

# How the West Was One



Hundreds of teenagers. A herd of mustangs. One man with a vision. In the foothills of the Rocky Mountains rides a cavalry that just might change the world.

BY REBECCA LANDWEHR. PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID RACCUGLIA



**IT WAS MAY OF 1983** and Elmer Wyland was dying. For years his health had been failing, and most of his worldly affairs were in order, save one. There, in his home, alone with his wife, he took care of his last and perhaps his most important legacy.

“Tell Glen it’s his,” he said. They were the old horseman’s last words.

With that, Glen Keller Jr. received his inheritance: a herd of horses, a basement full of Wild West costumes, and 650 horse-crazy teenagers. Colorado’s famed riding team, the Westernaires, was now Keller’s responsibility.

The news came as a shock to many. Wyland was an old lone wolf with a passion for horses, history, and unyielding discipline, a man who had created the Westernaires and governed them with the zeal of a military commander. Keller was a young, straight-talking city lawyer—and an unlikely choice of successor. In the clan of the Westernaires, Keller was a relative outsider, just a volunteer dad with kids on the team. He’d never worn a red team bandana, and he didn’t come up through the ranks under the old man’s watchful eye.

Yet Wyland knew Keller was the one man who would keep his dream alive. He must have sensed that for his philosophy to live on, the old way needed a new cowboy, somebody who understood what this inheritance was, and what it could become. Keller had served as one of Wyland’s assistants, standing behind the director and watching him lead the Westernaires with logic and wisdom. When it came time to step in, he knew what to do.

The job would mean more than just chaperoning trips to the rodeo. For Keller, it was

a chance to unearth the buried memories of the horse-crazy child he once was, to instill that passion in the next generation, and to hold on to a place where the Wild West lived on—where the good guys wear white hats and say “yes, ma’am,” where the day is long because there’s work to be done. It was a chance to become the custodian of an era.

Keller knows that shepherding Wyland’s dream in 21st-century Colorado won’t be easy. But for the last two decades Keller has stood guard, not just keeping the Westernaires alive but also instilling Wyland’s driving principles in new generations of modern teenagers. Because by keeping the old era alive, Glen Keller just might be saving the world, one Westernaire at a time.

**ELMER AND MARJORIE** Wyland never had children of their own. Instead, they lavished their love on their mutual passion—horses. They spent their weekends sharing long rides, just the two of them. Eventually the couple joined Lakewood’s riding club, becoming fixtures at the local parades and other cowboy activities. When the Lakewood Youth Council asked Wyland, a well-respected Mountain

Bell executive, to form a community-building project, a kids’ group centered on horses, his life was given new purpose.

Wyland founded the Westernaires in 1949, when Jefferson County was a rural region: Ranching was a viable living, 4-H clubs flourished, and the city of Denver seemed far, far away. Television had only just become available in Jeffco, and switchboard operators still routed all the phone calls by hand. The notion of pretty teenagers performing routines on horseback was the very picture of 1950s Colorado.

The horse club has performed its precision drills throughout Colorado and around the country, always returning to its one and only home in Golden, right next to the Jefferson County Fairgrounds. Fort Westernaire consists of a few old covered barns, a dusty pasture full of horses, a grassy parking lot littered with big diesel trucks, and a massive new indoor arena—a modern anchor on 40 acres of yesterday.

Enthralled with the role of the cavalry in the American West, Wyland modeled his riding club after the precise training and drills of the horseback Army division, creating the show routines from old training manuals. He ran things with the order of a military man—the riders followed strict guidelines for dress, attendance, and behavior, and the rules didn’t bend. Around Fort Westernaire, Wyland’s decisions were uncounseled and final: There was only one boss. Until his death, he presided over the Westernaires with uncontested authority, his role evidenced on the parade route—atop his mount, always positioned at the lead, not so much riding with the kids but in front of them.

As singular as Wyland’s authority was, the organization relied on volunteers to fill the rank and order of Wyland’s design, one that also resembled a military chain of command. Among them was Glen Keller. In Keller he saw a man who could straddle two worlds: a man who could diagnose colic in a fussy horse and then rub elbows downtown with Denver’s political elite. For his part, Keller admired the director, understood his methods, and dutifully followed Wyland’s lead until the day he succeeded him.

