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PHOTO COURTESY OF JAY REISER

The presentation of the colors, with a rider carrying the flag, is a rodeo tradition.

RIDE, ROPE AND FUN: McLean County rodeos

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

Sometimes, a person crafts the enjoyment of an activity from a young age, honing a youthful interest into an endeavor lasting a lifetime.

Other times, a person discovers an activity as an adult, then shares it so others of all ages can enjoy it as well.

Jay Reiser, Washburn, has been involved in ranching much of his life, but began competing in ranch rodeos as an adult.

"It is a group of people that enjoy the ranching and cowboy lifestyle, and competition and camaraderie that comes with events like these," he says.

Ranch rodeo events aren't traditional rodeo events like bull riding or barrel racing. Instead, contestants

partake in steer mugging, range branding, wild cow milking, trailer loading and a trailer relay. While contestants share the love of competition and winning, they're also on the other side of the fence, cheering for each team, Reiser adds.

Although Reiser didn't grow up in the rodeo arena, his participation in ranch rodeo as an adult brought back childhood memories. He recalls attending the McLean County Fair when he was younger, when a ranch rodeo was a county fair staple.

Yet times change and the county fair's ranch rodeo became a distant memory.

As Reiser got more involved as a ranch rodeo participant, he reminisced about those bygone days and

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Roping teams compete in steer mugging during McLean County Fair's Ranch Rodeo.



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the county fair's ranch rodeo.

"I remembered it being fun to watch and I also thought it would be good to have another ranch rodeo in the area to compete in as well," he says.

Reiser reached out to the McLean County fair board, and with the support of its board of directors, the McLean County Fair Ranch Rodeo was reestablished in 2024.

Last year's event fell on Father's Day.

"I thought this would be a great way to celebrate the dads in our life by having the ranch rodeo highlight them through shoutouts and some giveaways that kids could sign their dads up for," he says.

This year's event celebrates Flag Day and the nation's 250th anniversary.

Typically, two teams (four riders on horseback and two steers each) go head-to-head in ranch rodeo events.

"So, the action is constant and there is a lot happening at the same time. It is very exciting to watch," Reiser says.

What is Reiser's favorite event as a participant and organizer? That's easy: "All of them."

Reiser has a volume of volunteers sharing his interest in bringing the ranch rodeo dream to fruition each year.

"They are all amazing people that help with making flyers and banners, to inviting people to attend and help

sponsor, to those that help the day of the event and make it run smoothly," Reiser says.

Volunteers are also the heart and soul of the Max Rodeo Association, which was established in the late 1970s and sponsored by the Max Jaycees, describes Karen Finkbeiner. Volunteers like Jerome Finkbeiner spearheaded the efforts with the group, later



Tatum Arndorfer, Tenley Kleeman, Megan Hogue and Charley Heuchert, left to right, were open winners in the 2025 McLean County Fair barrel race.

PHOTO COURTESY OF NICOLE EVENSON

establishing the Max Rodeo Association.

At least 30 people contribute their time and efforts through their participation in the association to host its annual Max Roughrider Rodeo and maintain its grounds in working order, volunteer Nicole Evenson estimates.

"It takes quite a few," she adds.

Amateur Rodeos of North Dakota launched in 1981, later becoming the Roughrider Rodeo Association (RRA). The Max Rodeo Association's annual rodeo has been a longstanding sanctioned RRA event.

While the rodeo is the organization's only event at its rodeo grounds, the group also organizes and hosts the McLean County barrel race during the annual McLean County Fair in Underwood, Evenson says.

The event has attracted about 100 participants in recent years.

"We have had kids as young as 2 to adults in the 60s-plus," Evenson describes.

Contestants are divided into three divisions based on age groups: the Peewee Division is for 9 year olds and younger, the Youth Division is for those 10 to 18 years old and the Open Division is available to any age as they all compete for buckles and cash prizes.

All of the peewee riders receive prizes, Evenson adds.

Evenson came into the rodeo arena at a young age, riding horses and barrel racing.

