



## Cowboy poet uses barnyard humor

By DONNA BROWN  
Lakeside Review

SYRACUSE — A cowboy poet doesn't have to ride the range to appreciate the good life.

In fact, he doesn't even have to be a cowboy to write about the rough-cut life of those in agriculture. But it helps.

Least wise that's what Bob Christensen says, and he should know. He may not be a rider, but he's certainly a writer and in the past five years his barnyard humor has taken a poetic form that folks come to hear from miles around.

Christensen says he didn't know he could write poetry until about six years ago when a few lines he wrote got a chuckle from his friends. He loved the laughter and it encouraged him to write more.

Another friend read his poems and raved about his talent. She recognized his style as cowboy poetry and directed him to a gathering of poets like himself. That was back in 1984.

Christensen attended his first Elko Cowboy Poetry Gathering as a spectator that year. Today, he is an honored guest and performer.

The gathering is a national event to which poets, singers, and talent scouts clamour every January to relive the good old days through poetry and song.

"That was what people used to do," he said. "I mean, hell, they didn't have television so they'd sit around and entertain each other. They talked to each other."

He said originally cowboy poetry came about as the cowboys rode their horses and made up jingles. He said 90 percent of the true cowboy poems were lost, they were just never written down.

The Elko gathering tries to limit appearances to those who have some tie to the beef industry or at least a tie with agriculture.

Although he is relatively new to the poetry industry, 54-year-old Christensen is no newcomer to the country. Christensen's voice even sounds like a cowboy should sound.

He lives on a farm in Syracuse that was homesteaded by his grandfather in the 1800s. The house he lives in was built by his father in 1929. A visit to the comfortable old farm house is like going home. He and his wife, Laurie, are the parents of five children who have brought forth 20 grandchildren.

Christensen has worked for the Pillsbury Feed Company, Ogden, for about 30 years. He figures he's been on most of the ranches in Utah, Idaho, Wyoming and Nevada.

"I'm sort of an associate cowboy. I'm not a workin' cowboy by any stretch of the imagination. But, they've been kind



Bob Christensen likes his poetry to look on the brighter side of life.

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— Bob Christensen

enough to let me join in and do my stuff," he said.

"I don't keep livestock...my tie is just a love of the culture and the fact that I've spent so many years dealin' with the industry that you get to know these guys and, oh hey, I've worked a few squeeze chutes and helped work some cattle. When you go out on a place and they're working cattle, you pitch in and help a little bit," he said.

His poems are based on the colorful people he's met, the crazy stories he's heard and his imagination.

"I really have a love for the people who work with the land and the cattle," he said. "So, most of the stuff I write is sort of sympathetic towards 'em and so quite often if we get a chance to zing a government agency or the EPA or environmentalists, we'll do it."

He said the cowboy poetry gathering has been good for the beef industry because it's been a very positive thing for beef in general.

"We promote a way of life," he said. "It sort of shows people that we're not such a bad bunch of folks after all. We're just trying to do our thing, we're certainly not out ravishing the environment like a lot of these

so-called tree huggers think. They show a very dim view of what's goin' on."

His career may have begun at the Elko gathering which has received national attention, but it hasn't stopped there.

Christensen said a man named Baxter Black, the king of cowboy poetry from Brighton, Colo., helped give him his start in the world of performances. "He's been very good to me," Christensen said.

Baxter had become so popular that he could no longer handle the work load. He referred clients to Christensen.

"You don't make money writing poetry. You make money performing it," he said. "It's got now to where it's almost a profession."

Is poetry as much fun for Christensen now that it's for money instead of just for fun? "A lot more," he said.

Christensen performs for just about any kind of group that is associated in some way with agriculture. "This stuff is pretty generic," he said. But, he said people who are from urban areas might not understand the humor that's associated with cows, farmland and machinery.

"The thing that keeps people in agriculture surviving is that we've got the ability to laugh at ourselves and if you haven't been there it isn't as funny as if you have," he said.

"Fortunately in Utah, in just about any group that you get together with people are still close enough to the land and have enough ties with the land. They've either grown up on a ranch or a farm."

Some of his poetry makes a political statement, a few poems have a moral message and a good percentage of them are just plain silly.

He tries not to get too rank and he doesn't like bad language, he just likes to write — and he doesn't mind the money. Performing is right up there with the two, remind him of a poem and he'll recite it 'till your rolling on the floor.

