

COWBOY ARTS & GEAR MUSEUM

# 2024 BIT, SPUR & RAWHIDE ROMEL REIN CONTESTS



FEBRUARY 2024





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Step into the world of craftsmanship and tradition at the **2024 Cowboy Arts & Gear Museum 6th Annual Bit Contest & Auction**. We extend a warm welcome as we embark on an exciting journey, celebrating the artistry and functionality of gear making. This year, we are thrilled to introduce the Spurs Contest, a new addition that promises to add a new dimension to our showcase.

As we delve into the heart of our traditions, we shine a spotlight on the #99-bit pattern and the #100 spur pattern from the 1924 Garcia Saddlery Co. Elko, Nevada Catalog. These iconic designs, featuring the timeless heart symbol, echo the rich history of bits, spurs, and Western gear. The heart symbol, an enduring motif, connects the past with the present, weaving a thread of continuity through the tapestry of our heritage.

Our esteemed participating artists, numbering thirty from across the country, bring a kaleidoscope of experiences, ranging from seasoned expertise to emerging talent. Armed with blank cheek pieces or spur bands, each creator infuses their unique style and creativity into these raw materials, forging pieces that are not only unique works of art but also highly functional.

In addition to the annual bit contest, we are excited to continue the Rawhide Romal Rein Contest. Rawhide romal reins, integral to the bridle bit setup, take center stage with 15 braiders from around the country showcasing their skills. These braiders, with their diverse styles and plaited strings, contribute to the vibrant tapestry of traditional bridle setups.

Each handcrafted item, be it a bit, spur, or rawhide romal rein, is a testament to the dedication and skill of the individual artist. Intricately designed and thoughtfully crafted, these pieces are now available for auction. Immerse yourself in the bidding process, and take home a piece of living history that blends artistry with functionality.

Visit [westerntradingpost.com](http://westerntradingpost.com) for auction registration and bidding instructions.

By supporting the artists who build gear, you become an integral part of preserving the legacy of hard work and craftsmanship that defines our Western culture. Your involvement ensures that the Bit, Spur & Rein Contest and auction continue to pay homage to artists, gear-makers, our history, our future, and the enduring passion that keeps it all alive. Join us in celebrating the essence of our heritage and the artisans who bring it to life.



# BIT CONTEST







## — JOHN WRIGHT & BRET HASKETT —



**This complete Bridle Set is generously donated, with 100% of the proceeds dedicated to supporting the museum's mission and endeavors.**

The museum is privileged to showcase this contribution to our auction – a custom-made headstall, bit, and headstall conchos generously donated and hand crafted by John Wright & J.M. Capriola Co. We extend our sincere appreciation to J.M. Capriola Co. for their additional generosity in including a set of Jedidiah Rice rein chains, further enhancing the beauty of this complete bridle.

Jedidiah Rice, a highly regarded and respected gear maker within our industry, collaborates with his wife to operate a small shop in Idaho known for producing exceptional gear. Their dedication to crafting phenomenal pieces, including the stunning rein chains featured in this set, reflects their commitment to excellence. We are pleased to note that these remarkable rein chains are now available through J.M. Capriola Co., allowing a broader audience to appreciate the exceptional workmanship.

The museum acknowledges and values the significant contributions of individuals such as John Wright, J.M. Capriola Co., and Jedidiah Rice, who play a vital role in preserving and promoting the rich heritage of our industry. Their collective efforts contribute immeasurably to the culture of our community, and we express our heartfelt gratitude for their ongoing support.

Additionally, the museum would like to recognize the continued support and generosity exhibited by Bret Haskett and his wife, Melanie. Their enduring commitment to the former; Great Basin Gear Show, the CAGM annual contest, and the annual donation of Romal Reins exemplify a remarkable dedication to the industry and the art of gear making.

Bret's longstanding participation in these events, as well as his consistent contributions, has significantly enriched the community of makers and our event. The museum extends special recognition to Bret and Melanie for their unwavering commitment, recognizing the invaluable impact they have made on the industry, gear making, and the success of the CAGM. Their generosity and dedication undoubtedly play a pivotal role in fostering the continued success and growth of these meaningful endeavors.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the collaborators involved in this initiative. Their dedication and support make this endeavor not only meaningful but also impactful for the museum, ensuring the sustained celebration and preservation of our industry's legacy.



