



SHELDAK RANCH

BUILDING THE APPALOOSA BREED

By Lori Steedsman

Dave and Kim Utke, owners of the Sheldak Ranch, Sheldon, ND, have been selected as the 2019 inductees to Appaloosa Horse Club Hall of Fame. Due to COVID, the announcement was delayed.

The vision of Sheldak Ranch began long before owners Dave and Kim Utke met each other. They each wanted their futures to involve horses.

Dave was born in March 1942 and grew up on a farm north of Fargo, ND. As a young man, he and his father, Paul Utke, were stock contractors in the late 1950s and early 1960s. They furnished bucking bulls for local and regional rodeos. Dave was also a bull rider in early 1960s. Some of the Utkes' top bucking bulls were The Stripper, Little Joe and Thunder Road. Dave also spent many years threshing

with horses. He and his father used three teams of horses hooked to bundle wagons to bring shocked grain to the threshing machine. As it became more difficult to find shockers and teamsters, the Utkes had to end their threshing era in the late 1970s.

The other half of Sheldak Ranch began with the exuberant daydreams of a girl who loved horses – Carolyn “Kim” (Evanson) Utke. She was born in January 1943 and grew up in Detroit Lakes, MN. She helped start the first 4-H Horse Project in Becker County, worked hard to get it set up statewide, and went on to train her “backyard horse,” a sleek palomino mare named Sis Monty, to win numerous area championships and make parade appearances. She told everyone that she wanted to raise horses for a living when she grew up. People told her that was a ridiculous notion, which made this



stubborn little Norwegian girl even more determined to prove them wrong.

Dave and Kim met in 1959 when they were showing their Quarter Horses at the North Dakota State Fair. Their visions of ranching merged into reality when they married in 1963. Already raising their first horses together at Dave's family farm, they bought a dilapidated old farmstead 50 miles southeast of Fargo near 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 'round 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 initials (D And K), and town of SHELdon, and North DAKota. 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.

While working first to breed palomino part-Arabians (first foal sold went on to win National Top Ten Yearling Filly at AHA Nationals), then later Quarter Horses, the Utkes met their first Appaloosa stallion in 1968. Rebel Red Hawk, a gentle, stocky red leopard, was boarded overnight at Sheldak Ranch on his way to a show in Minnesota. Within a day's time, they fell in love with him. The Utkes bought Rebel Red Hawk after the show and set out to build up their breeding operation.

From then on it was time to build up the broodmare band. Even though young and perhaps naive, the Utkes made their best decision ever by following 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."

To learn more about the best horses, Kim subscribed to Appaloosa Journal then buried herself in Appaloosa research. She and Dave studied bloodlines and list after list of great Appaloosa sires and dams. Kim used her industrious detective side to make phone calls to Appaloosa show judges across the country, bluntly asking who they thought were the breed's best. 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. Today, after decades of countless national and world show wins and placings by Sheldak Ranch Appaloosa descendants, Dave and Kim are now the ones mentioned by judges as among the world's best breeders.

Dave and Kim's success in the horse world began early with their vast 4-H horse wins as youngsters. After starting Sheldak Ranch, Dave and Kim's hard work and research paid off almost immediately. Their first Quarter Horse foal won the Weanling Colt class at the Great Midwest International Show at Crookston, MN, and went on to be pinned Reserve Grand Champion, the first time ever for a weanling. After switching to Appaloosas, their first Appaloosa colt, sold in 1969, won the yearling Appaloosa class at the Minnesota State Fair, the largest fair in the nation at the time. From that time on, hundreds of national and world championships, national high-point awards and other accolades have been earned by the Utkes' Sheldak Ranch bred-and-raised foals all over the United States, Canada and other countries.

The first Utke bred-and-raised foal to show at a national show was the red leopard colt Prince Shannon (by Prince's Jim). Prince Shannon was named Junior Reserve National Champion at the 28th National Appaloosa Show in 1975. He also won the



**Prince Shannon (1974 colt by Prince's Jim)
All-Time Leading Sire National & World Champions, Halter & Performance Superior & Medallion Award Winners
Hall Of Fame (from our 5th foal crop of 1974)**



**Imagine That Jack — (by Imagine)
Over 800 Points, 326 Performance Points, 83 Non-Pro Points
6 Register Of Merit Awards, 3 Performance Superiors
Versatility Champion, 4 Bronze Medallions
5 time National & World Champion in all roping classe**



2020 Sheldak ranch foals

Junior Championship at the Grand National Cow Palace and earned many more championships and high-point awards. Prince Shannon went on to become a Leading Sire of halter and performance horses, with his offspring dominating an impressive range of classes, including halter, steer daubing, roping, reining, pleasure, stake race, Camas Prairie Stump Race, English show jumping and suitability for dressage. Prince Shannon was inducted into the Appaloosa Hall Of Fame in 1996.

