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SUTTON

Life

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ON THE COVER...

*Mark
Sheridan*
FEATURE ALUM



FEATURE ALUMNI: MARK SHERIDAN

Life



MARK SHERIDAN

learned the importance of time, patience and perseverance.

I was born in Hastings, Neb., in 1958 and grew up in Sutton, but I moved to the desert in 1981. Now I live in Cave Creek, Ariz., with my son Hayden. At 16, he plays on the varsity basketball team at Cactus Shadows High School. Hayden has been playing competitive sports since he was 4, so I have spent most of my off time and weekends going to soccer, football and basketball practices and games watching Hayden compete and grow. Needless to say, SportsCenter is on at our house all the time.

Being the best dad I can be is probably my biggest accomplishment, and for me, part of being a great dad is bringing my son to the place where I grew up. Every time we get a chance to get back to Mayberry (our nickname for Sutton), we go to the farm to visit and see family. Hayden has spent most of his summer vacations back in Sutton since he was 2 years old, so he knows most of the kids in Sutton very well.

My upbringing in Sutton influenced my career choice because we were raised with horses our entire lives. Dad used to raise feeder cattle, and my family always used the horses to bring the cattle up in the winter from the field. We loved riding horses, and I thought that having a

Mark Sheridan showed and cared for horses from a young age in Sutton. He has since graduated from 4-H to world shows, from his father's farm to his own business, Mark Sheridan Quarter Horses Inc. Getting to that point took years of hard work, but through it all, Sheridan

career where I'd get to do something for a living that I have a passion for would be a great way to go. My parents also liked the horses and were very supportive of my career choice. Along with my brother Brian and two sisters Mary and Julia, we all showed the open show circuit and 4-H shows, and it became a big family event. As long as my



"I feel that success in life is directly related to good parenting, and I have been blessed with that."

-Mark Sheridan

brother and I fed the cattle, moved tow lines, checked rows and worked in the field, dad made sure we always had good horses to ride and show. Between chores, sports and homework, there was not much sitting around the Sheridan house. We were always outside.

We bought some of our first horses right in Sutton from Earl Ely. Soon after that, Elmer Epp from Henderson was a huge influence in moving us in the direction of riding and

showing Quarter Horses. Dad bought me a horse from Elmer when I was a young teen, and Elmer was always a great source of knowledge. He sold us a horse named Pancho Dell, who was a son of Poco Dell and out of a daughter of King's Pistol. These are still historically famous bloodlines, and he was an amazing horse. I wish I had 20 more just like him right now!

After graduating from Sutton, I went to Mick Clark's Nebraska Farriers School in Denton, Neb., during the summer to learn how to shoe horses, and then I was off to the University of Findlay in Ohio. Mom did most of the work in making that happen, and I'm glad she did so. They were just starting up the Equestrian and Equine Science program at Findlay, and two of the greatest trainers in the country – Dale Wilkinson and Clark Bradley – were taking professor positions there. For the next four years, they would be my mentors. After graduating with a Bachelor of Science, I moved to Arizona to apprentice for another famous trainer named Doug Lilly. It was there that the hard work really began. After five years of learning from the best, I opened up my own Quarter Horse training stable.

Mark Sheridan Quarter Horses Inc. has been in business since that time, training horses and riders on a competitive level. We still start most of our young horses and bring them along, and many have become great World Show horses. Most of the shows we compete at are in Arizona and California, but we go to Oklahoma a few times a year for the American Quarter Horse Association Youth and Open World shows. We also buy and sell horses to fit competitive riders. One of the biggest challenges in my profession is finding affordable horses to match the riders. Not every good horse works for just any rider; they have to gel. They not only have to look good together, but the rider must be able to communicate and ride the horse at a competitive level. Horses have personalities just like people, and both need to get along. It can take a long time for some horse-and-rider teams to be competitive. Patience is one of the largest necessities for a horse trainer -- patience for the horse to improve and patience in getting along with people. What seems simple for me and a horse is difficult for others. Time and patience are key.

One thing that's really helped in my career has been surrounding myself with good people who help me. Ann is the barn gal who keeps everything groomed up, saddled and unsaddled for me. Mike starts the youngsters and rides the problem horses. I also have interns from Scottsdale Community College who come out and learn the ins and outs of the business, and I get to grade them for their efforts. Barb, the farm owner, makes sure the horses have the best care every day by feeding the horses three times a day. The stalls are also cleaned three times a day, seven days a week. On average, we have 25 horses in our care, and lessons are a big part of the business.

Another part of my income is judging horse shows and giving clinics. I have judged the AQHA World Show and



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Youth World Show seven times. Finding the time to train horses, give lessons, show, manage the books and judge can sometimes become a challenge. My job allows me to travel to judge large horse shows. The European, Japanese, Australian and Canadian championships are always a great challenge to judge, and it is fun to see the different styles of competition around the world. I have also judged the All-American Quarter Horse Congress in Ohio four times. It is the largest horse show in the world and lasts for almost a month.

I love to teach people, and probably the most enjoyable part of the business is when you see a rider get better before your eyes. Being a coach can be very rewarding. Conducting riding clinics around the country provides this opportunity, as well as marketing "The Ultimate Lead Change," a 3-DVD series on achieving great lead changes from start to finish on horses. The series has been a huge project, but it's one I have been working on for a long time. The marketing phase is in full gear right now. Marketing is huge in this business. My goal is to be able to offer clients more due to my experience, talents and longevity in the industry. Reputation is everything in this industry, and most good trainers are always trying to improve on that and do the best job they can.

Although horse training and judging is a huge part of my life, I still make time for my other interests. In my spare time, I enjoy alpine mountaineering, and I'm always looking forward to climbing a tougher mountain. Mt. Rainier in Washington state is the biggest one so far. This hobby takes me far away from the horses and work for a while, and the challenge is sometimes overwhelming. I always try to climb with instructors who have climbed Mt. Everest. I figure since I got quality instruction in the horse business, why not get the same quality instruction in the mountains?

Life

FROM THE TOP:

MARK'S SON
HAYDEN;

MARK AT RAINIER
SUMMIT CRATER;

MARK'S
SENIOR PICTURE
FROM THE SUTTON
CLASS OF 1976.

