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INFR STORY #2 READY-FOR-RELEASE

RODEO ROUGH STOCK RANCHERS

It takes good critters to make good cowboys and key to that equation is the animals provided by rodeo stock contractors. In the case of the Indian National Finals Rodeo, there are several dozen suppliers who haul in stock from all over the U.S. and Canada --- Indian ranches that raise Indian livestock for use in an all-Indian rodeo.

Staying true to its 38 year tradition, INFR --- the biggest and longest-running American Indian rodeo organization in the world --- keeps it all in-house. "We're all-Indian from our cowboys to our critters," says INFR general manager Donna Hoyt.

Acknowledging that it's more expensive to work only with Indian-owned animals, "We made a commitment to showcase stock from all around Indian Country," says INFR's Perse Hooper, noting that last year the rides --- and the ridden --- came from ranches in Montana; South Dakota; Oklahoma; Arizona; California; Wyoming; New Mexico; Florida, and Alberta, Canada.

The INFR Stock Contractors Association began in 2009 at the suggestion of Smiley and Chancy Kittson of Browning, Montana. The Blackfeet father and son team reasoned that Native contractors did year-long regional rodeos, but were not afforded an opportunity to go to The Big Show and they wanted to change that. "It's been proven that if stock contractors are given the opportunity to bring a select number of animals to an event like this, they'll bring their best ones," says Chancy, now INFR Stock Superintendent.

"A lot of these contractors have waited their whole life to get invited to INFR and when they do, we get the cream of the crop of their animals. Allowing Native contractors a chance to be a part of the Las Vegas event has helped raise the bar to a new level. There were ranchers who didn't have the correct caliber of animals we were looking for, and once they knew they could be potential players at INFR, they have worked to raise the bar."

Rodeo stock contractors are multi-talented businessmen and women who must not only be knowledgeable about cattle, but link that knowledge with a strong business sense to provide horses,

bulls, steers, and calves for the rodeo, which this year will be held November 5-9 at the South Point Equestrian Center in Las Vegas.

It takes smarts from both sides of the corral fence to make a living in livestock. One third-generation Oklahoma provider gave up bulldogging for bull providing, noting that “if you’re rodeoing, you might get a check every month, but if you’re a stock contractor, checks arrive every week.”

The two main categories of stock are rough and roping. Rough refers to animals being ridden and prized for their bucking abilities. Roping is in reference to animals used in timed-events like tie-down or team roping. Professional providers can often own between a couple dozen and a couple hundred event animals to stock the competition circuit and traditionally focus on a specific group, be it horses, calves, or bulls.

Planning on as many as 200 rough stock animals at the 2013 Indian National Finals Rodeo, Kittson says: “We couldn’t provide the level of competition we do without the stock contractors and it’s important to realize the sacrifices they make in raising and conditioning their animals. These contractors love their animals more than their children in some cases...the livestock become Priority Number One.”

K/L bucking Bulls out of Page, Arizona, is one of the veteran INFR stock providers where Michelle McCabe says: “Our annual goal is to provide a special pen of stock that adds to the caliber of desired performance, challenging riders to do their best and giving them a chance at a winning score. We want to bring in bulls that, if successfully ridden, will provide a high score for the rider. It’s a balancing act and when the team of rider, bull, and livestock supplier click, it’s a job well done.”

Steve Stallworth, Equestrian Center General Manager, sees a lot of hooves in his house but says the annual arrival of cowboys, livestock, and fans associated with INFR is always a high point --- “Great competition with great athletes and great livestock.”