At Carl Miles's Dispersal Sale, Dave and Kim purchased Prince David, the second-highest selling son of Prince Plaudit, a purchase in excess of what Dave and Kim Utke's gross income was for the year. Prince David went on to sire many champions, High Point in

Nation, Superiors, ROMs, plus one of their major sires, King David, who in turn sired champions all over the U.S.

Another famous Utke sire, Mighty Tim, started producing national winners in 1975. Mighty Tim was a massive bay stallion with a white blanket and a puppy-dog personality. He was a major financial investment for Dave and Kim. As one of the greatest halter and performance horses in the breed at the time, he did not disappoint as a sire. Mighty Tim retired from the show ring to Sheldak Ranch and became a leading sire of worldwide halter and performance champions produced out of Sheldak mares. In turn, those fillies and colts went on to become leading producers themselves. Mighty Tim's influence is still seen in his



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descendants at Sheldak Ranch and around the world.

Mighty Tim's first offspring to show at a Nationals (Canada), Jokers Mighty Paul, won 5 Canadian National Champion High Point Awards at his first national show (see list at end), plus National Superior Halter, National

Superior Western Pleasure and Outstanding Member Of Breed Awards. Many more Mighty Tim offspring went on to win Canadian and US National Champion Awards, as Mighty Ambrose, Cherry Maiden, Cherry Fashion, Mighty Timon, The Alternative, Mighty Charmed, and his offspring



2020 Sheldak foals



Hesa Cool Star — (by Imagine) (at the South African Nationals) 2010-2017 seven-time National Halter Champion
 16-time Horse Of The Year, winning dozens of different classes
 National Supreme Champion Of Champions
 Supreme Champion Western Riding Horse

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String Of Storms (by Imagine) 163.5 halter points
 2017 Hall of Fame inductee
 2010 National Champion Broodmares
 2009 World Champion Open Broodmares
 2008 National Champion N-P Aged Mares (unanimous)
 2007 Reserve National Champion N-P 3 YO Mares
 2006 Reserve World Champion N-P 2 Year Old Mares
 2008 World Champion Youth Sr Mares
 2007 Reserve World Champion Youth Sr Mares
 Dam of National & World Champion offspring through 2020 Appaloosa shows

in turn produced more National and World Champions.

Their recent premier stallion, **Imagine** (1990-2017), has produced National and World Champions from his first foal crop in 1997 through 2018, which includes Appaloosa Hall of Fame inductee and 7-time National & World Champion **String Of Storms**, 6-time National & World Roping Champion **Imagine That Jack** (720 points in 21 different classes) and 20+ National & Supreme Halter and Western Performance Champion **Hesa Cool Star** (South Africa). **Imagine's** offspring in turn have produced National, World and International Halter and Performance Champions, Superior, Supreme, Horse Of The Year, and Champion Of Champions, yearly through the 2019 National Championship Show as the aforementioned **String Of Storms** (dam of 2019 National Champions) and **Colored By Vision**, 15-time National & World Champion. **Imagine** was a proven sire with a charming, kind and curious disposition. His exceptional progeny were athletic, eager to please and quick to learn, just like he was. Many trainers have told Dave and Kim that "you only show an **Imagine** offspring something one time, maybe twice, and they remember."

A sampling of awards won by **Sheldak Ranch**-bred horses (through 2019) includes:

- Leading Sire Awards – **Mighty Tim**, **King David** and **Imagine**
- Appaloosa Hall of Fame inductees
- World Champion and National Champion Sr Judged Heading
- World Champion Jr Judged Heading
- World Champion Reserve Steer Daubing
- Register Of Merit Awards – several in cattle classes
- Superior Judged Heeling
- Superior Heading & Heeling