## — JEREMIAH WATT — & NEVADA MILLER



### Jeremiah Watt

Jeremiah has been working as both a saddlemaker and silversmith for 48 years. He has been self-employed for 35 years. Two years after starting his career as a saddlemaker, he began learning silversmithing and the metal skills of a bit and spur maker. Except for an eight-year apprenticeship as a saddlemaker, he taught himself all the other skills he acquired. Jeremiah and his wife Colleen spent five years working on remote chuckwagon jobs on various ranches across the West. He believes that no skill is complete without the knowledge gained from using and testing the gear that you put your name on. Jeremiah is passionate about building unique bridle bits and has spent a lot of time understanding the mechanics behind a functional and artistic bit. He enjoys teaching and sharing his knowledge with others. He recently became a grandpa and loves his new role. He also enjoys cycling, especially distance cycling, and wild camping and typically embarks on one long trip every other year.

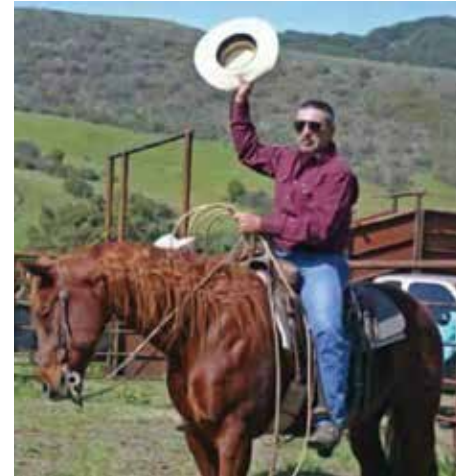
### Nevada Miller

Nevada Miller, of the Nevada Watt Brand, creates heirloom quality silver jewelry from her studio in the middle of nowhere Oregon. She blends western influences with international cultures to create items that hit just a little differently in the market. While being a maker is an important part of her life she also supports her husband in their families ranching operation and is the proud mother of a spirited little girl, Clara! Nevada also founded an online school to learn the Western Trades called Be A Maker School. With this school, Nevada along with talented makers across the industry has provided a way to carry these trades forward with the infusion of new makers!





## •— DENNIS DOMINGOS —•



Dennis grew up in the Santa Ynez valley. San Luis Obispo is to the North, Ventura to the South and Santa Barbara is in the middle. This is the home to many Vaqueros and Californios, deeply rooted in the Spanish style traditions. Many bit makers have come from this area in California such as G.S. Garcia, Mardueno and Juan Flores. Dennis is proud to be from a valley where such amazing artists have produced traditional Vaquero pieces that are now highly sought after.

Dennis, a cowboy by trade, modified his first bit while cowboying in 1975. Dennis spent a few decades working on his now trade and perfected his passion when he worked exclusively with Chuck Erwin in 2009. Chuck spent many years teaching and grooming Dennis to become the maker he is today.





## — DAVID SIMMONS —



David is from Northern California and lives in Anderson with his wife, Rachel, and two kids, Caleb and Chace. He grew up on ranches in Northern California, sparking his interest in becoming a certified farrier.

In 2021, David decided to try his hand at bit-making with help from Mike Vatalaro. This kickstarted his journey into honing his craftsmanship. Now, he's entering his fourth bit in the Cowboy Arts and Gear Museum Bit Contest.

David, who loves collecting bits, spends most of his days crafting and working on ranches. His experiences cowboying on various ranches have instilled in him a profound appreciation for the intricate skill set required to create a beautiful and functional bit.

From ranch life to becoming a certified farrier, David's passion for bit-making reflects his commitment to excellence. Each piece he creates combines tradition, craftsmanship, and dedication.



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## — GEORGE ELSNER —



George grew up working on ranches in the west. He currently builds custom bridles, spurs, bridle bits and snaffles for individual horses and cowboys. George is a very humble and modest silversmith who enjoys seeing his gear on the many working cowboys horses in the Great Basin Region. George has entered the Great Basin Gear Show and Bit Contest since its beginning.







## — CONNOR GARWOOD —



Connor Garwood has spent most of his life cowboying on ranches from where he grew up in Nebraska to Wyoming, Nevada, and now Arizona where he's currently colt starter and a cowboy on the ORO Ranch. When he's not horseback, the 25-year-old craftsman is working on his next bit or pair of spurs. Connor became interested in making bits and spurs as a teenager after watching a Bruce Cheaney spur making video. He was 16 when he built his first pair of spurs at his grandpa's shop with the help of his grandpa. He'd read about and admired the work of bit and spur maker Gary Wiggins who his mom got in contact with and just before his 18th birthday, he traveled to Brewster, Kansas, and built his 8th set of spurs in Wiggins shop. He returned five more times and built his first curb, snaffle and spade bit and learned how to engrave. Still early in his craftsmanship, he says his favorite thing to hear is how good his spurs fit, or a bridle rides. When asked about his deep steel engraving style he replies "I guess It's the one plus to my mule headedness".



