

## 70<sup>th</sup> Annual HORSECAPADES dedicated to

Glen E. Keller, Jr.

Westernaires, Director Emeritus

12-21-38 to 8-2-23

**“One man volunteers and changes the lives of over 100,000 people for the better”.**

**Dave Scolman, Volunteer**

Imagine that it is 1986 in Golden, Colorado, and funds are sparse for a grassroots non-profit organization that is run completely by volunteers. Now imagine that you recently “inherited” upon the death of the founder, this local non-profit that involves 650 teenagers and 150 horses. Finally, imagine that your only indoor show arena burns down, taking with it 3 beloved Westernaires rental horses, cherished by those teenagers. This was the world that Director Glen E. Keller, Jr. found himself facing a mere 3 years after he had taken over the reins of Westernaires, a Golden, Colorado non-profit.

**A PROFESSIONAL:** It was May 1983 and Elmer Wyland, the original founder of Westernaires lay dying when he named volunteer, Glen E. Keller, Jr. as successor to the director position. Mr. Keller and his wife, Liz, had joined the organization in 1977 when their 2 kids began riding. When it became his turn to lead the organization, he knew what to do, having watched Wyland and learned from him. Keller had been raised as a horse-crazy kid on a Longmont farm, the son of a farm implement dealer. Finally, after begging for years for a horse, his parents relented and he became the proud owner of “Smockey”. **“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”**, Keller said. Smockey led to other horses, but they all eventually had to take a back seat as the boy grew to a man and had other responsibilities. He entered the University of Colorado, lacked motivation, and took a year off while he worked as a radio disc jockey. He eventually returned, finished his Bachelor of Science degree and then his Juris Doctor from the University of Denver School of Law, where he earned the Harry Clayton Davis award for outstanding graduate student. He married his college sweetheart, Liz, and had 2 kids. Among his many professional accomplishments were being named an Assistant Colorado Attorney General, a US Bankruptcy Judge, and being listed in Best Lawyers in America and Who’s Who in America. As a community member, Keller served as a member of the Jefferson County District R-I School Board, the Colorado State Board of Health, the Colorado Air Pollution Control Commission, the Western Stock Show Association, as a trustee of the National Western

Stock Show and Rodeo Association, and once considered a run for Governor of Colorado. Before he retired from his law profession, he had been known to be able to straddle 2 worlds. There is a story told that at least once when he was on the bench, he came to work wearing his jeans, boots, western shirt, and bolo underneath his robe in order to be able to rush down to the National Western Stock Show and Rodeo immediately after court.



### *AWARDS AND HONORS*

*1999 Horseman of the Year from Colorado Horsemen’s Council for His Dedication and Contribution to Colorado’s Horse Industry*

*2004 Top Hand Award from National Western Stock Show for Outstanding and Generous Support of NWSS and Outstanding Leadership of Westernaires*

*2011 National Day of the Cowboy “Cowboy Keeper” Award*

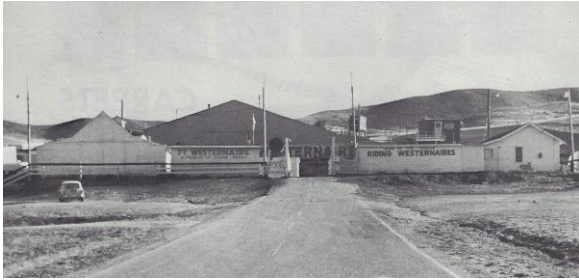
*2013 Living Landmark for 30 years of commitment from Golden Landmark Association*

*2014 Friends of the National Western Award from the Red Meat Club*

*2022 Glen and Liz Keller Scholarship Created*

**A BUILDER:** It has been said that Elmer Wyland was the founder of Westernaires and that Glen Keller was the builder. The building started from the minute he took over. The replacement of the arena after the 1986 fire especially required his financial creativity, good networking skills, and ability to inspire volunteers, all skills which Keller had demonstrated and honed for years. Many other construction projects followed over the years, resulting in the complete makeover of the Jefferson County Fairgrounds property that had long ago been portioned off to the Westernaires. The crown jewel of those projects is the Glen E. Keller, Jr. Equestrian Center, a huge state-of-the-art building that was built with donations and hard labor of many of the organization’s volunteers.

