

Sam Shepard wins Zane Schulte Memorial Award

by Jill J. Dunkel

Winning the Zane Schulte Memorial Award is quite an honor for any recipient. But when you've spent time with Zane and knew him well, that brings the distinction to a new level. For Sam Shepard, it simply makes it "special."

"Tom and Barbra (Schulte) called me a few weeks ago when I was at a show in Mississippi and told me about the award. We have all been friends a very long time. And to be in the same company with others who have won the award—Dale Wilkinson, Buster Welch, Bill Riddle and others—it is such a big honor," Shepard said.

Shepard first got to know Zane when the Schultes and the Shepards were at an event together in the early 1990s. "Pam and I had Austin with us, and we took him and Zane sight seeing in New York City. He was a great kid and so much fun to be around, he was so positive. Zane and I would play golf together at shows and became good friends. I thought the world of him," he said.

"The award being in his name makes it that much more meaningful to me."

Being recognized by his peers and customers is very gratifying, he said, and knowing that the award is not based on showing, but other values that are involved. "It's always gratifying to win something like this."

Now a trainer in Verbena, Alabama, Shepard spent many years competing in cutting as a Non-Pro before going professional in the early 1980s. Prior to that, he was an administrator at a vocational school in Mobile, Alabama, and trained his own horses in the evenings and on weekends.

"I wanted to get involved in aged events, but I couldn't afford the really nice colts in order to be competitive," he explained. But others believed in his ability, and asked him to train their colts.

"I was training at night and working my 'real job' during the day. I wound up with 20 head to ride in the afternoons, and would still be at the barn at midnight. Then I would have to get up early and be back at work the next morning," Shepard said. "I decided I had to do one or the other, so I thought I'd try training horses."

The school where Shepard worked offered him a year-long sabbatical to give the career move a try. "Within six or seven months, I called and told them I wasn't coming back. Cutting was my livelihood."

For Shepard, the career move wasn't for money or fame, but because he enjoyed it. "I love training. I love the horses, the cattle, the competition. It's been a terrific way



2009 Zane Schulte Memorial Award recipient Sam Shepard.

to make a living. And a terrific way to bring a family up if you do it the right way, if you handle yourself and your associations with other people the right way."

Shepard said there aren't very many professions where you meet such a variety of people. "People that you wouldn't meet in just a regular workday life, that's meant the most to me, all the people I've met. All the different backgrounds that come to cutting, riders, trainers, owners, movie stars, every walk of life that you can imagine. That's been special."

Sandy Brannon nominated Shepard for the Zane Schulte Award. In her nomination letter, she wrote, "I believe Sam Shepard is the perfect nominee for the award. Sam's honesty and overall integrity in the cutting horse industry is recognized by many participants, spectators, customers and vendors."

She also wrote, "Sam has well earned the respect and honor through his genuine kindness to the people in the cutting horse community."

It is that honesty and integrity that Shepard believes is important for anyone trying to make a living in the cutting horse business. "You've got to have the natural ability, and you've got to have the business sense. But it also takes good work habits and a good work ethic," he said.

One of the highlights of Shepard's career came when Buster Welch sent two Futurity horses to Shepard to train. "This was back when Buster was riding horses for the King Ranch. We were at his place working cattle. I took two horses home, and one of them belonged to Buster. To know that he paid me training on his own horse was such a compliment."

Shepard's dedication to cutting reaches further than just as a trainer. He has also contributed to the industry, serving as NCHA President in 1992-93, and on various committees over the years.

In the show pen, Shepard has won in excess of \$1.7 million, and is a member of the Riders Hall of Fame. "Being inducted in the Riders Hall of Fame was special because I didn't start showing professionally until I was in my 40s. I had to start from scratch, and had a long hill to climb. To get to that point was one of the most fulfilling accomplishments in my cutting career."

Now watching his sons compete brings a great sense of pride. His oldest son, Austin, has more than \$3.6 Million in winnings at the young age of 32. He also has a daughter, Stephanie, from a previous marriage.

Shepard and his wife, Pam, have another daughter, Emma, and a son, Harris, who also enjoys cutting and won the Junior Youth Scholarship Cutting in 2008 and was reserve in the Senior Youth in 2009. "It is tremendously satisfying watching my children succeed. It doesn't matter what they do."

Whether it's watching his children or riding a barn full of horses, Shepard says cutting will stay an active part of his life. "I have no intention of retiring. I may cut back some in the next five years, but I don't plan on quitting. I just enjoy what I'm doing." ★



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About the Zane Schulte Memorial Award

In honor and memory of Zane Schulte, the son of Thomas and Barbra Schulte, to be awarded annually to a professional trainer who exemplifies the character by which Zane Schulte is remembered: integrity, service, values, respect of their peers, contribution to the industry and excellence in the arena. Each year's winner is presented with a special bronze Zane Schulte Award trophy at the NCHA Futurity.

Zane Schulte Award Recipients

- 2001 Dale Wilkinson
- 2002 Bill Riddle
- 2003 Al Dunning
- 2004 Buster Welch
- 2005 Jim Reno
- 2006 Mike McCarty
- 2007 Chris Benedict
- 2008 Allen Crouch
- 2009 Sam Shepard

The recipient will be honored with a bronze "Zane Schulte Award" trophy at the NCHA World Championship Futurity during the NCHA Hall of Fame and Awards Party sponsored by the NCHA Professional Trainers.

2009 Zane Schulte Award Nominees

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| Gerald Alexander | Tommy Dvorak Jr. | Tommy Marvin |
| Angella Ball | Aaron England | Mark Michels |
| Keith Barnett | Matt Gaines | John Morgan |
| Jeremy Barwick | Shannon Hall | Bruce Morine |
| Chip Cardon | Phil Hanson | Craig Morris |
| Mike Coleman | Russell Harrison | Nick O'Dell |
| Lloyd Dennis Cox | Joe Heim | Steve Schlesinger |
| Charles Crawley | Olan Hightower | Raymond Shumate |
| Casey Crouch | Polly Hollar | Jim Simpson |
| Mitch Davis | Clay Johnson | Corky Sokol |
| Troy Davis | Tom Long | Larry Trocha |
| Dean Domann | Tim McCloud | Mike Wood |
| Chuck Drake | Dave McGregor | |
| Ed Dufurrena | J.B. McLamb | |