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## — PAT HORLACHER —



Pat has always been drawn to Eastern Oregon. The harsh weather, rugged high desert terrain, and ranching way of life help to influence each of his pieces. He likes to refer to his engraving as a bastardized version of western bright cut and high relief. Pat strives to put his signature style into every piece and to make each piece unique and one of a kind. John Hyde, of Yamsi Silver and Leather, gave Pat the opportunity to get his foot in the door of silversmithing back in 2009 and since that humble beginning; Pat has worked with several excellent silversmiths, such as Dave Alderson and his biggest influencer Ernie Marsh. He plans to work with more, as he believes his education is never ending. Back in 2020 Pat and his wife, Kailin partnered with Ernie and Teresa Marsh and Marsh Bros. Bits and they are now being made in Pats shop in Burns, OR where they can continue on the tradition started by Al Tiejten.





## — CHRIS CHENEY —



Chris Cheney and his family live in Rexburg Idaho. He built his first bit in high school then he and his wife attended Miller Bit and Spur School in 2000 after looking for silver to mount on a saddle. He enjoys making California style spade bits and saddles and has tried to improve with each piece of gear he's made.

This year's bit features large 2 inch sterling flowers with 14 karat gold filled centers, sterling filigreed overlays that have been contoured, and fine silver inlays. The mouthpiece is a 4.25 inch Spanish spade, 5.25 inches wide and it's been offset forward on the cheeks for improved balance.

It's finished in a bright Nitre blue finish.





## — CARLEE STUTZ —



Introducing Carlee Stutz, a 25-year-old silversmith originally from Northern Colorado, now calling Burns, Oregon home. Carlee embarked on her silversmithing journey following her high school graduation. In 2021 she moved to Eastern Oregon to continue to grow her skill set as a silversmith and bit maker. Carlee draws inspiration from the vast landscapes of the high desert and the buckaroo culture of the Great Basin. Currently employed at Horlacher and Marsh, she skillfully assembles their renowned line of cast bridle bits, working under the mentorship of Pat Horlacher. Carlee's artistry reflects a deep connection to the rugged beauty of her surroundings, shaping a unique narrative in the world of silversmithing.



Justin, his wife Kathleen, and son Jake, live near the base of the Bighorn Mountains in northern Wyoming.

He has worked for the Tom Balding Bit and Spur shop for over 20 years as lead bit builder, silversmith, and sole engraver.

In addition, he has a custom silver and metalworks studio at his home, where he does custom silver, metal, and engraving work. Designs include jewelry pieces, western conchos, buckles, and bracelets, reflecting both western and outdoor themes. The entries he submits for this contest each year are entirely products of his home shop. All pieces are designed and built to exhibit both form and function, with bit comfort and functionality a priority.

Much of his spare time is spent hunting, fishing, and exploring the adjacent mountains and wilderness area. Many of his designs reflect his love of the outdoors and natural world.



Ann Kusler is a rancher from Cypress Hills, Saskatchewan. Together with her fiancé, Tyler, they own and operate a commercial cattle herd and breed/ raise ranch horses and stock dogs. After being introduced to silversmithing in College, Ann began dabbling in engraving and taking numerous classes. A year later, after coming home to take over the family ranch, she started "Kusler Silver Design". What started as a small jewelry business has now expanded and encompasses working cowboy gear. Ann enjoys coming up with unique designs and strives for functionality. Now, 7 years into her engraving journey, Ann has started to make bits. She looks forward to continuing to learn while pushing the boundaries of traditional gear. Her hope is to bring unique bits to the working cowboys and gals of North America.







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## — STEPHAN HOYT —



Stephen Hoyt is from Washington, Missouri. His current occupation is in agriculture. He is also a certified welder. Stephen enjoys working in silver and steel as well as making saddle silver, buckles and bits. He started his engraving business 2016. He has taken engraving classes and workshops from Diane Scalese and Ray Cover, that have helped him improve his talent.



## — LANE CREMER —



Lane Cremer, along with his wife Mayzie and daughter Clara, live in Big Timber, Montana where he is a full time rancher and builds bits and spurs in his spare time. Lane got his start building spurs out of rasps in college and became fascinated with the art aspect of California style gear. It wasn't too long after his interests peaked when he bought an engraving machine and started scratching up steel.