Christensen has written two "Feedbags of Cowboy Poetry" I and II. He occasionally writes under the pen name, Bic Sheaffer. The two books are illustrated by Richard Christensen.

In his first book Christensen, alias Sheaffer, notes, "If this is your first sampling of cowboy poetry do not judge this form of expression by this book. Most cowboy poetry is pretty good and deals more directly with everyday ranch life in a purer sense.

"If, however, you like a chuckle, get a kick out of a pun or just plain need some reading material for the outhouse, this book should do the trick."

## Here's a sampling of poet's work

Here's a sampling of some of cowboy poet Bob Christensen's work, taken from his "Feedbag of Cowboy Poetry" books I and II.

### Bad Habits

*They said give up tobacco  
It isn't good for you  
Not tailor-made's nor roll  
your own's  
Not even as a chew  
And you've got to quit the  
drinking  
The whiskey, wine and beer  
And be a sober citizen  
For all to see and hear  
Your gambling's sure a waste  
of time  
And sure a waste of money  
The time would be much better  
spent  
At home with your sweet honey*

*And while we're on the subject  
Of your sweet devoted wife  
You'd better quit your chasin'  
And live a normal life  
Now your cussin' ain't becomin'*

*And your values you should search  
And it's been nigh on to seven years*

*Since you've been seen in church*

*And all your tall tale tellin'  
It really is quite sorry  
How you never let the truth get in*

*The way of a good story  
Well I stopped and took account of it*

*And maybe they are right  
I'm goin' to change my attitude*

*I'll start right in tonight  
Well that was just a year ago  
I've changed, and it's alarmin'*

*I'm down to one bad habit now*

*But gosh, I can't quit farming.*

### So You're Movin' In

*So you've moved out to the country*

*And left the city lights  
And the hustle and the bustle  
For the quiet summer nights  
Now pilgrim you're plumb welcome*

*To help our county grow  
But before you plant your garden*

*There's a few things you should know*

*You see us folks are different  
And just so's you'll understand*

*We try to scratch a living  
From this overtaxed farm land*

*We'll work from dawn 'till sun down*  
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## Community briefs

### Clearfield bethel wins sweepstakes award

CLEARFIELD — Bethel No. 15 of Clearfield, of the International Order of Job's Daughters, recently won the Sweepstakes Award at the Annual Session held in Salt Lake City, March 30 to April 1.

They took first place in large bethel choirs category, second place in large bethel skit, second place in large bethel drill, first place in ritual, first place in softball.

Members also won the following individual awards: Tami Martin, Heather Kerschner and Monica Painter, third place in the trio choir competition; Jenny Brown, second place in tennis; Cyndi Carter, first place in bowling; Monica Painter, second place in bowling; Tami Martin, Rachel Norris, and Kandy Hodgins, first place in arts and crafts; Monica Painter, second and third place in arts and crafts.

Dawn Kerschner and Tami Martin were each awarded Scholarship for the 1990-1991 school year. Monica Painter was fourth runner-up in the Miss Utah Job's Daughters pageant.

For more information concerning Job's Daughters call Roger or Joanne Martin, 771-8533.

### Cub Scout group will form for area boys

LAYTON — Cub Scout Pack 86, sponsored by St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church, Layton, is looking for boys who are now in kindergarten and may be interested in becoming a Tiger Cub Scout.

A group is now being formed to begin late May or early June.

In line with National Boy Scouts of America policy, Pack 86 accepts first-grade boys as Tiger Cubs and second-grade boys for the Cub Scout program.

Pack 86 is a community, non-denominational unit. For more information please contact Pat Casper at 773-1002 or Kathy Rudnicki at 547-9218.

### Business women's club to hold elections

CLEARFIELD — The Lakeview Business and Professional Women's Club will meet at the Country Garden Restaurant in Clearfield on May 3 at 7:30 p.m.

Elections will be held for officers for the coming year. There will also be a speaker on travel safety.

Reservations can be made by calling Faye Cummings at 776-1707.

### Last checkout day for PERC books May 11

FARMINGTON — The Parent Education Resource Center (PERC) will have its last regular checkout day on May 11. All books will be due on May 11.

Summer checkout will be held May 23, 24, and 25. On these dates, patrons will be able to check out 15 books for the summer. A \$25 deposit will be required to check out the books. The deposit will be refunded when the books are returned.

The Parent Education Resource Center is located at 100 S. 200 East, Farmington.