- National High Point Judged Heading
- Reserve High Point Heading & Heeling
- World Champion Jr Cutting Horse
- National Reserve Champion Jr Cutting Horse
- National High Point Western Riding Horse
- Superior Performance Horse (many awards)
- Overall High Point Performance Horse
- Supreme High Point Performance Horse
- Outstanding Member Of Breed Awards
- ApHC Club Champions
- ApHC Versatility Champions
- Register Of Merits in Halter and most all performance classes (dozens and dozens)
- World Champion Ladies Western Pleasure Horse
- Reserve World Champion Jr Western Pleasure Horse
- World Champion Sr Western Pleasure Horse
- World Champion Sr Western Riding Horse
- National High Point Pleasure Championships
- High-Point Barrel Racing
- All-Time Leading Sire Awards
- World Champion High-Point Western Horse (missing Super Horse Award by one point)
- National High-Point Sr Trail Horses
- Bronze Medallion Performance Awards (many)
- National & World Grand Champion Stallions, Mares, Geldings
- National & World Champion Broodmares
- Bronze Medallion Halter Awards (many)
- National High-Point Halter Mares, Stallions, Geldings
- Plus hundreds of State and Regional High-Point Champions in all phases of halter and performance classes.



Sheldak mare with new foal



Sheldak Ranch stallions January 2020 | Master In Command, The Secret Storm, Star Striker IM (left to right)



Skip A Gal (by Imagine) earned a bronze medal by the Appaloosa Horse Club of Germany. The medal is a part of the breeding certificate of the ApHCG where horses are judged concerning their exterior and movement. She reached the highest studbook level of 8.0 - and is registered to the premium studbook!!! in Germany. This year she got additional points because of the quality of her foal and so she earned a silver medal.



Sheldak grandson in Chili. The country of Chile started the Appaloosa breed with all Sheldak Ranch foals.

And in various foreign countries:

- International Grand Champion Mares, Stallions, Geldings
- International Supreme Champion Stallions, Mares
- International Superior Halter, Performance
- International Western Riding Champions
- International Supreme Champion Western Saddle Horse
- International Champion Of Champions
- International National Champion High Point Awards
- International Overall High-Point Judged Events Awards
- International Overall High-Point Champion Awards
- International Horse Of The Year Awards
- International North American Championships
- International Get Of Sire Championships

The horses that today graze Sheldak's pastures have pedigrees that go back to many national and world champions and the most recognizable names in Appaloosa sires, including Mighty Bright, Bright Eyes Brother, Prince Plaudit, Acclaim, Joker B, Prince David,

Mighty Tim, Spittin Image, King David, String of Stars, Skipper W and Mr Exclusive – all tracing back to Old Fred. Broodmares trace back to the Old Blue Mare.

Today, after raising two children and a couple thousand foals, the Utkes are still going strong, running the ranch on their own much like they did at the start. The Utkes are strong believers in pasture breeding and foaling. They have run as many as 75 broodmares (now 30) and keep four stallions. Because the stallions do not stand to outside mares, all ranch income depends on weanling sales each fall. There is no production sale, as the Utkes prefer the one-on-one interaction with their customers. Many people are repeat customers. Most sales are done through their web site at www.sheldakranch.com and through Appaloosa Journal advertisements. With the horses serving as their only means of income, the Utkes put nearly every penny earned back into building up the ranch.

The Utkes consider it a great professional achievement to see their customers experience tremendous success in the show ring and in their own breeding programs with the horses that they have foaled at their ranch. While



IMAGINATE, HALL OF FAME SIRE (Photo at age 16 in pasture condition).

SHELDAK RANCH

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the Utkes take humble pride in the long list of accolades their horses have received through the Appaloosa Horse Club, they also relish the sheer enjoyment that their horses have brought to fellow horse lovers throughout the years. Because the Utkes own their own broodmare band, do not stand the studs to outside mares or use an AI program, they are particularly delighted by positive comments on the success of their personal, selective, and relatively small-

scale operation.

Dave and Kim also have been honored outside of the Appaloosa Horse Club. Sheldak Ranch was named Number 3 of the Top Five Horse Farms in the United States by Horseman Magazine (2012). Number 1 was Claiborne Farm, retirement home of the legendary Secretariat. The Utkes have also been recognized regionally for their work in the equine industry. In 2016, the Utkes were named the Red River Horse Breeders

Association Horseman and Horsewoman of the Year. They were also honored that same year with the ND State University Harvest Bowl Outstanding Agriculturalist Award.

Besides taking care of their Appaloosas, Dave and Kim consider it a professional obligation and duty to be good stewards of the land on which they farm. They have single handedly planted more than 15,000 new trees on the ranch in the past 50

years. The Utkes have cut down approximately 8,000-9,000 dead trees in the old shelter belts, plus cut up storm-damaged trees for firewood for the two wood-burning stoves in their home. In 2000, they earned the Ransom County (ND) Soil Conservation Award for outstanding effort to conserve their valuable soil resources through pasture rotation, water source protection and shelterbelt preservation for erosion control and protection for the horses. 🐾

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