

AWARDS FLY IN THE BIG SKY

What do you have to have for an MFTHBA affiliate to put on two National Points Shows, two National Trail Rides, five other major trail rides, 10 clinics, and the best booth at a large horse expo? Well, in a word, volunteers. Dedicated volunteers are the only way an affiliate is able to provide members with any type of service and activities.

On December 1, the Big Sky Fox Trotter Association held its fourth annual Big Sky Awards Banquet honoring all the volunteers who made 2007 an outstanding year for the members.

The banquet was held at the Missoula Country Club and featured an outstanding dinner of Salmon or Rib Eye steak overlooking the 18th green. Of course there were 10 inches of snow on the green, it was 12 degrees, and it was dark, but it's the thought.

The evening began with the President, Bob Womack, asking for prayers and a moment of silence for two members who passed away in 2007. Shirley Netteberg left us in March and Larry Conner succumbed to a heart attack the Wednesday prior to the banquet. Both were long time members. Larry had served the club for ten years in every office and as show chair on a couple of occasions. Shirley was the ever present wife and partner of Ole Netteberg, and was always the life of our activities. We are diminished with their loss.

After an opening prayer, and welcome for those who traveled long distances, (we had four couples who traveled over 250 miles one way, and from different directions) members sat down to a very nice dinner.

Throughout the evening members names were drawn from a basket for door prizes that included horse treats, 50 pound bags of horse feed, certificates for Wrangler jeans and a saddle blanket from Fox Trot USA. Only two members did not get their names drawn for a door prize and member Thea Gervais promised them a set of her excellent show ribbons.

Annette Padgett put together a Power Point slide show made up of pictures from all the events held during the year and personal

photographs from members. That ran on a big screen at the back of the room throughout the evening.

As dessert was served, Bob Womack and awards committee chair Mark Goss began the evening's recognition program. Recognition plaques were given to all the 2007 officers and board of directors -

President – Bob Womack, Vice President – Mary Auger, Board of Director members – Bill Free, Jerry Christison, Mary Greene, Rick Padgett, and Vaughn Clutter.

Thea Gervais received a plaque for her outstanding work as the 2007 trail ride chair.

Mark Goss, who is a member of the national versatility committee, then recognized members who competed in Ava and who, in Goss' words, "ruled the versatility arena". Members receiving acknowledgement were Suzanne Nebeker who won Open Versatility World Grand Champion and Three Year Old Versatility Futurity Champion; Thea Gervais, Amateur Versatility World Grand Champion and Amateur Ranch Horse Reserve World Champion.

Also recognized was Bill Free, who, at 81 years young, was the 2 gait Open Champion at the Great Northwest affiliate's National Point show (against three past World Champion performance horses and riding with a cracked rib suffered the night before the show) and 2 gait Open Champion and 3 gait Reserve Open Champion at the BSFTA National Points Show.

Bob then recognized Lauren Johansen for her work designing and implementing the BSFTA web site and serving as web master. Lauren received a bottle of fine Merlot for her efforts.

Bob awarded a bottle of very good white wine (is there a pattern here) to Cathy and Randy Olson for acquiring two sets of National Finals Rodeo tickets which the BSFTA raffled off, raising over \$1000.00.

BSFTA held the first ever versatility and ranch horse only show in Helena, Montana this last May. Bob acknowledged the hard work from the show chairs, Mary Auger and Mark Goss. Bob also recognized Jerry Christison

and Mary Greene for their efforts in logistics and sponsorship fund raising. These two coordinated with the arena and cattle owner, made the trail obstacles, and raised \$1500 of sponsorship monies.

Cathy Olson received a great round of applause for her work as the only gate person all show long.

Then it was Mark's turn to talk about the BSFTA Annual Points Show, the affiliates 13th. Rick Padgett was the rookie show chair and did a fine job (with a lot of help from his wife Annette). Leslie Womack, the ever suffering wife of Bob, was the show announcer and received rave reviews. One of the loudest rounds of applause went to Tony Dees, who was not even a member (although he is now), who took vacation and worked the gate for the show everyday and all day.

This year's point show was probably the best ever. The club gave out over \$1200.00 in Championship belt buckles, a huge number of ribbons, and some very nice merchandise awards.

