



Buck Beal
Public Relations Director
World Gay Rodeo Finals®
Buck.PS@gmail.com
Tel. or Text 760 333-5664
www.igra-wgrf.com

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The History of Gay Rodeo

It is a huge surprise to many that the gay community is involved in rodeo, but this being America and the fact that all of us are intrigued with our Western heritage, it only adds to the reality "We are everywhere!"

The gay community has found many creative ways to become involved with America in efforts to overcome the walls of prejudice. The "Imperial Court" system, which is active in many cities across America, asked their "Empress and Emperor" to raise money for charity. It was felt that raising money for the "Muscular Dystrophy Association" would make a statement for both our existence and our concern for our neighbors.

Reno Gay Rodeos

Emperor I of Reno, Phil Ragsdale, came up with one of the most creative ideas to raise funds. The year was 1975 and Ragsdale wanted to help out the local Senior Citizens Annual Thanksgiving Day feed. An amateur gay rodeo would be fun, raise money, and even erase a lot of gay stereotyping. Ragsdale did not find it easy to pull off this event. He did finally land the Washoe County Fairgrounds for October 2, 1976 and then could not get any local ranchers to allow gays the use of their animals. Finally, on October 1, 1976, he was able to locate five "wild" range cows, ten "wild" range calves, one pig, and a Shetland pony. The next day, "IT WAS RODEO TIME!" Over 125 people took part in this "first" event and the winners were crowned; first, "King of the Cowboys," second, "Queen of the Cowgirls," and third, "Miss Dusty Spurs" (the drag queen). It was great fun and a minor success.

Ragsdale added several new twists to the 1977 version of this rodeo/fundraiser. He founded the Comstock Gay Rodeo Association and his rodeo project became the National Reno Gay Rodeo. Following the Imperial Court's lead, Ragsdale added the "Mr., Ms., and Miss National Reno Gay Rodeo" contest to benefit the Muscular Dystrophy Association.

The 1977 rodeo, although still small, with its new twists donated \$214.00 to MDA under the name of "Reno Gay Liberation." The National Reno Gay Rodeo became a total new outlet for the gay community and created a dual party, "emerging Gay Liberation mixed into a

Country/Western party" and "24-hour casinos." Dance troupes from the gay community found an arena to show off their stuff. Square dancing, clogging, formation line dancing, and the rebirth of the two-step made the nights into fabulous parties!

By 1980 a group out of California, the "Pacific Coast Gay Rodeo Association," had emerged with talented rodeo contestants. Fresno, California and Utah had presented some of the top contenders for the Mr., Ms., and Miss titles. Gay rodeo, and the parties surrounding the event, had gained a great foothold in America. Texas was the big state in 1981, bringing a host of fans in Texas T-shirts, a hot contender for All-Around Cowboy, and Mr., Ms., and Miss contestants, who by the way raised nearly \$40,000 for MDA. The Miss from Texas won the competition for Miss National Reno Gay Rodeo. With San Francisco only a short drive away, the underground gay network spread the word about this "party" and the audience in the grandstands grew to 10,000. Those who only came for the nightlife swelled the head count of gays in the city to over 40,000!

1982 was dominated by Colorado and brought another change to Ragsdale's rodeo: contestants who wanted standardized rodeo rules so they would feel that they were competing on an equal basis. Many contestants from the previous five years did not return for competition. The Mr., Ms., and Miss National Reno Gay Rodeo contestants were no longer comfortable raising large numbers of dollars just for MDA. Texas in particular was disappointed in this area and decided not to return in 1983.

So, 1983's version of Mr., Ms., and Miss National Reno Gay Rodeo allowed contestants to designate 50% to MDA and 50% to a gay-related charity of their choice. Most chose the AIDS Foundation. 1983 also saw the largest number of dance groups ever assembled at a gay rodeo and the grandstands filled with over 12,000 people. The lack of consistent rules continued to create problems in the arena.

By 1984, the ninth and final National Reno Gay Rodeo still brought over 10,000 people to the rodeo grounds and thousands more to Reno for the gambling and nighttime parties. The IRS credits the demise of this rodeo to a dispute with Washoe County Fairgrounds and the Sands Hotel along with the purported seizure of the rodeo books. Nonetheless, Phil Ragsdale had made a major mark on gay history and introduced the renowned Rose Maddox and Joan Rivers to the emerging gay-Western lifestyle and kindled the flame in the hearts of many men and women scattered across the nation.