Over the years he had the privilege to learn from some of the best makers in the business: Ernie Marsh, Wilson Capron, Dave Alderson, Shawn Didyoung, Eddy Mardis, and Russell Yates. Lane is constantly trying to push the boundaries of his abilities, but his main priority has always been to build high quality, fully functional pieces to last for generations to come.

## — JAKE BROWN —



Jake grew up on a ranch west of Winnemucca Nevada. He spent nearly 3 decades Buckarooing in Elko County on some of the biggest ranches in the west.

He is an accomplished rawhide braider and decided to give the bit making a try after a good friend of his (Curt Waddington) showed him some basic skills involved in building bits. His many years spent working on ranches around talented horseman has given him a unique insight into building functional bits. He quickly gives Jesus all the praise for his rawhide and bit work.

He and his wife Riata live in Richland Oregon on a small working cattle ranch.





## — MATT WILSON —



Matt Wilson "Grew up ah dreaming of being a cowboy"; Some say he did, some say "All he's doing is keeping a good horse off feed!"

Growing up in Central Oregon he learned roping and riding and enjoyed a great upbringing. Learning to ride cutters, reiners, rodeo horses and even dressage and jumpers, Matt was a paid apprentice under accomplished trainers in all disciplines. He has an understanding of the horse.

Matt would tell you he learned all he knows about creating with his head and hands from his Dad. A man who is a meticulous fabricator at all he does.

Like many cowboys, Matt has always had an artistic flare to what he does. Be it decorating a fancy horse, painting, writing a song, carving stick horses or building a longbow, he has always been lucky enough to meet those who were willing to share their knowledge. He has always made do, and built with, whatever materials he could muster up.

If you know Matt then you know he is proud of his family: his beautiful wife of 27 years, Rachel, and their "five amazing daughters and two of the greatest son-in- laws they could ask for." They live in Silver Lake Oregon, where they have raised their family and enjoying living on the edge of the Great Basin – one Hamm's pork chop at a time!

Starting out with a vice on a stump and an anvil on another, a hacksaw, worn out files, and a welder he built his first bits. Eventually with his Dad they created a number of bits and had a successful small business after Matt was "nearly killed in wild and stupid adventures, for about the sixth time! Those bits are out there marked Wilson, and are still being traded around." Today, he builds many different styles of bits, conchos, and all sorts of ideas clients come up with.

Matt is honored to be involved in this years Cowboy Arts and Gear bit building competition. "Designing my idea, building, and trying some new ideas on this bit I feel, has broadened my horizons. I'm not concerned about competing, I've enjoyed the experience and look forward to being in Elko.



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## — TELL DEATRICH —



Tell has been a full time rancher since 2015 and he is able to work in his shop during the winter months. Tell generally makes knives but has started engraving in recent years. Building western jewelry and gear has mostly been an exercise in engraving, though he has had a long time interest in building bits and spurs. The artistry involved in creating functional pieces that are pleasing to the eye is a great challenge. Tell enjoys seeing other makers tackle the artistry aspect and he also enjoys this challenge himself. The 2023 bit entry was challenging, but he wanted the viewer to recall the original diamond shape that was prominent in the original Garcia bit. Keeping this bit traditional Tell also wanted to have his own original style in his design. The border of the concho reflects the modified diamond shape and the slight engraving on the cricket. It was also important to have the viewer be reminded of the crescent moon as they look over the mouthpiece and the rein chain stirrups.

## — RICHARD & LEIGHTON BROOKS —



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From their ranch near Cayley, Alberta Richard Brooks and his son, Leighton build custom gear, mainly influenced by the traditions of California style gear Richard does most of the design work and engraving while Leighton does most of the steel fabrication work. The silver fabrication is split between Richard and Leighton depending on the complexity of the project and Leighton has also started doing some leatherwork. Although we have adopted modern technology (waterjet, milling machines, welders, etc) we still honor our roots of a one man blacksmith/silversmith shop started in the 1940s by grandfather Roy Sr. as we build most of our pieces one at a time, with the same attention to detail to provide superior, functional work that could easily be considered art.





# SPUR CONTEST



## — RYAN ERICKSON —



Ryan Erickson started his journey into building bits and spurs in 1994. His education in the builders trade came from riding with horsemen and cowboys who were skilled in the finer points of communication between man and horse. His time spent in the saddle starting colts and cowboying for a living, have aided him in the practical application of theoretic principals. Along the way he would find established makers willing to impart skills and techniques that could improve the products he was making. Ryan and his wife, Kathryn, currently own and operate a breeding and training business in Stanley, NM, specializing ranch type show horses. This horse business and seasonal day work, provide immediate product testing opportunities, and allow him to get feedback from the industry professionals that purchase & use his items.