"Getting involved with the Max Rodeo Association was a great fit when I moved to the area," she adds. Evenson, currently serving as treasurer, joined the association in 2017.

Cowboys and cowgirls from North Dakota, South Dakota and Montana, and stretching into Canada, participate in the Max Roughrider Rodeo. They compete in saddle bronc, tie-down roping, steer wrestling, team roping, goat typing, breakaway, barrel racing and bull riding.

The legacy of the cowboy and horse, rodeos, cattle and American Indian culture shaped this nation and its history.

That's one reason the MHA (Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara) Rodeo Association, MHA Nation and Three Affiliated Tribes host several rodeos, plus a rodeo championship, across the Fort Berthold Reservation, described White Shield's Ree Ranch Manager Jackie Whitecalfe.

"Our nation was built on the back of a horse," she says.

The White Shield Stampede, held at the Ree Ranch horseback riding, training and rodeo facility south of White Shield, is a way to keep the horse and the ranch tradition alive, she describes.

Like the Max Roughrider Rodeo, White Shield Stampede participants hale from throughout the multistate region and Canada. It's open to the public to attend and participate, Whitecalfe adds, with contestants competing in junior and senior divisions in the wide array of traditional rodeo events. The first Stampede was held in 2017.

Today's rodeo events were once a vital part of the bygone days of western life working cattle on the range. Yet, rodeos remain part of the American lifestyle well into the 21st century.

They keep traditions alive in places like McLean County, celebrating a lifestyle of the past and present. ■

Riding the bull during Mercer-Turtle Lake Rodeo Club's annual Bulls and Broncs.



PHOTO BY KAREN ZINKE

2026 McLean County rodeos:

- **Max Rodeo Association Annual Roughrider Rodeo:** July 31-Aug. 1, with 6 p.m. Friday performances, Saturday slack at 8 a.m. followed by 2 p.m. afternoon performance. The Max rodeo grounds are located on the west side of the community. More information is available on the Max Rodeo Association Facebook Page.
- **McLean County Fair Barrel Race:** June 13 beginning with a 10 a.m. exhibition. Racing follows at noon at the McLean County fairgrounds, Underwood.
- **McLean County Fair Ranch Rodeo:** June 14 beginning at 2 p.m. at the McLean County fairgrounds, Underwood. The ranch rodeo will also celebrate Flag Day and the 250th anniversary of the United States as part of this year's event. Look for information on the McLean County Fair's Facebook page as well as its website, mcleanfair.com.
- **White Shield Stampede:** Held annually on the second weekend in July in conjunction with the community's annual Arikara Celebration Powwow. Contact Jackie Whitecalfe, 701-898-7210, for more information or visit the Ree Ranch Facebook page, [Facebook.com/free.ranch](https://www.facebook.com/free.ranch). ■

A rodeo passion

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

It started innocently enough, with a love of rodeos. It's a passion Randy and Karen Zinke passed onto their sons, Lane and Logan. Little did they realize how the love of a sport would grow.

Randy and Karen founded the Mercer-Turtle Lake Rodeo Club after their boys started riding calves in junior rodeo competitions. The problem was there weren't many junior rodeos in the region 20 years ago. The rodeo club solved the problem by hosting a Lil' Rowdy Bucking Bulls Performance held at Schlichenmayer's Arena south of Turtle Lake.

Its first rodeo was born.

"We (rodeo club) started out with Little Rowdy Rodeo Bulls," Karen describes, later expanding to a big pen with junior and senior bulls. Over the years, the club added calf and steer roping along with mutton busting.

Participants ranged from 3 years old to seasoned cowboy veterans in their 40s and 50s, with the addition of rough stock events, Karen says. The Mercer-Turtle Lake Rodeo Club Annual Brush Lake Bulls and Broncs Rodeo attracted participants from North Dakota, Minnesota, surrounding states and Canada.

While Randy isn't a rodeo participant now, his favorite events remain rough stock.

"He always says, 'Since I cannot ride anymore, I have to do the work to put rough stock events on. We do it for the cowboys and for the love of the sport,'" Karen says.