Under Wyland, the Westernaires performed their precision mounted drills at rodeos, parades, and the National Western Stock Show. Today, the schedule and the drills look much the same. The difference lies beneath: Wyland created an institution; Keller cultivates a tribe. Under Keller, the anachronistic club thrives, larger than ever with 1,000 riders and 150 horses. When the Westernaires’ Red Team, its top echelon, performs its routine this

**SINGULAR SENSATION** Previous pages: The Westernaires’ elite Red Team in rehearsal. Left: Club director Glen Keller Jr.

year at the National Western Stock Show's 100th anniversary, those modern teenagers riding bareback will be a living testament to Keller's philosophy and methods. The Westerners may seem quaintly trapped in the past, but he looks at his riders in their Wild West costumes and sees only the future. "People may accuse me of having an agenda," says Keller. "They're absolutely right."



**IT'S 7:30 ON AN** August evening and Keller stands, somewhat stiff, behind a podium in a crowded gymnasium on the Jefferson County Fairgrounds. He's wearing a smart sport coat and bolo tie, cowboy boots, and a flawless white cowboy hat. On either side stands a teenager, one boy and one girl, like honor guards—each in a red varsity letter sweater. "You're here now," Keller announces, "so you might as well get used to the Westerner Way. Around here we like to start on time, so I think I'll get started. I'm Glen Keller, the director of the Westerners, and it's my pleasure to be responsible for some of the finest young people you'll ever meet."

## [ The kids are all here with one hope—to ride. ]

It's Induction Night for the newest members of the Westerners, and nearly 300 youngsters, most only 9 or 10 years old, have come with their parents to sign up as Tenderfeet, the class rank of first-year riders. Some children arrive in cowboy boots, others in Crocs. They all hang on Keller's every word. Even though they won't touch a horse for weeks, they're all here with one hope—to ride.

Keller's voice resonates in the cavernous gym, his speech plain and direct. "If you think you're here just to ride a horse, you're going to be sorely disappointed," he says. "You'll learn to ride, but you're also going to learn respect for yourself, respect for others, and you'll learn to become a leader—for your horse and for your teammates." Before turning the mic over to his teenage riders for their own (far less stern) welcome speeches, Keller directs a few comments to the parents, joking that joining the Westerners is the best deal in town: \$25 a year for membership, and horse rentals costing just \$7 a day. He also tells the parents about the three required volunteer shifts they'll take at Fort Westerner, and hints at more demanding volunteer opportunities. Then he reminds everyone of what's at stake. "I'm going to put your little darlings on top of a 1,000-pound dumb animal," he says. "And trust me, horses can be dumb. It's

not going to be easy, but you're going to see your kids grow up here."

As the speeches finish, the aspiring Westerners wiggle in their seats in anticipation. At last, the newest members of the brood are led outside and up a grassy hillside for their first look at the family compound, a hangarlike building high on a hill overlooking Table Mountain and the foothills. It's used only for special purposes—trick-riding practice, and performances such as tonight. The crowd files in the door beneath a sprawling sign in red western letters that reads "Glen Keller Jr. Equestrian Center." Once inside, they pass long glass cases filled with trophies, commemorative plaques, and dolls dressed in replicas of Westerner uniforms from the last 50 years. To their right climbs a flight of stairs to the Eagle's Roost—Keller's office, which sports a balcony looking down onto the arena below. The families file into the bleachers and take their seats for the evening's Wild West horse show. Now everyone will have a glimpse of the possible future.

Very short clowns, probably only a year older than the incoming Tenderfeet, greet the

crowd, prepping them with well-rehearsed pratfalls and other circus antics until the show officially begins, with a parade of elementary-school kids in Wranglers and cowboy hats riding into the arena on perfectly groomed ponies. Middle-school girls in chaps and fringe perform drills carrying large, colorful flags. Eyes widen when the acrobats of the trick team enter—tiny teenage girls in harlequin-patterned jumpsuits drop into one-legged "death drags," splayed over the horses' sides as they bound around the ring. Then the "riders of the steppes" thunder into the arena, pairs of horses moving in tandem, a teenage boy in each saddle and a third standing above, arms wide, balancing one foot on each horse to create a pyramid reminiscent of a Hollywood water-ski formation.

As the next generation sits in the presence of Westerners in action, the earlier speeches melt away, any initial fear replaced with wonder, amazement, and desire. These kids, their parents—none of them have any idea what they're getting into. When he saw it for the first time, Keller didn't either.