The ceremony then moved into recognition of those who have provided us with entertainment and a some laughs during the year.

Thea Gervais and Erica Stred were recognized for their unceremonious, rather rough, early dismounts during speed events this year. For their embarrassment they both received two strips of Velcro, one for their pants and one for their saddles.

Bill Free received a small orange cone in memory of his run through the trail class in Washington where Bill knocked over every cone on the course but the very last one. He missed that one because he wasn't even close to it.

Randy Olson was awarded a tiny tire on a piece of dental floss to be used for further training of his stud, who really baled out during the ranch horse versatility class when Randy dallied the tire and started to pull. Randy cowboyed up and rode the deal to the end, all the while proving that fox trotters can canter at the sidepass for at least 300 feet.

Karen Philips, who has a black horse and was wearing black in a very dark corner of the arena during the showmanship class in Washington

and who was not seen and therefore not called by the judge, was given a lapel pin with flashing red and green lights.

Jack Womack, who in most people's memory has not ever lost a pole bending race, was beaten in Ava by Lisa Petty. In trying to figure that deal out some members reviewed tape of the event and decided that Lisa had an unfair advantage because her horse, Pixy, was wearing a breast collar made of bright red fleecy material. So Annette Padgett made Jack a similar (but more professional) bright red fuzzy breast collar to enhance his speed next year.

The table then turned on Annette, who was given a clothes pin to use on her nose. Seems Annette wrote an article for the newsletter in which she mentioned something about Bob Womack smelling like a horse. Problem was Annette left out the "s" and said that Bob "smelled like a hore", something the Right Reverend Bob denies.

This year the awards committee started a new awards category, Most Improved Rider. It was decided that we needed to recognize both a male and female rider.

This year the Most Improved Male Rider Award went to Randy Olson.

The Most Improved Female Rider Award was shared by Karen Philips and Annette Padgett.

There were three Outstanding Contribution Awards for people who went above the call of duty and sacrificed time, talent, and put a significant amount of effort into making 2007 a super year.

Annette Padgett was recognized for her tireless work as newsletter editor for the last four years, co-chairing the annual points show, organizing the horse expo booth and demonstration, organizing the annual awards banquet for the last four years, and making the world's best pizza. (the last honor is absolute truth)

Donna Goss received an Outstanding Contribution Award for her work as Treasurer, Show Secretary, fund raising chair, and show sponsorship co-chair. Donna sold the most raffle tickets by a very wide margin.

Karen Philips received an Outstanding Contribution Award for her unselfish contributions to the Big Sky affiliate. Karen is stepping down after four years as secretary, during which time the membership went from about 60 to over 120. Karen designed a new membership records program, sent out recruitment and follow-up letters that were instrumental in member recruitment and retention.

Karen also was show sponsorship chair for four years during which she took sponsorship to an entire different level. Karen put together a program that sent out request letters, did personal follow-up, and designed sponsor recognition awards that has allowed the BSFTA Annual Points Show to be one of the best funded in the country. This year, along with co-chair Donna Goss, Karen was able to raise over \$4000.00 from over 40 different sponsors, mostly Montana businesses.

This year the Big Sky affiliate inducted three long time members into the Hall of Fame of the Big Sky Fox Trotter Association. To be considered for induction a member has to have given long term contributions to the welfare of the affiliate, contributed to the recognition and spread of the Missouri Fox Trotter in Montana, proven a superior performer in the show ring, represented the affiliate at non-affiliate trail rides, and be recognized and respected by their peers.

The 2007 inductees were Mariann Wheat, Helena, Montana, Harriet Free, Florence, Montana, and Jerry Christison, Helena, Montana. All three are very deserving of induction into the Hall of Fame.

In closing remarks, President Bob Womack, read a letter from long time member and Hall of Fame member, Pete Peterson. In his remarks Pete said that the 2007 BSFTA Annual Points Show was the way shows used to be, laid back, fun, and with everyone enjoying being together. Bob thanked everyone for making the Big Sky club a fun outfit and said he looked forward to everyone working together again to make 2008 an even greater year for the best affiliate in the MFTHBA.