The family loves attending rodeos.

"We love our rodeo family. We all cheer and support each other," she says. "A rodeo is one of the few events where a prayer is said before it begins. You will always observe our cowboys and cowgirls from other countries respect our country during the national anthem. Our veterans are always honored at rodeo events."

That love of rodeo is also evident among its many volunteers who assisted in creating its portable arena and working entrance gates, and helping with various events. The couple's daughter Haley and their good friend Roxanne Tweeten have helped every year since the first rodeo.

"We are so thankful for all of our other friends and family who have helped throughout the years. We could not have done it without them," Karen says.

The rodeo wasn't possible without its volunteers, Karen adds, along with the treasured support from sponsors such as McLean Electric Cooperative.

"McLean Electric has been a major sponsor for us for several years and we are so thankful for them and the many other great sponsors in our area. ... Rodeos are not money makers. Any money that is raised is used to help put on the next one. It's a lot of work, but when it's over, we are always happy to hear the cowboys say this is their favorite rodeo to come to. We're happy to



PHOTOS COURTESY OF KAREN ZINKE

A saddle bronc rider goes for the time during Mercer-Turtle Lake Rodeo Club's annual Bulls and Broncs.

hear some of our lake friends tell us, 'Thank you, it was a great event,'" she says.

This year's event is in the planning stages with the goal of celebrating The rodeo passion lives on. ■



Mercer-Turtle Lake Rodeo Club's annual Bulls and Broncs mutton buster participants show off their T-shirts.

A rodeo for all ages

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL



PHOTOS COURTESY OF N.D. PARKS AND RECREATION DEPT., FORT STEVENSON STATE PARK

A young contestant herds his "pig" toward its pen in the Stick Horse Rodeo.

Fort Stevenson State Park may be best known as a go-to destination for Lake Sakakawea fishing, camping and a host of longstanding, popular activities ranging from April's Maple Sugaring Day to a First Day Hike every New Year's Day.

But since 2024, another popular event takes center stage as part of its annual Frontier Military Days – a rodeo.

This isn't your typical rodeo though. It's a stick horse rodeo, which is a fun afternoon for children old enough to walk and into their teens. The horses are stick horses – the old-fashioned kind with a fabric and fuzzy-maned horse on a stick.

"You press their ear and they neigh," laughs Fort Stevenson State Park Manager Chad Trautman.

The bulls? They happen to be soft, squishy and wonderfully bouncy.

Events for the young cowboys and cowgirls are divided into age categories, from babies to 5 years of age, 6- to 8-year-olds and 9 years of age and older.

Some past events included barrel racing, where the

young cowboys and cowgirls ride their "horse" around 5-gallon buckets, bull riding a bouncy critter with its "bull" face and a cowboy boot race, along with critter penning where the younger cowpokes kick beach balls with farm animal faces into their "pen."

The park's first Stick Horse Rodeo began in 2024, one of several special events held throughout the year as it celebrated its 50th anniversary.

"We love kids' events and it tied well with the (Fort Stevenson Interpretive) Guardhouse," he adds.

The rodeo is held on the expansive guardhouse lawn as part of the park's longstanding Frontier Military Days in late June each year.

It wasn't just folks at the park that loved the idea of a Stick Horse Rodeo as a fun family activity. Many businesses and organizations wanted to be part of bringing the rodeo to fruition, Trautman describes, as the park sought sponsorships.

That includes McLean Electric Cooperative and Touchstone Energy® Cooperatives, a national network of electric cooperatives providing training and communications programs, resources and research.

The rodeo proved popular among its participating cowboys and cowgirls, as well as families, campers and those visiting the park for Frontier Military Days. Plans call to continue hosting the annual rodeo in conjunction with Frontier Military Days, Trautman adds.

The third annual 2026 Fort Stevenson State Park Stick Horse Rodeo takes place June 27, beginning shortly after the noon firing of the Frontier Military Days cannon.

Participants get to keep their stick horse to call their own and also receive a free coupon for a hotdog at the Frontier Military Days food truck.

