36th National Cowboy Poetry Gathering Special Sessions & Discussions

Elko, NV - For 36 years in the heart of winter, thousands have traveled to Elko, Nevada to listen, learn, and share experiences of ranching and the rural West through poetry, music, and stories. The National Cowboy Poetry Gathering, presented by the Western Folklife Center, has been called the most honest and open-hearted festival in America. From January 27–February 1, 2020, Western community and tradition is alive and well as celebrated through hands-on gearmaking, cooking, dancing and writing workshops; live poetry and music performances; exhibitions, talks, films, and storytelling sessions.

The upcoming 36th National Cowboy Poetry Gathering delivers again with an exciting, thought provoking, and educational line-up of special session discussions and compelling speakers. The scope and number of discussions and special sessions will have something for everyone!

KEYNOTE ADDRESS: Horses at Work in Contemporary Society

Thurs, Jan 30, 9:15–10:30 am
Not to be missed is the Gathering's opening conversation that will explore the value and growing relevance of horses in contemporary society and how we might regain the important connection horses once represented between rural and urban communities. Bryan Neubert, horseman/buckaroo, and colt starting, horsemanship, and cow-working expert; Derek Knapp, executive director of the groundbreaking Restoration Ranch, and Ghuan Featherstone, South Central Los Angeles native and founder of Urban Saddles will come together to share their different everyday experiences with horses and their communities.

Horses

The Gathering sessions continue to honor the horse and celebrate the horse rider connection by offering Conversations: Horses and Riders I & II. Join Peter Taylor, Ghuan Featherstone, Derek Knapp, Mike Beck, Maria Lisa Eastman, Maddy Butcher, Bryan Neubert, and Randy Rieman in these discussions and learn from their variety of backgrounds of the use science as well as tradition to optimize outcomes for horses, in rural or urban settings, contemporary therapeutic centers and working ranches.

Cowboys

In exploring this year's theme honoring and celebrating the historic contributions and contemporary culture of Black Cowboys, the Gathering will feature illustrated talks and conversations. Historian Les Sweeney explores the legendary Buckaroo and National Cowboys of Color Hall of Famer Henry Harris. Myrtis Dightman, Sr., who in 1964 became the first Black cowboy to compete at the National Finals Rodeo, will make the trek to Elko from his Texas home to share some of his amazing life stories.

Mr. Dightman will also participate in the Rodeo Stories Sessions along with rodeo veterans Luke McKay, Gabe McKay, Jim Brooks, Rodney Nelson, & Cat Clifford as they take listeners behind the chutes, into the arena, and down the road through hearty stories of the ins and outs and ups and downs of rodeo life.

Additional talks include Southern Riders, a visual presentation by Gathering featured photographer Rory Doyle introducing some of the communities he met in his three year journey to document Black cowboys, and horsemen and women from Georgia to the Mississippi Delta; and Community, Continuity, Conviviality: Trail Rides in South Central U.S. sessions. In these sessions Rory will be joined by Myrtis Dightman Jr. and Geno Delafose and others as they all share tales of the Black cowboys tradition of trail riding groups and rides from Louisiana and the Mississippi Delta to Texas.

Veterans

The National Cowboy Poetry Gathering is honored to continue its collaboration with the Veterans Resource Center at Great Basin College and the Veterans History Project of the American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress. The discussion: Gathering Veterans Stories, Songs, and Poetry, will be hosted by Karen Lloyd, Veterans History Project, Library of Congress and include those involved in the Writers Project and veterans presenting and sharing stories they have been collecting as well as writing related to their service. This panel will feature Jennifer Koopman (Great Basin College), Dave Richmond, Bill Jones, Ghuan Featherstone, Joel Nelson, Derek Knapp and Ted Howard.

Modern Ranch Topics

For those interested in delving into contemporary ranchers navigating modern times, two sessions should be particularly rewarding. In Stories & Film: The McKay Family we invite you to get better acquainted with this eastern Oregon ranch family that includes six adoptive children from Haiti with a rich exchange of stories, traditions, and identities. We invite you to get better acquainted with this eastern Oregon ranch family that includes six adoptive children from Haiti with a rich exchange of stories, traditions, and identities.
In the second talk, **Managing for Abundance: How Ranchers are Stewarding the Land for Increased Biological Outcomes**, Spencer Smith, owner and operator of the Jefferson Center for Holistic Management, and an accredited Savory Field Professional, will connect the dots between ecosystem function and livestock movements, healthy soil and human nutrition. This discussion will celebrate the great stewards of our western landscapes while looking at new, innovative ways that producers and land managers are building soil, habitat, and improving water resources.

**AND MORE**

See discussions & special sessions, go to special quests & speakers, or e-mail Karyn Erickson, Media Relations for more information on any of the special sessions or speakers.

The Western Folklife Center is a member based non-profit organization. The 36th National Cowboy Poetry Gathering is supported by foundations, business, corporations, and individuals including the Nevada Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts, Nevada Humanities and the National Endowment for the Humanities, the City of Elko and the Elko County Recreation Board, as well as individual memberships.

Links to additional 36th National Cowboy Poetry Gathering press releases and media assets can be found here: https://www.nationalcowboypoetrygathering.org/press-room

The mission of the Western Folklife Center is to use story and cultural expression to connect the American West to the world.

www.westernfolklife.org

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