Glen Keller Jr. was born the horse-crazy son of a Longmont farm-implement dealer. He immersed himself in the cowboy way from a young age, reading every horse book in the public library, his head filled with stories of

good cowboys and fast horses, of powerful Indians and their impossible battles. He devoured children's picture books, then the Black Stallion series, and when those ran out, veterinary textbooks. All the while, he begged his parents for a horse. They told him no—horses were an expense the family couldn't afford. But at age 8, the future attorney eventually negotiated himself a grumpy range mare named Smokey, a castoff from one of his dad's customers. "Smokey was the meanest horse who ever lived," Keller says. "You couldn't turn your back on her or she might run you over. I learned a lesson from that mare—can't trust an animal whose instincts are wild." But the determined boy worked with her until she'd finally accept his lead.

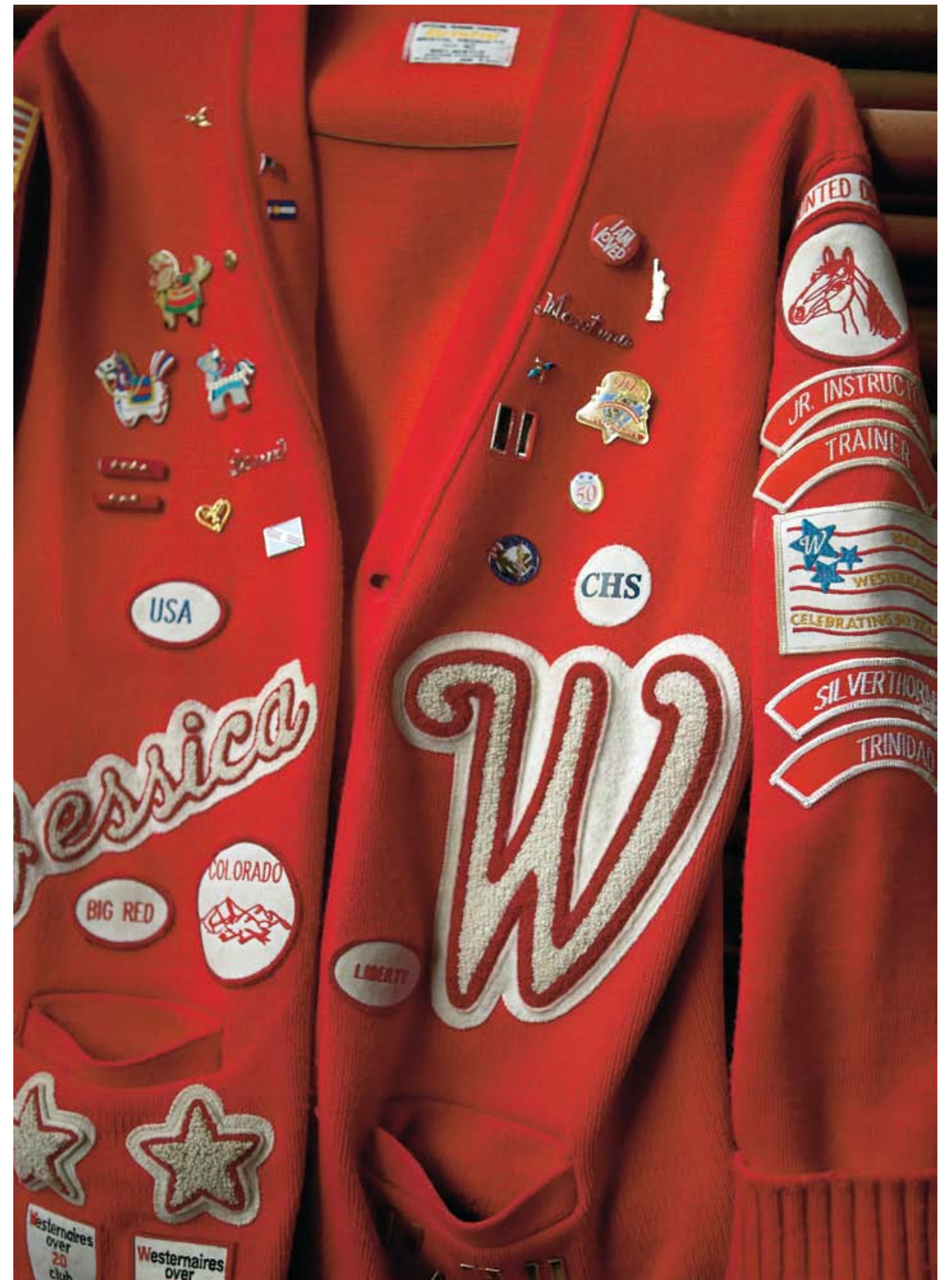
Smokey was nearly impossible to ride, but the Kellers wouldn't abandon the troubled horse, and instead bred her, resulting in a foal named Flame. Flame was a good horse, and Keller rode her after school and on the weekends, only the setting sun convincing him to quit. In time, with Flame's help, he went from a horse-crazy boy to a genuine Colorado horseman.