Funding of the building, constructed in 2003, was helped along with a HUD grant obtained by Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell, one of Keller's many acquaintances.



### ***KELLER ERA BUILDING***

*1986 Red Arena destroyed by fire and is rebuilt.*

*1997 Blue Arena collapsed*

*1998 Agreement with Jefferson County for perpetual use of abutting space. New Blue Arena under construction.*

*1999 New outdoor arenas built*

*2001 New pony area built*

*2002 Ground breaking for Volunteer Building with new indoor practice and show arena*

*2003 Volunteer Arena dedicated as Glen E. Keller, Jr. Equestrian Center*

*2005 New caretaker's house built*

*2005 Administration Building expanded. Kitchen and Lunchroom built*

*2007 Museum area relocated and renovated. Dedicated to Orrin Curtis*

*2012 White Arena and expansion of Volunteer Arena built*

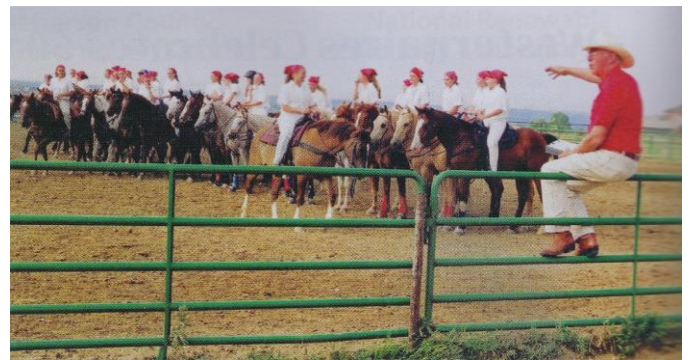


**A VISIONARY:** Keller said he took pride in **“taking teenagers from all walks of life, combining them with a dedicated group of adult volunteers...spending countless hours teaching and learning that responsibility, dedication, and perseverance can lead to unexpectedly good results”**.

Like a true leader, he possessed the combination of personality and leadership skills to make others want to follow his direction. He was able to develop a strategy so that everyone in the organization could understand it. He would then communicate that strategy enthusiastically and in a caring way. He was a strict disciplinarian who ran the organization with rules such as near-perfect attendance, working hard, staying in school, no alcohol, drugs, or tobacco, and adherence to a specific dress code for riders and volunteers. Tenderfoot riders were handed a Westernaires rule book upon joining and were expected to know the rules from the start. He was heard to say **“People accuse me of having an agenda. They are absolutely right”**. That agenda was creating self-reliant kids, teenagers who would become good citizens and leaders and take their place in our society. He believed that these kids were the hope for tomorrow, ready to take the reins of leadership from the previous generation.

**I cherish ... the long, close friendship filled with mentoring, sharing ideas and dreams, brainstorming how to handle issues, and working together to build a better, stronger Westernaires. \_He gave me so many years of his friendship in the same manner he gave of himself to all the Westernaires, past, present, and future.**

**—Art Geis, Retired Assistant Director**



**AN EDUCATOR:** Keller was always an educator, believing that riding a horse wasn't just getting on it and staying on. He once complimented a rider for really “riding the horse, not just sitting on it”. The Westernaires education included a curriculum of equine biology, psychology, and maintenance. All Tenderfeet must participate in a safety course before ever climbing into the saddle. They learn to properly groom and saddle the horse, how to care for the horse, and recognize illnesses. Riders learn all elements of horse care, whether they own their own horse or not, because, after all, they will have to care for their horse on out-of-town trips. Many riders leave the organization and pursue careers in horse training, farrier

work, or veterinarians because of their start at Westernaires. Keller also loved western history and took advantage of every opportunity available to teach kids to be good citizens and patriots, and to love their flag and country.



He was a genuine flag-wrapped patriot who ensured that every Westernaires show started with the Star Spangled Banner, with riders' and volunteers' hands across their hearts, and then a grand entry with the American flags flowing. The renowned Red Team firelight drill ends with the "ride of the colors" and many of the Varsity Red Team's costumes and flags have a patriotic theme.

