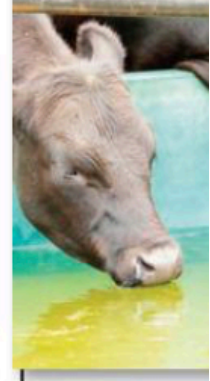




# ELBERT COUNTY NEWS



A publication of  Colorado Community Media

ELBERT COUNTY, COLORADO



Cassidy Lenhart, Ashley Rhinehart and Catherine Rose ride into the arena at the 2017 Elizabeth Stampede.

TY STOCKTON

## Drill team does some fancy footwork

### Blazing Saddles squad began 11 years ago

BY JODI HORNER

SPECIAL TO COLORADO COMMUNITY MEDIA

For the 24 young riders of the Blazing Saddles drill team, having the opportunity to ride their horses and perform at rodeo events throughout the region means a commitment to once-a-week practices, riding in all weather conditions (except lightning), and learning to manage a half-ton animal in a variety of situations.

The riders practice steering their horses into formations and carrying large flags mounted on poles of wood or aluminum while riding their horses at high speed.

The flags bear the logos of business sponsors and rodeos, along with military flags.

The all-female drill team was started 11 years ago when coach Cindy Adams harnessed momentum from a grassroots drill team that had begun with the Little Britches Rodeo in Kiowa.

"We got together and wanted to do an opening for the Tuesday night rodeos for a couple of years, and the kids that were doing it wanted to

start their own team," said Adams, who lives in Elizabeth.

Adams is assisted by Madeline Wagner, also from Elizabeth.

"Being a member of the drill team is so much more than getting dressed up and showing everyone how fast and well you can ride a horse," Wagner said.

Wagner said she finds volunteering with the Blazing Saddles to be very rewarding.

"I feel that I gain more from being involved with the girls than the girls get from me," Wagner said.

Wagner said she gains a sense of

SEE EQUESTRIAN, P14

# Equestrian

FROM PAGE 1

satisfaction knowing “that my training tips and guidance is helping the girls to become better riders and build self-confidence and self-esteem.”

## Coaching is demanding task

Coaching a horseback riding drill team doesn't come without its challenges, Adams explained.

“It's mainly the horses,” Adams said, “to get the drills and the pinwheels (formations) to work properly.”

“There are certain horses that don't like to be next to each other. Some horses are faster than others so you have to be able to figure out where to start in the drill and figure out where they should be,” Adams said.

Another challenge is dealing with the events — seen and unforeseen — of life.

“A huge problem — one that we face every time — is if one person isn't there and they've been practicing that way, then somebody else needs to move into that spot and it rearranges everybody,” she said.

“Soccer games, sickness, horses getting hurt. I have a bunch of royalty on the team from a bunch of rodeos, so there's royalty stuff — it seems like at almost every rodeo ... we have to rearrange everything at the last second,” Adams said.

Although the Blazing Saddles is Elizabeth-based, “we allow girls to join from however far they want want to drive,” Wagner said, noting they



**From left to right, Nicole Hunt, Maddie Garner, Macie Bronson, and Brinlyn Brinkworth ride in formation at First Responder night at the 2017 Elizabeth Stampede. Brinlyn carries the flag for Douglas County in honor of her father's role as a Douglas County sheriff.**

TY STOCKTON

have members from Bennett, Kiowa, Aurora, and Parker, “but mostly Elizabeth.”

The team has become popular to the point of having a wait list — two are currently hoping to ride with the Blazing Saddles in the near future.

“The only reason we have 24 women is because of the number of costumes and chaps we have — each pair of chaps costs \$200-\$300 per girl,” Adams said.

The girls' costumes as well as outfitting for the horses are owned by the Blazing Saddles organization.

Unlike most of the drill teams in

the area such as the Westerners and the Rangerettes, the Blazing Saddles has no established age minimum or maximum, although typically the riders “age out” when they graduate high-school.

“Our youngest is 12,” Wagner said, “and we've had girls join when they are 7.”

Elizabeth High School senior Rachel Hinds has been on the Blazing Saddles for three years.

“It gets the adrenaline going, performing,” she said.

For Hinds, the challenges as a drill team rider seem to be more

exciting than stressful.

“It's a great team work,” Hinds said, “you have remember the drill and what you're going to do.”

## Family ties

High school freshman Macie Bronson is in her second year with the Blazing Saddles. She became involved through her cousins, who were also on the team.

“I kind of like to learn how to keep calm when stuff happens,” said Bronson, who makes the commute from her home in Parker to practice in Kiowa.

“Sometimes something will go wrong and a horse will freak out,” Bronson said, “or sometimes my horse won't get along with another horse so I have to space out (distance) a little bit.”

There are times, Bronson said, when the coaches have to move horses in the formations because “horses will literally kick each other.”

From one parent's perspective, the drill team is a means to foster growth and character.

“The sense of responsibility is definitely there,” said Macie Bronson's mother, Jennifer Bronson.

“It does get stressful — plans change immediately, girls can take that stress and fix it. It's like, you signed up for this, you are out in the heat, it's hot in those chaps, the black pants, you have to do it,” Jennifer Bronson said.

“I love being at rodeos and performing for people, I love pleasing them,” said Macie Bronson, “and I love the girls on the team.”