But becoming a man meant putting aside his childhood passion, and the horses eventually lost out as adulthood prevailed. It didn't happen overnight. After a lackadaisical undergraduate career including a short stint as a radio disc jockey, Keller took a year off. Then it was finally time to grow up, get serious, and do as his mother wished: He went to law school. He became a lawman, first as a lawyer and then a judge in federal bankruptcy court—the kind of man who put mobsters behind bars and forced white-collar criminals to pay their bills. He didn't make the rules, but he was the one who dished out the consequences. By the time he married, Keller's passion for horses had been buried so deep that Liz Keller had no idea her husband was a cowboy at heart—until one day in 1976, when the family went to a horse show and laid eyes on the Westerners.



**KELLER'S WESTERNERS** are fueled by his own particular brand of tough love. There is distinction of rank; there is order. Understanding this is the only way to succeed.

**SEEING RED** Of the 300 kids who join each year, only 40 will reach the highest ranking Red Team, earning the coveted letter sweater.





Take, for example, the horses. Every couple of months, he steers the Westernaires' red Chevy pickup south to Cañon City, past the barbed-wire fences of the state penitentiary, and down a dirt road lined with cottonwood trees. There, in a pasture rimmed by tall fences made of weathered wood, a herd grazes. The once-wild horses are adopted from Bureau of Land Management roundups and gentled by prisoners through the Wild Horse Inmate Program. From these, Keller builds his cavalry.

Keller likes mustangs. The wild horses come in odd shapes and any color of the spectrum. They tend to be small, stout, and tough, with the occasional ragged ear or scrappy tail. But Keller's horses don't have to be pretty; they just have to be strong. He looks for big chests and hearty girths, which mean good lungs, vital for performing drills at high velocity. He looks for large nostrils, to bring the air into those lungs. Sturdy legs. Sure feet. And with the physical requirements, there is a certain something else he looks for. With each visit, Keller watches the inmates put their mounts through their paces. He watches the horse's head; he wants the animal to be collected, to keep its head down. He doesn't like horses that lead with their heads up. It means they're trying to control the rider. It's a sign they won't follow the rules.

Once these horses make it to Fort Westernaire, they'll enter a world of horse-crazy girls, a softer place but one that will still require the horses to submit. They'll keep their heads down as they endure inexperienced riders and excessive love from a hive of uniformed kids.

Each Saturday morning hundreds of kids show up at Fort Westernaire dressed in matching uniforms, divided into rank by colored bandanas: tan for the beginners, blue for intermediates, red for the most advanced. Lined up along the rail, girls talk to their horses about boys. They talk to each other about horses. During the chatter, they sweep brushes over the horses' every square inch, inspecting them like a crew of teenage veterinarians.

The Westernaire education includes a hefty dose of horse learning, and the curriculum is a combination of equine biology, psychology, and maintenance. Before ever climbing into a saddle, they'll take safety courses and grooming

**ALL THAT GLITTERS** Opposite: Veteran Westernaire and trick rider Mike Ulshoffer, 19, poses with his horse, Bailey. This page, top: Westernaire dad Dick Foss stands by in the usual volunteer "posse" uniform of red shirt and white hat. Left: One of the many show costumes at a Westernaire performance.

classes. They'll study the social order of these herd creatures so the children can recognize if a horse is ornery or just lonely. And finally they'll learn to diagnose illnesses—memorizing the warning signs, like how colic sounds with an ear pressed against a horse's belly.

Along with their horse care and riding lessons, Westernaires spend hours in classrooms learning every horse's step for each drill. At home, they diagram these drills for hours, filling reams of paper with color-coded maps, which they then commit to memory. Riders are allowed only five unexcused absences from practice. More than that earns a rider a meeting with Keller.

If Keller's training seems rigid, perhaps it's because he knows enough about horses to never trust them completely. On July 4, 1993, at the Festival of the West show, a Red Team trick rider named Katie Nielsen was about to perform one of the dangerous acrobatic stunts when the horse panicked. Nielsen's foot became stuck in her stirrup and she couldn't escape, and no one could stop the bolting horse. In the middle of a performance, she was dragged to death.