**Mr. Keller was a man of grit, integrity, and kindness. He believed in individuals and all that they could accomplish, when they dedicate themselves to a team. He believed in me, even though I was a kid from a single-parent household and dreaming of being the first person in my immediate family to go to college.**

**-KD Nowiski, Westernaires Alum**



Out-of-town performances frequently included a detour to an historic site, such as an old Pony Express Station in Kansas, an extensive farm implement museum in Iowa, listening to a farmer explain her Iowa corn crop next to her field, or participating in a Native American powwow in New Mexico, all unique experiences for riders and volunteers. Every Westernaires Annual Show, the HORSECAPADES, starts with a caravan of Wild West performers such as Buffalo Bill, Annie Oakley, Native Americans, a pioneer family, and gold miners with a donkey. There are acts that involve trick riders, a Pony Express team, a stagecoach, cavalry riders with a

cavalry wagon, and a Cossack team. Keller also liked mustangs (feral horses born in the wild) and believed strongly in the Bureau of Land Management adoption program whereby, through the Horse Inmate Program, prisoners gentle horses to be purchased by the public through auction. Westernaires has acquired dozens of these half-gentled horses, runs a horse training program with riders as trainers, and gradually assimilates them into the horse rental string. Wild horses learn the Westernaires way and teenagers learn what it means to teach and love a wild animal.



**The Westernaires receive recognition at the State Capitol**

**A SHOWMAN AND PRODUCER:** He built, cultivated, and preserved life-long relationships with those in the professional rodeo and Wild West industry that resulted in Westernaires repeating engagements year after year. Some of those repeat performances are decades of invitations to the National Western Stock Show and Rodeo where Westernaires teams enter the gate up to 50 times during the run of the Stock Show, the Trinidad Round-Up Rodeo with 60 consecutive years of invitations, and local and regional county fairs, rodeos, and parades throughout the Rocky Mountain West. His relationships led to requests by special national and international dignitaries visiting Denver. President Bill Clinton said after Westernaires performed for the leaders of the Summit of 8, that "the kids and horses were the highlight" of the summit. Keller's lasting friendship with Mexican Rodeo Extravaganza charro and producer, Jerry Diaz, led to numerous performances for Westernaires during his rodeo and even an all-day horse workshop for Westernaires riders at their home arena.

**I thought the world of Mr. Keller and had the utmost respect for him. He was a big supporter of my family and me. He was intelligent, kind, sincere, loyal, a great leader, and always willing to help. He always spoke from his heart. He had a firm handshake and always looked you straight in the eye. We shared the same idea of the future of kids.**

**-Jerry Diaz, Charro  
Producer of Mexican Rodeo Extravaganza**



Keller was fiercely proud of Westernaires and expected riders and volunteers to conduct themselves at all times to bring pride to the organization. There were rules for how they behaved both in the public and while at “Fort Westernaires”, even on practice days. He always demanded excellence and challenged them so that the Westernaires reputation remained untarnished. Everyone who has ever been to a Westernaires show either as a rider or as a spectator, recognizes Keller’s signature opening for every show. He would say, **“You’re here now so you might as well get used to the Westernaires way. Around here we like to start on time, so I think I’ll get started. I’m Glen Keller, the director of Westernaires and it my pleasure to be responsible for some of the finest young people you will ever meet.”**

**Glen Keller! HATS off to a compadre and idol who brought enjoyment, love, and class for over 50 years to the Trinidad Round-Up Association and Labor Day Festivities. He will always be in our hearts.**

**-Kristy Bennett and Karen Buhr  
Trinidad Round-Up Rodeo**

#### ADDITIONAL NOTABLE EVENTS

*Many of these shows were obtained through connections that Mr. Keller made over the years.*