### Enter old quilts in Discovery Day show

Quilts and tops made before 1950 can be entered in Heritage Quilt Discovery Day, Saturday, May 12, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Davis County Courthouse, Farmington, and Saturday, June 2, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Newgate Mall Community Room, Ogden.

Utah Quilt Heritage will document all quilts made before 1950 as to size, pattern, color, fabrics, construction, age, quilting, etc. The histories of the quilts will be taken and photographs made to preserve the legacy of Utah quilts and quiltmakers for the future. There will be no charge.

A \$100 prize will go to the most historically significant quilt. For advance registration, contact Betty John at 546-3037.

### Clearfield High plans 'pops extravaganza'

CLEARFIELD — The Clearfield High School Music Department will present "A Pops Extravaganza" May 9 at 8 p.m. The concert will be held in the Clearfield High school auditorium. Admission is \$1. For further information, call 774-7460.

## POW survives camp through belief in God, love

By RUTH MALAN  
Lakeside Review

KAYSVILLE — Paratroopers jumping from the overhead planes were a welcome sight to those who survived the Indonesian civilian concentration camp below.

"We knew they were Americans because the second to jump carried a huge American flag," said Kitty de Ruyter, former prisoner of war during World War II.

And Mrs. de Ruyter had instant respect for that flag. She told the women assembled at the annual Crestwood LDS Stake Women's Conference in April that they may not realize what they have in the United States and should teach their children to honor the flag.

Mrs. de Ruyter, a South Jordan resident, is a Dutch Indonesian who was born in what was once known as the Dutch East Indies.

"In my youth I was taught to love God," she said. It was that love that helped her through the years she spent in the concentration camp witnessing the cruelty inflicted upon her family and others.

As a member of the Dutch Reformed Church it was a custom for her family to read scriptures daily. Each of the seven children in her family had a personal nanny until he or she was 10, she said.

Her family lived in a large home just outside an Indonesian village. As owner of a rubber



Former prisoner of war Kitty de Ruyter relates her experiences in concentration camp.

manufacturing plant her father was quite wealthy. Numerous servants worked for the family. There were no schools for the children to attend so five classrooms were incorporated into one wing of the home and tutors were hired to teach both the children of the family and the children of the servants.

"My nanny called me 'a child with a destiny,'" said Mrs. de Ruyter. It was that nanny who

taught her of Mohammed and the Moslem religion.

"Religion was very important. We celebrated both Christian holidays and Moslem holy days," she said.

On May 10, 1940, the Germans invaded Holland so the Dutch East Indies prepared for war, she said.

Her mother had dreamed on three separate nights that the family should build a bomb shelter

next to their home. She made her father uproot his imported roses to build the shelter in the exact place it was in her dream.

The shelter was built with a secret passage that led to the wine cellar of the main home. Clothing, food, medicine and bedding were placed in the shelter.

As a pharmacist her mother had access to medications and medical supplies. Her desire was to become a doctor but women at that time were not allowed to do so.

That didn't stop her. She was taught medical skills by her brother and uncle, who had both become doctors.

After bombing Pearl Harbor in 1941 the Japanese stopped in Indonesia on their way to the Philippines. Once there all the Europeans were placed in concentration camps, said Mrs. de Ruyter.

Her father had joined the military and was at that time an escaped POW. He destroyed bridges and even blew up his own rubber plant so the Japanese couldn't take it over.

His family was placed under house arrest. Barbed wire was strung around the home and mines were placed in the yard. The family was allowed to live in just three rooms; the rest of the house was cemented up, she said.

Their captors were in hopes of starving the family out, but with the provisions in the bomb shelter the group was able to survive

for several months. Her mother was expecting her last child at the time.

The natives who had learned to read and write threw stones with messages tied to them, through the open window at night to let the family know what was happening on the outside.

"We thanked our Heavenly Father daily for the three stupid sentrys who never could figure out what was going on," she said, laughing.

The baby was born with no help from the outside.

Her father surrendered, hoping for his family's freedom. Her mother sewed backpacks for each child. Inside she placed outer clothing, medicine, chlorine tablets, toothpaste, toothbrush, comb and underwear. All of the items were labeled with the children's names. Each child was allowed to take a favorite toy. Bands were embroidered and placed on the new baby boy's legs and wrists.

During the darkness of the night the family was awakened by soldiers and in her sleepiness she forgot to take her favorite rag doll. Her father and brothers were taken one way while her mother, sisters and the baby, dressed in pink, were taken another way.

Her brothers, aged 17, 15 and 13, were not seen again for 3½ years, she said.

They were placed in a camp  
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