Today, as the various ranks and teams finish tacking up, Keller is already standing ready fence-side. As his Red Team riders lope toward the outdoor practice ring, he watches. "Heat it up," he tells the Red Team captain. The riders fall into formation, quickening their pace. Of the 300 kids who showed up at Induction Night, fewer than 40 will make it to the Red Team, an achievement recognized with a red varsity sweater—like the high-school letter sweaters of the 1950s. Every child at Fort Westernaire wants to make it to Red Team, all of them knowing there's only one way to get that sweater: Follow Keller's rules.

The Westernaire's rulebook is based upon simple tenets: self-reliance, hard work, respect, common sense, and pride. The Westernaires start on time, and riders are expected on the grounds at least 30 minutes before their practice starts. Riders don't smoke, drink, or do drugs. They treat adults with respect. Riders must be enrolled in school, no exceptions. Couples are allowed in the Westernaires, "But I don't want to see it, hear about it, or generally know about it," says Keller. If a girl gets pregnant, she's out—if a boy gets a girl pregnant, same goes. Tenderfeet learn early on that any excuse that begins with "My Mom..." just won't fly. Showing up on time, in uniform, and prepared remains the rider's responsibility,

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**THE FEW, THE PROUD** Even sequins can't disguise the discipline and determination riders like Renee Micaletti must embody.

The Westernaire rulebook is based on simple tenets: self-reliance, hard work, respect, common sense, and pride. Riders don't smoke, drink, or do drugs. They treat adults with respect.





not the mother's. It isn't the parents who'll be riding those drills in the ring.

The kids aren't the only ones who have to play by Keller's rules. Parents abide by their own set of guidelines while at Fort Westernaire: No smoking, no drinking, no swearing. And that's just the beginning. Parents must also cede some of their authority to the Westernaire organization: No talking to a child in the ring, no running into that ring when their kid falls off a horse, and no arguing with the chain of command. When chaperones travel with the team, they too wear uniforms: the ladies in red Wranglers and white practice blouses, the men in tan Wranglers and red shirts—almost everyone wears a white hat. In an era when soccer moms hover and everyone wins a trophy, Keller's world is no place for a mama's boy—or his mama.

"What's my agenda?" Keller pauses. "It's creating self-reliant kids. Teenagers who will become good citizens and take their place in our society." Keller has seen firsthand what comes of children raised wrong—from run-of-the-mill spoiled brats to lonely, desperate kids who turn to gangs for a sense of family. He's not about to hand over our society to a careless youth. He has opinions on child-rearing: Overprotective parents get on his nerves. Keller doesn't baby his Westernaires. For riders, they know taking care of their horse's needs comes first, their own, second. When a girl's horse gets colic at the rodeo and nervous parents want to check on their investment, Keller dismisses them. "Let Jenny worry about the horse, it's her responsibility," he says. "That's the way we do things." The parents roll their eyes to each other and look too irritated to respond. Fact is, Keller never asked for their opinion anyway.

"I think our society is in trouble," he says. "In my view anyway." The modern world has its drawbacks, and Keller dares to pinpoint them with a politically charged word: values. "There's nothing wrong with old-fashioned values; they're based on hard work, on respect for ourselves, and respect for others." The Westernaires, however, is not about political values, Keller says. "I've even known some Democrats to raise some fine families," he jokes. Although Keller spent years involved with Jefferson County's Republican party, even getting elected to the school board, today he

**HORSE PLAY** Clockwise from left: Matthew Davis and Alex Rosette sport the proof of their hard work. Westernaires train at the club's outpost near Table Mountain, wearing uniforms—with their own personal touches—even for practice and grooming. Rider Alexis Grace hugs a teammate after a drill.