A new event features nerf gun shooting, a modern take on an Old West tradition.

In addition, staff found adult-sized bouncing animals so mom or dad can "ride" with their toddlers if they want. It's yet to be determined if the adult "riding" will become an event onto itself or if it's geared so an adult can accompany a toddling cowboy or cowgirl as they compete, Trautman says with a smile.

Plans tentatively include Miss Rodeo North Dakota and a real-life rodeo clown to be in attendance this year, Trautman says.

The Stick Horse Rodeo is free for participants, although a \$7 N.D. State Park daily pass or annual pass good for all North Dakota state parks (\$35 for one vehicle; \$61.25 for two vehicles), is needed for park admission. Contact the park, 701-337-5576, or visit its Facebook page, [Facebook.com/fort.stevenson](https://www.facebook.com/fort.stevenson), for more details.

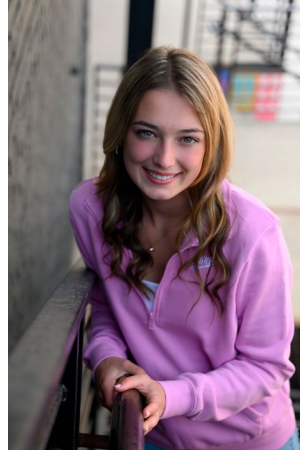
The park is 3 miles south of Garrison. ■



Sally Heger



Anthony Belzer



Kylee Heer



Kennedy Myers

Scholarship and Youth Tour winners announced

BASIN ELECTRIC SCHOLARSHIP

Basin Electric Power Cooperative provides two \$1,250 scholarships to McLean Electric Cooperative (MEC) member-owners' children. These scholarships were awarded based on academic excellence, which includes the following criteria: ACT scores, work experience and participation in school and community activities. The recipients are:

Sally Heger - Underwood

Sally is the daughter of Mike and Talesa Heger of Underwood. She will graduate from Underwood High School and is active in basketball, golf, track, softball, pep club and youth group. She is an honor student and valedictorian. She will be attending the University of North Dakota, pursuing a bachelor's degree in biology/pre-med. After college, she wants to apply to medical school and become a pediatrician.

Anthony Belzer - Garrison

Anthony is the son of Rod and Tracey Belzer of Garrison. He will graduate from Garrison High School and is active in football, basketball and golf and is the National Honor Society president. He will be attending North Dakota State University, pursuing a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering.

MEC SCHOLARSHIP

MEC provides a \$1,250 scholarship. Each entrant had to answer this year's essay question: "What challenges face rural electric cooperatives in the coming years and how do you think the challenges should be addressed?"

Kylee Heer - Max

Kylee is the daughter of Chad and Amy Heer of Douglas. She will graduate from Max High School and will be attending Bismarck State College to pursue a degree as a registered nurse. Her goal is to become a specialized diabetic nurse educator because her brother has Type 1 diabetes.

YOUTH TOUR WINNER

Kennedy Myers is a sophomore at Garrison High School. She is the daughter of Brad Myers of Douglas. She has been selected to represent MEC on the all-expense-paid 2026 Electric Cooperative Youth Tour in Washington, D.C., this June.

During the weeklong tour, Kennedy and other students from across North Dakota will tour sites, monuments, attractions and congressional offices. They will learn about electric cooperatives and discuss issues facing their community and nation. ■



Get your camera ready

BY PATRICIA STOCKDILL

Spring is embracing North Dakota and it's time to plan for the glorious days of summer and the coming year: Graduations. Spending time at one's favorite McLean County lake. Family gatherings and the wonders of the outdoors. Softball, baseball and T-ball. Swimming and kayaking or just playing in the yard with the dog. Feeding chickens, fishing, farming, football and fall hunting seasons. Watching wildlife or sunrises and sunset or simply living life as rural McLean County residents.

It's also time to think about entering McLean Electric Cooperative's (MEC) second annual photo contest.

From babies to families, critters of an array of sizes and shapes, and time on the water, MEC member-owners can put our life in rural McLean County on grand display and win prizes in the process.

