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For the St. Paul Rodeo

ON PARADE

St. Paul couple, long time volunteers and residents, are chosen as parade grand marshals

St. Paul, Ore. (June 17, 2024) – Mike and Karen Bernard used to organize the St. Paul Rodeo parade.

Now they'll be leading it.

The St. Paul couple, longtime volunteers with the rodeo, were chosen as the 2024 parade grand marshals.

Both of them, like many in the small community, have given of their time and talents to produce the rodeo, which is the biggest pro rodeo over Independence Day and one of the top twenty-five rodeos in the nation.

Mike got his start as a kid, tagging along with his dad, Don Bernard, as Don was vendor coordinator, telling the food and merchandise vendors where they could set up their stands. His granddad, Pete Bernard, helped build the rodeo grounds and filmed the rodeo; Pete's rodeo footage is still used by the rodeo today. His parents, including his mom Jeanette, believed in volunteering and helped at the event for years.

Mike (and later Karen, after they married), took over the role of vendor committee chairman, sending contracts to vendors months in advance of the rodeo, assigning their spots, and making sure they had electricity or water for their needs.

When he was dating Karen, in 1981, she got roped into helping, too. She grew up in Elmira, west of Eugene, and while dating him, a neighbor came over and asked if she wanted to sell tickets at the rodeo.

She did, and for several years, even after they married in 1984, she sold tickets.

She and Mike have helped with the St. Paul Rodeo parade for years. Early on the morning of July 4, they were at the high school, posting signs for each entry, and downtown, putting up no parking signs on the parade route. Karen served as judge for the best entries, while Mike, after the commercial entries were in order, jumped into his business truck, the St. Paul Tire truck, and was an entry in the parade.

As soon as the parade ends, they go to the church booth to help serve the parish's famous barbecue chicken.

"I call it a working rodeo," Mike said.

They've done more, too, helping cook and serve the breakfast on trail ride day, taking cover money for the rodeo's kickoff party, and now, helping keep the grounds neat and tidy.

They live on the east side of the rodeo grounds, so if tree branches are down, they pick them up. Mike likes to do little things around the grounds to keep things organized.

For sixteen years he owned a tire shop in St. Paul, then went to work for a tire store in Newberg. He fixed tires and sold new ones to everybody in town and the surrounding farming community, and before he semi-retired, was taking care of the tires of the third generation of customers. Three years ago, he retired. But that only lasted a month, and he was back to work.

"He loves his customers so much he can't quit," Karen said. "He went back to work."

"My customers missed me," Mike said.

Their blended family includes five daughters and a son, and most of the family usually comes home for rodeo. The Bernards host a crawfish



party at their house during rodeo, and when they had more volunteer duties, they didn't even have time to visit their guests.

Now they can spend time with them.

The couple, now in their seventies, enjoy their time with the rodeo. They made good friends among the vendors, even making a point to visit them at their booths at the state fair.

“We look them up and give them hugs, and we're still in contact with them,” Karen said.

Mike did more than rodeo work. He served on the St. Paul City Council for thirty years, was a volunteer fireman, and helped with the parish. It's important to both of them to be involved with the rodeo and the community, they said.

“I do it for the community of St. Paul,” Mike said. “It would have made my parents and grandparents proud.”

“We were taught to volunteer,” Karen said.

“It’s one of those things,” Mike said. “We get it done.”

The St. Paul Rodeo runs July 2-6, with performances nightly at 7:30 pm and a 1:30 pm matinee on July 4.

Tickets are available online at StPaulRodeo.com. They range in price from \$20 to \$60.

For more information, visit the website or call 800.237.5920.