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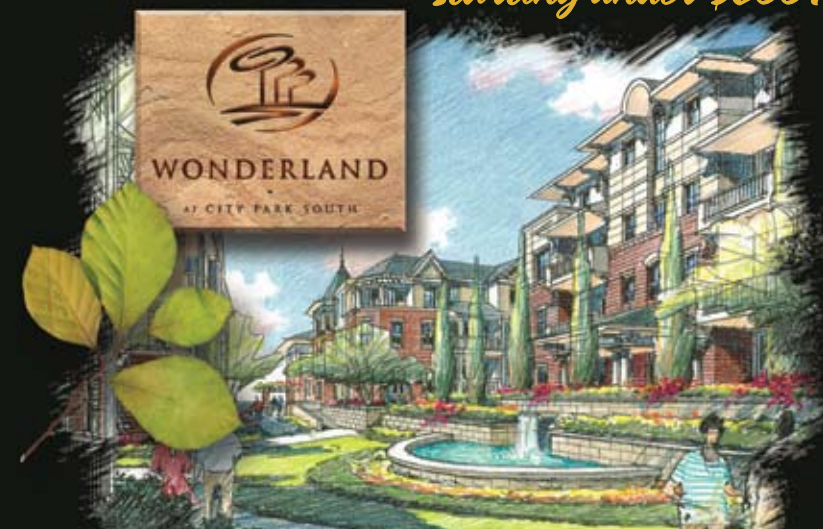
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no longer plays party politics, claiming his Republican party left him years ago. "I suppose I was too liberal for them," Keller says, quickly adding, "But still, I'm no damn Democrat." He's not one to waste his breath arguing family values. He's too busy living them.

Keller spends almost 40 hours a week at the Fort, managing his army of 500 volunteers and the one paid employee: Mr. Nicely, the caretaker. Just like in Wyland's day, Keller's army consists of Westernaire parents, grandparents, and alumni; they joke that the Westernaires is a dictatorship, but most of them agree that someone needs to have the final word. And whenever Keller parks his Cadillac SRX on the grounds, his vanity plates spell out who's in charge: "DIRECTOR."

Not everybody welcomes Keller's rules—at least not at first. Jeff McDowell has been a volunteer since 1995 and a member of the Westernaire posse, a specific rank of male volunteers, since 2000, and at first he didn't much care for Keller's strict rules. His daughter was training for Red Team, a Herculean effort involving three months of hell filled with weekly tests and nightly homework, at least four hours of diagramming horse drills seven days a week. She had failed three tests in a row, and that meant dismissal from training—her ride to Red Team was finished. Father and daughter requested a meeting with Keller to see if there was anything she could do, if she could get another chance. They learned that since she was a senior-level rider, in her final year as a Westernaire, there'd be no second chance. Those were the rules. "I'm sorry, there's nothing I can do," Keller told the family. Distraught for his daughter's sake, McDowell was about to give it one more try. When he looked up to speak, he saw tears running down Keller's face.

"It changed for me that day," says McDowell. Today McDowell still instructs the trick riders and travels with the Red Team as a barn man, sleeping in the parking lot of the fairgrounds, keeping an eye on the horses. His daughter graduated from the Westernaires five years ago. "I finally realized there were all these people volunteering their time for my kid's experience," he says. "So I decided to give another seven years, because that's how long my daughter was a Westernaire when I didn't pitch in."



**JUST BEFORE SHOW** time on Labor Day at the Trinidad Roundup Rodeo at the Las Animas County Fairgrounds, 40 Red Team members begin the ritual of changing. In a line, they enter the tack truck and hang their sweaters on an assigned peg. Then a "costume



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mom” hands them their hairnets. Next, they announce, “Sleeves please,” and walk into the crisp shirts held up for them by another volunteer mom. Then comes the sequined cape. Last, they are called one by one to take their hats out of individual hatboxes, each labeled with a rider’s name. Once their hats are on, they step out of the trailer, mount their horses, and wait. With minutes to go, they stand by the gates as members of the posse hand each rider a multicolored flag. The Westernaires sit tall on their horses. Now the only eyes they meet belong to each other.

While the riders make their way to the arena, their red sweaters hang neatly in the tack truck, quietly chronicling each rider’s road to Red Team. Rectangular patches with red stitching name every horse they rode on the way; round patches that have been meticulously saved in shoeboxes memorialize early teams like the Pony Hoedowners; military bars symbolize leadership positions. On each sweater, an American flag is sewn on the shoulder. Kids personalize their sweaters with angels and silly buttons, and almost everyone has a safety pin somewhere: a symbol to protect them on their rides, to keep them safe. They know that any rider can fall.