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Growing up on her family's sheep and cattle ranch in Utah, Amy developed a deep love of horses and nature. Her experience working on ranches, guiding for outfitters, riding colts for trainers and competing has greatly influenced her artistic approach, resulting in work that reflects her lifelong connection to the western lifestyle.

Amy's interest in silverwork and bits and spurs was sparked during her teenage years when she attended the Elko poetry gathering. Although she initially couldn't pursue her passion, she began honing her craft by learning leatherwork at a saddle shop in Vernal, Utah. Despite this detour, her dedication to silversmithing and engraving remained unwavering.

In 2013, Amy seized the opportunity to learn engraving from renowned artist Ernie Marsh at his shop in Etna, Wyoming. She further honed her skills by attending an intermediate engraving class at GRS in Emporia, Kansas. In recognition of her talent and potential, Amy was awarded the Art of the Cowgirl bit making fellowship with John Mincer in 2020. During this immersive experience, she learned various aspects of bit design and fabrication. The following year, Amy was honored with the Wyoming Arts Council Folk and Traditional Arts Fellowship, allowing her to work with Ernie Marsh again, this time focusing on spur design and fabrication.

Amy's work is both functional and traditional, as she creates traditional styles with unique patterns and designs, as well as adding a contemporary touch.

Driven by her gratitude for the knowledge and opportunities she has received from generous mentors, Amy has recently started teaching basic engraving. Her goal is to pass on what she has learned and inspire others to pursue their artistic dreams. Amy currently operates her business, Erickson Bit and Spur, on a full-time basis from her shop in southwestern Wyoming.



## — CHIP MERCHANT —



Chip and his family live in Beavercreek, Oregon, where he enjoys building bits and spurs and various other silver pieces. Chip has been blessed with good mentors and making good friends along the way. Chip attended two Ernie Marsh workshops and an engraving class with Diane Scalese. Chip is extremely thankful to have been given the knowledge and tools from these expert craftsmen. Chips goals are to create traditional one of a kind pieces that are of exceptional quality. Chip challenges himself to improve on each piece he designs, engraves and creates. Function and quality craftsmanship are the two elements that Chip strives to have in every piece he creates so that the gear he builds will be passed down for many generations to come.

## — STEPHEN HOYT —



Stephen Hoyt is from Washington, Missouri. His current occupation is in agriculture. He is also a certified welder. Stephen enjoys working in silver and steel as well as making saddle silver, buckles and bits. He started his engraving business 2016. He has taken engraving classes and workshops from Diane Scalese and Ray Cover, that have helped him improve his talent.

## — DOMINIC VALINE —



The creative seed was planted early by supportive parents. With an interest in rodeo and a career in welding, the idea of combining art with the fabrication of unique working cowboy gear seemed a good mix. His contemporary style of arena spurs started his business. Now his passion is providing the working with a using bit that has its own visual twist. His mix of rich patina steels and contrasting silver overlays give an old-world flavor to his work. From snaffles to signal bits, spurs to buckles, each order is hand crafted to suit the horse and riders.

## — KADE MARTIN —



Kade Martin raised in Wyoming on the family ranch, now resides in Idaho with his wife and 5 kids. Self-taught silversmith for the first 8 years, then was blessed to learn from many great mentors. Attended GRS class taught by Jeremiah Watt, then went on to continue his learning from John Wright, Wade Lowham, and many tips and tricks from Pat Horlacher, Jon Peters, Mark Dahl, Chris Cheney and other greats that have helped Kade develop his own style. He loves to learn and talk to everyone he can, and will never stop trying to become a better silversmith and craftsman. He's so very grateful for J.M. Capriolas, John & Susan Wright for doing all they do to keep these old traditions alive and heritages continuing. Also, the constant support and encouragement from his wife and kids.





Our family lives in Northeast California on the border of Oregon. We have raised cattle for the last seven years together as a family and it is what inspired me to start learning how to Silversmith in 2019. It was always in my sights to learn how to build bits and spurs and I am just getting into it with the help of some trusted mentors and my family. It was always important to me to be able to understand the function of a bit or spurs, not just the looks of them, so for the past two years we have lived in a cow camp for summer and fall cowboying full time as a family just outside of Adel, Oregon. I am heavily influenced by the traditional look of Garcia and Tapia. To me the look is timeless and functional. I am humbled by the opportunity to participate in the Cowboy Arts & Gear Museum, Elko Bit and Spur Contest. It has been a dream of mine for a long time!