- 1986 Red Team to Saskatchewan, Canada*
- 2001 First lighted grand entry at NWSS – Glen and Liz saw this type of performance at another event and brought the idea back to Westernaires and NWSS and it stands as a tradition to this day*
- 2004 Routt County Fair after 29 year absence*
- 2004 Prescott, Arizona – Arizona Equifest*
- 2005 Steamboat Springs, Colorado - Great American Wild West Show*
- 2005 Royal Canadian Mounted Police ride with Red Team*
- 2008 Marcus, Iowa county fair – Red Team hosted by alumni family*
- 2010 Red Team to Washington, Kansas for their 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*
- 2011 Long-awaited return to Estes Park*
- 2012 Ft Collins Extreme Mustang Makeover – Red Team performed Grand Entry on mustangs*
- 2012 Westernaires assist with local horse evacuation due to fires near Estes Park*
- 2013 Cuba, New Mexico – Navajo Rodeos and Powwow*
- 2014 Andrews, Texas – multiple teams created a major Wild West Show*
- 2017 Cheyenne Frontier Days – Cavalry and Warriors invited to perform on multiple days*

**His pep talks after tough performances and excitement when we rode perfect drills are moments that I will always hold near and dear.**

**-Sophia Faye Koop, Westernaires Alum**



**A NEGOTIATOR:** Keller's business expertise, ingenuity, and will to succeed made him most effective as a negotiator. When he took the Varsity Red Team to the Regina Horse Show in Saskatchewan, his legal expertise proved invaluable for the group to cross the international border. When the arena fire occurred, the organization conducted a "Barn Party" that raised hundreds of thousands of dollars toward the rebuild. Each year, Keller's careful planning and negotiating with the leaders of the National Western Stock Show and Rodeo yield new, creative performances that continuously awe the crowds, some of whom have seen Westernaires performances for decades.

**I am very honored to be asked to talk about Mr. Keller, my friend and a great man! I miss his voice of confidence, support, and trust that he brought to our friendship. He always had my back. Prior to my starting at National Western, I produced many private rodeos at many locations. No matter what the client asked for, my first call would be to Mr. Keller to contract with Westernaires. He would always say yes and then the two of us would talk about the rodeo before, during and after each event. These discussions led to my success at the National Western.**

**-Leon Vick, VP of Rodeo, Horse and Livestock  
National Western Stock Show**



His ability to manage conflict among the thousands of riders and volunteers over his nearly 40 years as director, speaks volumes for his negotiating skills. Westernaires relies on one annual fundraising effort, HORSECAPADES, whereby all riders are required to sell tickets. Varsity Red Team riders are each encouraged to sell a higher number of tickets as a way to boost their sales. Keller always challenged his team by promising something in return if they ALL succeeded. His friendly persuasion and delicate negotiating skills always resulted in every rider selling the negotiated number of tickets and so, of course, Keller always paid up when he lost. One year, he mucked all 40 Varsity Red Team stalls after the annual show as his pay-back.



**Mr. Keller was a model of calm, clear, intelligent leadership. He made it seem like anything was possible. As a teenager I didn't realize how powerful that belief in possibility can be. I think he really believed in all his riders.**

**-Renee Jakaitis Trafton, Westernaires Alum**

**A FAMILY MAN:** Keller believed that the sense of community and family within Westernaires is what inspires riders to become responsible community leaders. He always encouraged parents to volunteer in any capacity that met their skills and interests and emphasized spending that valuable time with their children instead of dropping them off in the morning and returning for them later in the day. Keller was proud that generations of families have been part of the organization, with grandchildren signing up at 9 years old to be in the next tenderfoot class. As most adult Westernaires volunteer experiences begin, so did that of Keller. Both he and his wife, Liz, became committed volunteers and remained until his retirement in 2021. Among many other volunteer roles that Liz filled, she always selected and played the music in the announcer's booth, had a large role in the design of the costumes, accompanied Keller to most shows and celebrations, including those that were out-of-town. Keller's 2 children, Mike and Patty, went through the program and attained Varsity Red Team. Patty became an instructor on several teams and his son-in-law served as a posse member for many years. His two local grandchildren, Caroline and Grace, also were in Westernaires and earned the right to wear the Varsity Red Team sweater.



With the passing of Glen Keller, the challenge for Westernaires is to continue to grow and thrive. Through all of his hard work and dedication, he built what has been touted as the “finest precision mounted drill team in the world at speed”. The principles of leadership, patriotism, and strong family in which he believed are in every rider who ever frequented the Westernaires arenas. We can say with confidence that the generations of Westernaires kids that he believed were the hope for tomorrow are truly ready to take the reins of leadership from the previous generation.



**Vaya Con Dios Amigo  
Ride with Pride, Glen Keller**