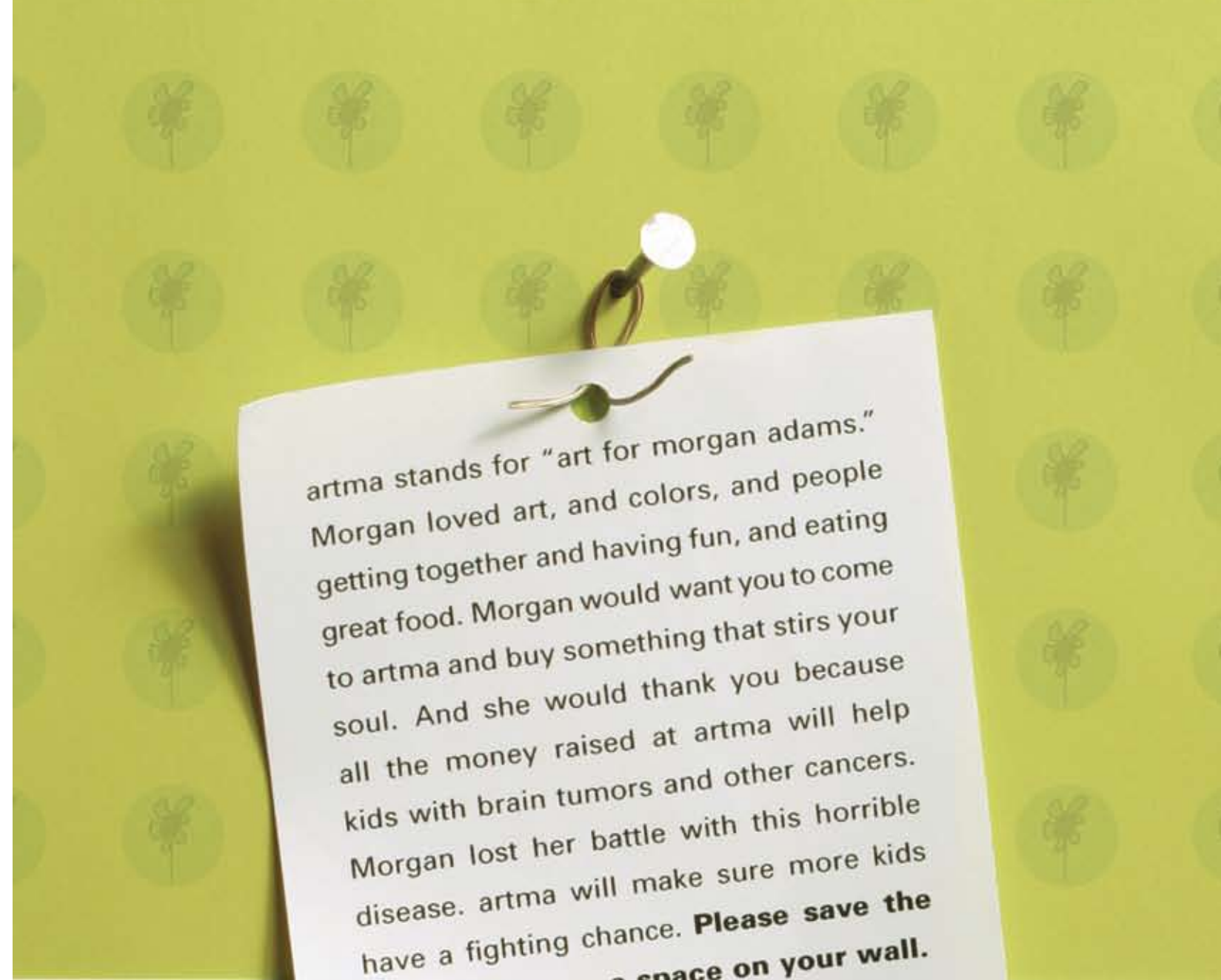
“Not all my friends understand what I’ve gone through here,” says Mike Ulshoffer, a 19-year-old trick rider and co-major who’s has been on Red Team longer than anyone. “But everybody on the team understands each other—we’ve been through so much. My friends think I’m crazy. But I know I set a goal and I reached it. I know I’ve made a difference. I have become a leader; I realized it this year.” Sure, he’s thought of quitting Westernaires at times, when the old-fashioned rules seemed insane, when the work got too hard. But he never gave up.

“It’s like that red sweater. Everyone wears it because of what we had to do to earn it,” he says. “It’s an emblem. It says, ‘We made it, this is who we are.’” Then he laughs to himself and says, “Even if it is ugly.”

Every January on the final day of the Stock Show, the senior members of Red Team graduate. This year, Ulshoffer will be among those moving on. Keller has witnessed 22 years of tearful graduations, but he shows no signs of leaving himself. Around the Fort, many quietly speculate about a post-Keller era. “Well, I don’t want to leave the job the way Wyland did,” Keller only half jokes. Although he confesses concerns about his own succession plan, he hasn’t set one up yet. He’s not ready to give up Wyland’s trust. Like his predecessor, he can’t leave before finding the one like-minded person to whom he can entrust his clan.