# RAWHIDE ROMEL REIN CONTEST





## — THAYNE OIAN —



My name is Thayne Oian and I am a 21 yr old rawhide braider originally from North Dakota. I enjoy keeping cowboy traditions alive with my rawhide gear. Residing outside of Elko NV after I recently moved last winter, I currently work on a ranch and braid and do leather work on the side.

Through advice from family members and other great braiders and through social media I've been able to improve my skills and provide not only quality products but also a piece of art. The gear museum offers a great platform to advertise and show my work and also to help get my name out there.



## — JERRY ARBITER —



Jerry Arbiter spent more than 38 years as an aviator. His career included 20 years as naval aviator flying single seat jet aircraft from US Navy aircraft carriers. His military service included flying more than 200 combat missions from the USS Oriskany in Vietnam. Nowadays he'd rather be in the saddle on a good horse than in the cockpit of an aircraft...

After obtaining a copy of Bruce Grant's book on making horse gear in 1968, Jerry dabbled in braiding, making a few scruffy projects. In 2010 Jerry began braiding in earnest, making reatas, reins, hackamores, bosals, quirts, rein chains and the like. He processes his own hides and strives for continuous improvement. He gives credit to other braiders and friends including Doug Groves, Kirby Orme and Mike Skinner who've generously shared their braiding knowledge.





A native of Utah, Dan Ames began his braiding and leatherwork career in 1971. As a rodeo contestant he learned to braid bull ropes to supplement his earnings. In 1973 one of his customers convinced him to apprentice in his saddle shop and build ropes on the side.

Rawhide had always been a mysterious creature and after many attempts to master even the smallest project, it was put to the side with only the occasional dabble.

In 2014 with the help of longtime friend and cohort Kelly Wahlen, he went back trying to master the craft. A class with Doug Groves in Elko lit the fire. Continuing with tutelage from braiders such as Kelly, Doug, Jack Armstrong, Bret Haskett, and Graeme Quisenberry, along with attending several Rawhide Gatherings, his journey continues. In 2018 he was awarded 2nd Place People's Choice award at the Gear Show at Elko's Poetry Gathering, for his rawhide martingale.

Dan recently retired as a Wildland Fire Manager for the State of Utah and spends 4 months of the year guiding Big Game hunters from all over the world in the fall.

Braiding gear now takes up most of his time, and he continues to build some leather items such as saddles, boots, and various other custom goods.

## — KELLY WAHLEN —



Kelly was born in Clearfield, Utah on December 24th, 1957, the only child of Jack and Mildred Wahlen. From the time he could walk Kelly wanted to be a cowboy. So at the tender age of 8 he was galloping and exercising his dad's horses. Kelly rode race horses on the so called "bush" tracks throughout Utah, winning his first race he ever entered, at the age of 12. He was named the leading jockey at Box Elder County when he was only 13 and 14. Kelly competed for the Spikers Rodeo Club while attending Weber High School. At the 1975 National High School Rodeo Finals, held in Gallup New Mexico he was crowned the National Bull Riding Champion and Reserve All-Around Cowboy. Kelly competed for Weber State College in the National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association on a rodeo scholarship. In 1976 he joined the Professional Cowboys Rodeo Association competing in Bull Riding, Bareback Riding, as well as Team Roping. He rodeoed full time for the next 8 years. He was the PRCA Wilderness Circuit 3 time Bull Riding Champion in 1977, 1978 and 1980. During his Pro Rodeo career, he won the bull riding at such rodeos as Reno Nevada, Caldwell Idaho, Amarillo Texas, and Livermore California. He won the All-Around buckle at the Phoenix Rodeo of Rodeos in 1981. Following his rodeo career he returned to the race track, most notably, Wyoming Downs where he was Rider of the Year in 2000. He also rode in stakes races and derby's in 7 western states as well as Texas. He retired as a jockey in 2005. Kelly currently lives in Clinton, Utah. He built a log home on the same ground where he rode his dad's racehorse over 50 years ago. There are still horses on the place. Kelly's rope horses, as well as barrel horses and prospects that belong to his wife Julie and their daughter Jessica. He does quite a bit of jackpot team roping and has qualified for the World Series of Team Roping in Las Vegas Nevada on four occasions. He is also a talented rawhide braider, horsehair hitcher and buckaroo gear maker. His pieces are in high demand among collectors as well as working cowboys. His work has been exhibited in prestigious competitions and shows, such as The Annual Cowboy Poetry Gathering in Elko, Nevada. Over the years he has made and donated numerous pieces to raffles, benefits and awards for various western organizations.



