

SKYLINERS

Horses and people making headlines.

World Class Proposal

By Tonya Ratliff-Garrison



WHEN ROBERT “BO” BARKER FIRST MET VICKI BALLOU, SHE WAS going through the January 2000 issue of *The Quarter Horse Journal*, reading about the 1999 AQHA World Championship Show she had visited a couple of months before.

“I didn’t know a thing about horses, but she lived and breathed them,” the Emmetsburg, Iowa, resident said. “She raved about the World Show and said she would love to go back again.”

So almost five years later, Barker thought what better place to ask her to marry him. But instead of an engagement ring, he planned to give her an “engagement roan”: a 1984 red roan mare named Big Bad Ruthie.

“The mare belonged to Vicki over 15 years ago,” he said. “She showed her in open shows and thoroughly loved the mare.”

However, Ballou had to give the mare up when her grandfather decided to sell the mare because she kept breaking out of the pasture. But “Ruthie” was never far from Ballou’s heart.

“She has had dozens of horses, but always Ruthie was at the top of her list of her most loved horses,” Barker said. “She has always lamented having to sell her beloved Ruthie.”

Barker then got the idea of locating Ruthie and buying her back for Ballou. In 2001, he located the mare near Phoenix, but before he could make the final purchase of Ruthie, he lost his job.

“From 2001 until recently, we have been through a financial hell,” he said. “But I never let go of the dream of getting Ruthie back for Vicki.”

Finally, in mid-2004, Barker decided it was time to not only bring Ruthie home to Iowa but also to ask the woman he loved to marry him. And he would do it all at the World Show.

“Our friends, Delbert and Donna Struve of Hartley, Iowa, had just qualified their stallion, Varsity Red, for the aged stallions class, so it just kind of hit me one day when I was driving by their house: Now is the time,” Barker said. “Find the mare. If she’s still alive, get her bought. Bring her to Oklahoma City to the World Show. I know Vicki loves this setting. She loves this kind of horse. She loves AQHA. Where is there a more perfect place to propose to her?”



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Barker tracked Ruthie down again and convinced her owner to sell the mare to him.

But how to get Ruthie to Oklahoma City, more than 1,000 miles from her Phoenix home?

Through searching, e-mailing and phone calls, he finally found William Page, D.V.M., who said he would bring Ruthie to the show along with his horse, Smart El Niño, who was consigned to the World Show Sale. Then, working with the show department at AQHA, Barker was able to get a stall for Ruthie on the show grounds.

Then came the hard part: getting Ballou to the mare's stall without her knowing what was going on.

The Struves' trainer, John Kabeiseman Jr., had an idea. After watching their friends' stallion compete in his halter class, Kabeiseman would say that he wanted to walk over to Barn 8 to look at one of his stallion's daughters.

"It worked exactly the way it was supposed to work," Barker said with a grin.

The crowd walked up to the stall, and Ballou immediately recognized Ruthie.

"I knew her right off the bat," she said.

As fast as she could, she opened the stall and hugged the horse she hadn't seen since 1988.

"She hugged Ruthie before she hugged Bo," Delbert Struve said.

"I always said I put my horses before my men," Ballou retorted.

"That she does," Barker said with a laugh.

However, Ruthie was only a small part of Ballou's surprise. Stitched on the purple halter the mare wore was "Will You Marry Me? -Bo"

"It took her a little bit to figure out what was going on," Struve said.

"I had to turn the horse's head for her to see," Barker said.

Ballou immediately said "yes" after reading the halter, but that wasn't good enough for Barker. He got down on his knees in the sawdust of the stall, and brought out Ballou's engagement ring: a fancy O-ring snaffle. Engraved on it was: "Vicki & Ruthie: Together Again; Vicki & Bo: Together Forever. AQHA World Show. November 20, 2004."

Ballou said "yes" all over again.

"I wanted to get her an engagement ring, but I was afraid I would get the wrong size or style, so I thought this was better," Barker said.

The two have yet to set a date, but you can bet Ruthie will be invited to the wedding.

Leadership AQHA

By Jim Bret Campbell

LOOKING FOR A WAY TO GET MORE INVOLVED WITH YOUR Association? In 2004, AQHA implemented "Leadership AQHA" as a way to train current and future leaders in how the Association works. Ten applicants were selected by the AQHA Executive Committee to participate in the first-year program.

The program's goals included identifying, capturing and training future leaders of AQHA and its affiliates; developing a pool of potential leaders for the horse industry; providing future leaders more knowledge about the various areas of the industry; keeping promising young people, who have shown an early interest in AQHA, involved in the Association's future; and maximizing the talents of the many young leaders within our industry and provide another level of involvement after their youth years.

The first 10 participants were: Amanda Rogers of Greensboro, North Carolina; Angela Eash of Sherman, Maine; Candice Frome of Fort Collins, Colorado; Debbi Holmes of Virgil, South Dakota; Georgianna Busboom of Dallas; Joel

Cusimano of Sallisaw, Oklahoma; Karen Waite of Lansing, Michigan; Michelle Forness of Saint James, Missouri; Nancy Kenway of Lethbridge, British Columbia; and Toni Bockelman of Manhattan, Kansas.

For more information about Leadership AQHA, contact Leman Wall, AQHA senior manager of membership services, at (806) 376-4888, Ext. 333, or e-mail lw@aqha.org.



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