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When he ponders the future, Keller believes he's made some changes around the Fort that will outlast him. And he's not just talking about the new buildings. "I've tried to keep the Westernaires the same as I found it, for the most part," he says. "But I've had to move with the times. If I keep the Westernaires too rooted in the past, the organization can't continue. You have to move with the times, or it will die."

Keller's not the only one who looks toward the future with concern. Young Mike Ulshoffer is a sparkplug of a rider, small but powerful. On his horse, he's a rock star: commanding, confident, powerful, often riding in oversized aviator sunglasses. By contrast, on the ground, he patrols the periphery, quietly watching from behind those darkened lenses. When lonely riders hang back from the group, intimidated newcomers join Red Team, or discouraged boys mutter to themselves, Ulshoffer notices and he reaches out—he includes, he welcomes, he listens, pulling them all back into the Westernaire fold.

The young Red Team rider sees a generation gap between the men like Keller who've volunteered for decades and the younger parents who stick around only as long as their kids ride. He wonders if the new generation of Westernaire parents really understand the leadership and commitment it will take for this group to continue. Although Ulshoffer hasn't graduated yet, he has already asked to enter the ranks of the volunteer posse.

None of this is lost on Keller. Usually he prefers riders take some time off from the Westernaires before they become volunteers. A few years away helps distance the riders from their red sweaters before assuming the Fort's mantle of adulthood—a white hat. But Ulshoffer has asked to come back early, to help teach the next generation of riders, and the director will bend the rules. Perhaps Keller sees more than just a good kid with a crackerjack talent; perhaps he sees a bridge to the future.

"Please allow me to introduce today's teenagers, the pride of the Westernaires—Varsity Big Red," Keller's voice booms from the announcer's booth. The annual Trinidad Roundup is a small stop on the professional rodeo circuit and one the Westernaires have traveled to each year for the last 47 years. In Trinidad the Westernaires are special guests. Keller, dressed a little sharper than usual in kerchief, studded plaid shirt, and the ever-present white hat, stands above the arena in a small booth opposite the grandstand. His wife, Liz, cues the music, a grand symphonic medley, on her small laptop. Dads in red shirts and white hats grab the heavy arena

gates, run forward to swing them wide, and dash aside.

Forty horses and riders gallop in, a singular force. For all the rules and regulations, the practices and the homework, the volunteers and the dictatorship, the Red Team riders now ride alone on the arena floor. The horses take in the tension, the energy of the crowd. Their strides quicken. Beneath the din of music and hooves, the captain uses her loud, husky voice to call the rider's next move.

From his perch, Keller announces the drill: the Mariner's Cross. It's a complicated military maneuver, one in which two lines of riders face off and gallop toward each other, sleeves and horses brushing within inches. The drill plays well to the stands. From above, the fans can see the single-file riders criss-crossing from all four corners of the arena, narrowly passing each other as they gallop to the opposite side. It's a favorite so thrilling that riders and crowd alike forget that anything so captivating could ever be dangerous. Because it demands utter perfection and precision, it is also the drill Keller dreads the most.

The riders peel off into four quadrants, creating the individual lines of the cross. All four corners of the arena align in mirror-image perfection. One by one, each section begins to run at each other to execute the exhilarating pass at the center. And then there is the sickening thud of muscle and hide colliding. Two horses hit, catapulting their riders to the ground. "Halt ho," demands Keller from the booth. All the horses come to a sliding stop. The crowd falls silent, the sideline posse freezes—everyone waits for Keller's lead.

"These things do happen," says Keller, his voice willfully relaxed, echoing from the rodeo speakers. "And I can tell you right now the only thing these riders want to know is, 'How's my horse?'" Slowly, one rider stands, dusts herself off, and extends a hand to her friend, pulling her teammate to her feet. The girls hug and the crowd cheers. The riders check their horses and quickly remount, and once again they are racing, the drill continuing from where it had stopped as if nothing had happened. The Westernaires finish the routine with the presentation of the American flag, and then they are off, tearing full tilt out of the arena and into the warm sunshine of a Colorado summer afternoon.

"There go the young people of today. They are ready to take the reins of leadership from you and I," says Keller, his voice ringing with the confidence of an old cowboy. "They are our hope for tomorrow." ▲

Rebecca Landwehr is senior editor at 5280.

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