## — NATE GIFFT —



Nate Giff's deep-rooted passion for cowboy culture traces back to his early years, and has grown into the relentless pursuit of building quality buckaroo gear and the horses that pack them. Residing in Baker City, Oregon with his wife and two children, Nate spends his time as a rawhide braider and day working cowboy. He attributes his expertise to the guidance and mentorship of Bill Black, whose knowledge was instrumental in shaping his braiding journey. Every step, from processing hides to dyeing strings, is a meticulously executed process that Nate takes great pride in. His participation in trade shows extends beyond profits. Rather, it serves as a platform to showcase his creative capabilities, engage with fellow craftsmen, and garner valuable insights for enhancing his work. Furthermore, it offers an avenue to establish meaningful connections with those who share a passion for gear making. Nate's commitment to learning and preserving the traditions of braiding and vaquero horsemanship sustain his dedication to this craft.





## — MIKE SKINNER —



Living in Boise Idaho, Mike focuses on braiding rawhide gear for the cowboy community. Mike's interest in handcrafted cowboy gear began early in life and he got his braiding start through the State of Washington's Folk Arts Apprenticeship program. The goal with each piece of gear is to improve functionality and add refinements, making each piece a work of art. Opportunities to spend time with horse owners and other braiders is key. Mike's success he values the time I have been able to spend with other braiders who are willing to share and teach.





## — ALBERT ZWAHLEN —



I got my start braiding about 18 years ago. Making my first set of reins. One of my good friends showed me how to braid eight strands of parachute cord into a set of reins. I knew then I wanted to keep making things braiding. Knowing I wanted to make these things I wanted to make them better and more traditional. I saw a feed store hackamore, and thought I could make that. My first few projects were a bit on the rough side, but I was hooked. I sought out anyone at a roping with anything braided and wanted to look at it. And figure out how they made it. I met one of my good mentors at a roping asking about his reins. I sought out classes or gathering from then till now. I was told once to learn at least one new thing every day. Getting to travel and meet new people because of this craft make that fairly easy. I enjoy the friendships and mentors that have come for this journey. I hope to share what I can with whoever might be interested.





## — JESSE BOLTON —



Jesse Bolton is a first-generation cowboy residing in far northeast California. After seeing braided rawhide gear for the first time as a teenager he developed an interest in learning how to make it himself, but his career as a rawhide wouldn't truly start until in 2009 after he and Nate Giffit spent a week learning from Bill Black. Driven by a desire to create quality useable rawhide gear, Jesse continued to learn from other rawhide braiders he worked with throughout his career as a cowboy. Now he relies on his rawhide braiding for a significant portion of his income. Jesse's approach to braiding focuses on functionality, longevity, and a clean and finished look, as he aims to provide his customers with a highly usable product that lasts long enough to become a family heirloom. If you ask him, he'll say the real art of rawhide is in its use.

## — JUSTINE NELSON-GRAHAM —



Born in the Magic Valley of Southern Idaho, raised around horses and other livestock, Justine has always been fascinated by the western way of life; particularly the tack and equipment that are unique to it's heritage. From childhood she sought to create the gear she observed around her. Often using whatever materials, she could find to build tack for toy horses.

At the age of 15 she was introduced to the writings of Bruce Grant. His books detailed the process of braiding rawhide into functional horse tack. She was hooked, and immediately took to braiding anything she could get her hands on. Shortly afterwards she also began working with and tooling leather. Eventually going on to learn saddle making and opening her own custom leather shop.

In 2015 she was able to begin to learn the process of taking a fresh cowhide through the curing and cutting stages and then braiding the resulting strings into finished pieces. She has continued to hone her skills in this craft., helped along by many of the top braiders in the industry. This hard and exacting process continually provides her with fresh challenges which she finds very satisfying.

Always one to use the gear she builds on her own horses she is able to maintain a strict quality control over the pieces she builds. Working in both rawhide and leather gives her a unique advantage as she is able to combine elements of both crafts seamlessly into her finished pieces. Her work is as functional as it is beautiful and is sought by cowboys, horsemen and collectors throughout the west and even abroad.

She currently splits her time between her leather/rawhide shop and the Wyoming cattle ranch where she lives with her husband.







Dakota May was born and raised in Nevada, and was always fascinated with the artistry and functionality of handmade gear. Fortunate to have Spider Teller as a mentor in his formative years he learned the old traditions that have been used for generations. Having worked on ranches in California, Nevada, and Idaho; Dakota applies the knowledge and techniques he has learned in his travels to each unique piece of gear he builds.



