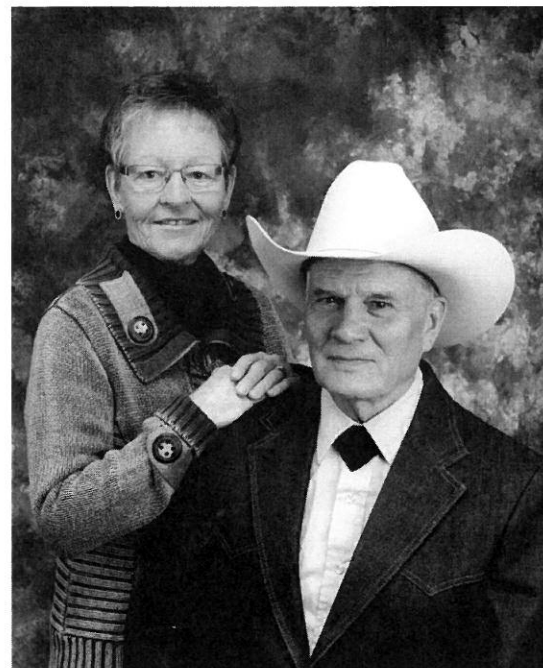


2016 Horseman & Horsewoman

Dave and Kim Utke of Sheldak Ranch are known worldwide for producing versatile Appaloosa horses that excel in and out of the show ring. For 50 years, they have sold weanlings each fall to eager buyers across the United States, Canada, and the world. The blood of these foals runs deeply with the rugged, sturdy lines of western stock that gave rise to the Appaloosa breed.

Dave grew up on a farm north of Fargo and attended NDSU. He and his father were stock contractors in the late 1950s and early 1960s. They also spent many years threshing with horses. Carolyn "Kim" (Evanson) Utke grew up in Detroit Lakes, MN. She helped start the first 4-H Horse Project in Becker County and for the state. She trained her "backyard horse" to win numerous area show championships and make parade appearances. Dave and Kim met in 1959, when they were showing their Quarter Horses at the fair in north Fargo.

After marrying, they bought a dilapidated old farmstead outside of Sheldon, ND. The couple started with nothing but \$1,000 cash, a small loan from the local bank, and one mare. The two of them spent time around the clock fixing up the run-down farmstead and getting their ranch set up to take on the name of Sheldak Ranch - a combination of their town (SHELDdon), their state (DAKota) and their initials (D And K). The strong-willed young couple decided they would run the ranch on their own with no hired help, which they continue doing to this day.



Dave & Kim Utke

Initially, Dave and Kim dabbled in palomino part-Arabian and then Quarter Horse breeding. But the Utkes decided to take a closer look at Appaloosas after one caught their eye in 1968.

This industrious young couple dove into Appaloosa research. They called Appaloosa show judges across the country to learn of the breed's best bloodlines. The judges repeatedly mentioned progeny of Mighty Bright (by Bright Eyes Brother), a line going back to Quarter Horse greats such as Old Fred, a muscular stallion born in 1894.

To build up the broodmare band, the Utkes followed the advice of well-known Texas oil man and horse breeder Carl Miles. He told them to "buy the best horses you can find, even if you have to finance for years to do it. A sure way to lose is to buy a few cheap horses and pray for a miracle."

Following Miles' advice, and with the help of their trusted local banker, the Utkes brought in the best stock they could find. Before long, foals off the ranch went straight to the top of the show ring. Prince Shannon (by Prince's Jim) was one of the first to bring Sheldak Ranch into the spotlight by becoming a leading sire of halter and performance horses. Yet it was famed Sheldak Ranch sire Mighty Tim who started producing national winners in 1975. Mighty Tim was a massive bay stallion with a white blanket and a puppy-dog personality. As one of the greatest halter and performance horses in the breed at the time, he also did not disappoint as a sire. He went on to become an All-Time Leading Sire of halter and performance horses -- all from Sheldak Ranch mares.

Exceptional sires to follow include Prince David, King David, Spittin Image, Master Star and Awestruck. Most recently, Imagine, at age 26, is still siring champions of nearly every major national and world title offered in the Appaloosa breed.

Since the start, Dave and Kim have tried to keep track of Sheldak winners. By their count, there are hundreds and possibly thousands of awards won by Sheldak Ranch bred-and-raised foals in the United States, Canada, and several foreign countries. They can boast national and world champions in all categories, divisions and age groups, both in halter and performance, including pleasure, trail, roping, reining, western riding, cutting, hunter, dressage and more.

Sheldak Ranch horses have been used in recent years as seed stock to start the Appaloosa breed in Chile, and dozens of foals have been sold to Mexico since 1997. Other customers are from Australia, Belgium, Canada, Ecuador, Germany, Panama, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Venezuela and nearly all 50 states.

Today, Sheldak Ranch is still a ranch in the true sense of the word. The Utkes are strong believers in pasture breeding and natural, unattended foaling. Mares foal in the spring on green grass, and stallions are turned out with the foaling mares in their separate pastures in May. They have run as many as 75 broodmares (now around 35) and keep about four stallions. There is no production sale, as the Utkes prefer to work one-on-one with buyers, many of whom have been repeat customers for decades. They do little advertising, as Sheldak horse fans come to find them year after year at www.sheldakranch.com. And this straightforward, hands-on approach to business has served them well. In fact, Sheldak Ranch was named one of the Top 5 Horse Farms in the U.S. by Horseman Magazine in 2009. Among the top 5 were Calumet Farm and Claiborne Farm, retirement home of legendary race horse Secretariat.

Even with a worldwide presence in the horse industry, Dave and Kim have been, and will continue to be, deeply involved in local government, soil conservation, community service, and equine research (www.appaloosaproject.com). Kim's colorful, scenic horse photography has received awards and has appeared in and on the covers of numerous national equine magazines. As enthusiastic ambassadors of the state of North Dakota, they enjoy hosting visitors on the ranch. Dave and Kim cherish the personal notes they receive from people who are enjoying Sheldak horses that never enter a show ring. Emails fill the Sheldak inbox with stories of people who are ecstatic about their working ranch horses, trail babysitters and family pets.