The photographer of our grand prize-winning photo will receive a \$50 MEC bill credit and \$50 Visa gift card (\$100 total value).

First-place winners in each category receive a \$25 MEC bill credit and \$25 Visa gift card (\$50 total value).

The grand prize winner, along with first place and honorable mention winners, will also have their photos published in upcoming 2027 MEC local pages of *North Dakota Living*.

CATEGORIES:

- **Family and Friends Make Life Great:** Celebrate McLean County residents through portraiture or play in McLean County.
- **Hats off to Work:** MEC member-owners or family members at work, whether in the agriculture or energy industry, business world or self-employed.
- **Our Great Outdoors** – Furry, Feathered, Flora and Fauna: Let's celebrate what makes McLean County an outdoor destination – its lakes of all sizes, Missouri

River, wildlife of all shapes and sizes, flora, fauna and its natural scenic beauty.

CONTEST RULES:

- Photos must be taken by MEC member-owners or a parent/guardian must be a MEC member-owner for photographers 18 years of age and younger.
- Original digital photos only.
- No AI or photoshopping, although photos can be adjusted for color, exposure and cropping. Remember color and exposure vary depending on computer monitor settings.
- One entry per category per person.
- File type: High resolution jpg, jpeg or png.
- All photos must be taken in 2026.
- Winners will be announced in the February 2027 issue of MEC's Local Pages of *North Dakota Living*.

ENTRY SUBMISSIONS:

- Include name, contact number and email address along with photo location and date it was taken.
- **Deadline: Dec. 1.**
- Submit all entries to MECphotocontest@mcleanelectric.com. ■

Questions:

Contact MEC Communications Manager

Sonja Moe at

701-463-6700 or 800-263-4922 or email MECphotocontest@mcleanelectric.com.

McLean County community calendar: Events and activities to see and do

McLean County area food pantry May and June distribution and donation thrift store dates, times and locations:

- **Garrison – Garrison Area Resource Center & Food Pantry:** Noon-2 p.m. and 5-7 p.m. May 28 and June 25.
- **Makoti, Parshall, Plaza, Roseglen, Ryder, White Shield and others in need – Community Food Pantry:** 10 a.m.-1 p.m. May 23 and 10 a.m.-1 p.m. June 27, 181 Ellsworth St., Makoti. Community Thrift Store: 3-6 p.m. Tuesday, 4-7 p.m. Thursday and 10 a.m.-1 p.m. Saturday, except holidays, 181 Ellsworth St., Makoti.
- **Max – Our Savior Lord's Food Pantry:** Noon-3 p.m. and 5-7 p.m. May 18 and June 15, Max City Hall, 215 Main St.
- **Turtle Lake – The Lord's Pantry:** 2-4 p.m. May 14 and June 11, and 10 a.m.-noon May 23 and June 27, Trinity Lutheran Church, 515 Kundert St.
- **Turtle Lake – Free Community Clothing Share & Exchange Store:** Noon-6 p.m. every Thursday, 221 Main St.
- **Underwood – Community Cupboard of Underwood food distribution:** 10 a.m.-noon May 9 and 4-6 p.m. May 2 and June 11, 208 Lincoln Ave. Like on Facebook (Community Cupboard of Underwood), for distribution dates and thrift store updates.
- **Underwood – Community Cupboard of Underwood Thrift Store:** 1-5 p.m. every Tuesday.
- **Washburn – McLean Family Resource Center:** McLean County residents can contact the center, 701-462-8643, for an appointment to pick up baskets along with more information or assistance through the center's services, 205 Seventh St.
- **Washburn – McLean Family Resource Center Clothing Outlet:** 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, 205 Seventh St.
- **Wilton – Wilton Food Pantry mini distributions:** 11:30 a.m. until gone every Friday. Full food distribution 4-6 p.m. May 21 and June 18, Wilton Senior Citizens Center, 42 Dakota Ave.
- **Wilton – The (free) Clothes Closet:** 3-5 p.m. May 21 and June 18, First Presbyterian Church, 401 Dakota Ave.