## — LEVI MILLER —



Levi Miller is a fifth-generation rancher who in his rare moments of spare time enjoys braiding rawhide akin to the type of gear he grew up using. He began his braiding career as a teen with initial guidance from his father Gary Miller. From that point he expanded his knowledge by spending time with Nate Wald during his undergraduate studies at Montana State University where he majored in Rangeland Ecology. He also has appreciated the time spent at the Northwest Braiders Gathering in Pendleton Oregon. Following his graduation he moved home to help manage the family cow calf operation with his father and two brothers. His time has been focused in a new direction when he and his wife Nevada welcomed their beautiful daughter Clara to the world March of 2023.



Joseph Stanek grew up in the Bitterroot Valley forty miles south of Missoula, Montana on a small family ranch, working with horses and cows. In his father's library, he would spend time reading leather repair and rawhide making books. "I liked looking at the pictures, figuring out how thing worked, and got put together." At eight years old he joined 4-H and took an interest in leather crafting, where he received instruction from a neighbor named Martha of Martha's leather and crafted items for himself and family. Wanting good cowboy gear as he grew up, but knowing it was expensive, he decided to learn one of the crafts associated with cowboy gear, make extra, and thought he could trade for other items he didn't have. A friend suggested that he pickup rawhide because there were a lot of good leather crafters, saddle makers, and bit and spur makers in the valley, but rawhide braiders were needed. The part of the journey began about five years ago with the desire to make good products. Self-taught the learning curve was steep and a lot of trial and error. Making his own rawhide he ruined a few projects and remade them until he was satisfied. By attending workshops and rawhide gathering rubbing shoulders with other rawhide braiders. Joe is always learning and developing his own style. His hands-on working with hides has helped him develop the multi-coloring he attains in his craft. No dyeing is needed. To him braiding is math without numbers. You must figure out the pattern and rhythm of it. Time is at a premium with working construction full time and a husband and father of three children. Always looking for ways to improve, he strives to lean more towards artistic rather than production. And of course, function is important too, if a product can't do what it is designed to do, what good is it. He loves the camaraderie between braiders and the challenge of doing things in a new way. Working with his hands in rawhiding, helps keeps him connected to the art of braiding and the tools needed for the cowboy lifestyle. "I enjoy being close enough to my family, that whenever they need help with the ranch, I can be there for them. Or just saddling a horse to help friends work cows. It's something most folks don't even get a chance to experience. If they could, they would just fall head over heels for it. I feel very fortunate just to be able to touch it."



I'm from Lewiston, Utah, where I currently reside and my family runs around 100 head of cattle. I grew up riding and showing horses, helping out on the ranch and participating in many 4-H, and FFA activities, and Reined Cow Horse competitions. When I first started horse 4-H my dad gave me a gorgeous pair of braided leather reins to show with; I remember thinking they were the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen! As I grew, I gained an appreciation for braiding leather, and started braiding myself about two years ago. I absolutely love braiding, and I have high hopes for the future.





## — RICHARD FOREMAN —



Richard Foreman was born and raised in a small town in Illinois, where few would expect to find a future cattle rancher and rawhide braider. At 22 years old he began packing and guiding for big game hunts in Idaho, where he learned his love for working with horses. This love led him and his young wife, Cheryl, to work for cattle ranches across the west. In 1993 he ended up on the ZX Ranch in Paisley, Oregon. His time on the ZX ranch ultimately led to his passion for braiding rawhide tack. He had humble beginnings, initially starting to simply have the gear he needed to start training horses. His first bosal he made was made from borrowed tools and guidance from an old timer buckaroo on the ranch. This first bosal still hangs in his home to this day. But he didn't stop there. He turned a necessity for tack into an art that he would trade and sell to supplement his meager buckaroo wages. Eventually he would acquire his own tools and style and travel to trade shows where he made a name for himself. Richard eventually settled in California and worked for an old cattle rancher till he was offered the opportunity to start his own cattle ranch. With a ranch and a young family, he became too busy to practice his art. But when the 2020 pandemic began his youngest son, Cooper, left for the Marines and his oldest son and his wife, Cole and Ruby, returned to help work on the ranch. Their need for their own tack encouraged him to crack open the books and used his newest resource, the internet and YouTube. He crafted a fine bosal and riata while helping his son and his daughter-in-law build bosals for themselves. These were his first rawhide work in 15 years. Now that he's older and wiser, he is refining his craft with more patience and for his enjoyment, hoping to bring his rawhide braiding to his local cowboy community.



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