodeo,” says Pris. For her, involvement in horses and rodeo came with marriage and family. She proudly states that she is the sole stock contractor for Stampede To Read’s Stick Horse Rodeo. Pris has served as chair of the Royalty Committee and as advisor to two special rodeo queens, daughters Sarah (1993) and Maria (2003). Son Luke has volunteered and don’t be surprised to see grandson Maxin in the arena this year. Rodeo is truly a family affair in the Schnell house.

“The loyalty to the rodeo and the goal to continue to make it better each year is embedded in us and the history is so deep that it is a good reminder that we need to bridge the tradition of the small town rodeo way of life and the need to embrace modern growth and change. The values of the rodeo and the western way of life include faith and family which is why we love it so much,” comments Pris.

Dan adds, “It’s also the love of animals and the pageantry of it all. that power and strength in an animal that is in its own way gentle and kind—and never knowing which athlete will win on any given day. The cowboy or the bull or horse. It’s as close to real life as you can get in a sport. It’s the success and glory along with the risks and dangers, all based on your own ability and the ability of the animal.”

These retired teachers continue to educate by example. “Our goal is to make a difference in everything we do. If there is one thing we would tell future volunteers, it would be for them to find a way to make a difference and to keep this rodeo at the heart of the community. We hope to continue to raise the bar every year.” The rewards of that simple act include a lifetime of memories and enduring friendships.

Congratulations to Dan and Pris Schnell, the Stampede Pioneers for 2016. Thank you for including us in your story.