Area food pantries often experience high needs for the following items: baked beans, pork and beans, canned fruit, tuna, chicken, vegetables, cereal, oatmeal, granola and breakfast bars, juice, macaroni and cheese, hamburger and tuna helper, pancake mix, syrup, pasta, spaghetti, Alfredo and pasta sauce, peanut butter, jelly, rice side dishes, soups and chili, and household items, such as body wash and soap, dish soap, laundry detergent, shampoo and conditioner, toilet paper, toothpaste and toothbrushes. Contact local food pantries for drop-off locations, information or a list of additional needs in your community.

- **Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Free Monthly Victim Support Group meetings:** 11 a.m.-noon May 7 and June 4, McLean Family Resource Center, 205 Seventh St., Washburn, 5:30-6:30 p.m. May 13 and June 10, Northland Health Center, 55 First Ave. E., Turtle Lake.

May and June events:

- Check for Memorial Day commemorations throughout McLean County communities.
- **May 3:** Annual Turtle Lake Hospital Auxiliary Salad and Sandwich fundraising luncheon, 10 a.m.-1 p.m., Turtle Lake High School.
- **May 8-9:** Washburn Community Rummage Sale sponsored by Washburn Life.
- **May 8-9:** Evening Hike Series: Full Flower Moon Fairy Hike, 9:30 p.m. each night, Fort Stevenson State Park, Garrison.
- **May 23:** Wally Trolley rides through Garrison begin every Saturday throughout the summer from about 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
- **May 23-25:** SkyFest Over Fort Stevenson Kite Festival, with kite flying and other family activities 10 a.m.-4 p.m. each day.
- **May 25:** McLean Electric Cooperative closed for Memorial Day observance and family time.
- **May 30:** White Shield Veterans Memorial Day Honor Ceremonies with 21-gun salute and taps at 13 cemeteries in the White Shield area, concluding at the Old Scouts Cemetery approximately 12:30 p.m., followed by gathering at the Veterans Building for a Memorial Day program, songs and meal.
- **June 5-7:** Washburn Riverboat Days.
- **June 6:** National Trails Day/American Legion Walk, Fort Stevenson State Park, Garrison. Hike starting at the Visitor Center at 2 p.m., enjoying the trails while honoring American veterans and underscoring veteran suicide awareness.
- **June 12-14:** McLean County Fair, Underwood.
- **June 13:** National Marina Day, with open house beginning at 1 p.m., Fort Stevenson State Park, Garrison. Garrison Marina (west marina).
- **June 6:** Military Appreciation Day, Fort Stevenson State Park, Garrison. Free daily park entrance fee admission for active military personnel.
- **June 16:** McLean Electric Cooperative's 81st annual meeting. Rocky Top Petting Zoo, bucket truck rides, registration, and supper beginning at 5 p.m., with business meeting at 6:30 p.m.
- **June 19-20:** Ryder 120th anniversary celebration.
- **June 20:** Camp of the Cross Ministries Annual Prairie Lake Festival, Douglas Bay on Lake Sakakawea. Quilt auction and lunch. Doors open at 9:30 a.m., lunch at 10:30 a.m. and auction at 11 a.m.
- **June 21:** Old Settlers Hiddenwood Picnic, Hiddenwood Lake.
- **June 21:** Annual Garrison Fire Department Fly-in Breakfast (freewill donation), Garrison airport.
- **June 27:** Midsummer Classic Car Show, Underwood.
- **June 27-28:** Frontier Military Days, noon-4 p.m., Fort Stevenson State Park, Garrison. Living history demonstration featuring skills and crafts from the 1800s and tours of the Fort Stevenson Guardhouse Interpretive Center.
- **June 27:** Stick Horse Rodeo, Fort Stevenson State Park, Garrison, following noon Frontier Military Days cannon-firing.

Nonprofit organizations and communities throughout McLean County can contact Patricia Stockdill at stockdill.patricia@gmail.com or 701-337-5462 to submit community events. ■

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