The Colorado Connection

Across the nation, the gay community began to set the tone for the "Urban Cowboy" phenomenon. Beginning in 1980, a popular disco called "The Broadway" in Denver introduced Country/Western nights with Ron Jesser teaching the two-step. It became so popular that the club dropped its disco format and catered strictly to this new country crowd and changed their name to "Broadway Country."

The city of Denver and the changing need for government buildings brought the "Broadway Country" to a roaring halt in January 1981 when the city gained control of the property for a new Justice Building. Denver's two-steppers were still hungry for a place to "do their thing" and one of the most ardent fans gambled his world to bring a country dance floor back to the gay community.

John King opened "Charlie's" in Denver in early June of 1981 and the urban cowboys were again happy. The underground gossip chain rumored that country bars were springing up all across the nation and believe it or not, a gay rodeo in Reno, Nevada. A handful of adventuresome cowboys from Denver decided to check it out and even if it wasn't true, Reno had great casinos. It proved true and a couple of the men even became contestants.

The boys from Denver saw an unbelievable mass of gay humanity coming together in Country/Western celebration. A couple of groups from San Francisco introduced Square Dancing (The Foggy City Squares), clogging (The Barbary Coast Cloggers) and a line dance called "Kaw-Liga." Rose Maddox belted out a theme that the gay community dearly loved, "Stand by Your Man." Everywhere you looked, the Pride of Texas was in front of you with great looking T-shirts and loads of enthusiasm. They had raised nearly \$40,000 for Muscular Dystrophy and their Miss candidate even won the title of Miss Reno National Gay Rodeo.

At the closing party in a jam-packed room at the Sands Hotel, the newly crowned Miss Reno National Gay Rodeo (Miss Texas) came face to face with Wayne Jakino. He couldn't move left or right and felt compelled to congratulate Miss Texas. She responded, "Thank you, and where are ya'll from?" Jakino said he was from Denver and Miss Texas chided, "Well, ya'll might as well of not shown up from all we have seen of you." Jakino let his mouth overload and snapped, "Yeah, but check us out next year!"

Excited about the Reno weekend, Jesser asked John King if Charlie's would allow a group to meet to talk rodeo. The first meeting saw Jesser, Jakino, and seven other men commit themselves to form the Colorado Gay Rodeo Association (CGRA) and return in force to Reno.

In just a little over a month, on September 13, 1981, the new association elected its first officers, with 42 people present, and make its first public appearance at a community fundraiser that evening. Jakino was elected Founding President and his memory burned with the taunting from Miss Texas. It was now "Reno or Bust!" time. It should be noted that the argument over placing the word "gay" in the name of the association had raged for a month before the election and for two months following at every bylaws ratification meeting.

Founding membership was held open on December 1, 1981 and hit 94 founding members. Thereafter, membership continued to climb. Surprisingly so, for historical purposes, this new rodeo group didn't even own a horse!

The next ten months were frantic and filled with enthusiasm. When August of 1982 rolled around, 270 CGRA members and over 150 supporters wearing shirts emblazoned with the slogan "Colorado Rides with Pride" arrived for the Reno National Gay Rodeo! This time they even had horses! The entourage included the first mounted gay drill team, the Mile High Square Dancers, the Denver Country Cloggers, candidates for the Mr., Ms., and Miss titles, and 43 rodeo contestants, which comprised two-thirds of the contestants for that rodeo.

Colorado contestants quickly learned that the rules of the rodeo arena changed from one minute to the next and learned from other returning contestants that this had been true in the past. The contestants voiced a wish for uniform rules in order to improve the quality of rodeo and more rodeos in which they could hone their skills.

Why not? A new challenge! Start another rodeo! Colorado returned home and talked rodeo. Practicality clearly indicated Colorado had not raised the amount of money that Texas had and additionally, Texas had a huge population base and an emerging political climate that Colorado could not match.

The Texas Connection

Colorado picked up the gossip from the underground network that there were great Country/Western bars with urban cowboys operating in Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, Austin, and San Antonio. Having already made a few Texas friends in Reno, CGRA decided the road to another rodeo led through Texas. A Colorado delegation headed south in the fall of 1982 determined to talk Texas into forming an association and hosting a rodeo.

Wayne Jakino, Rich Rezac, John King, and Kenny Cunitz arrived in Houston and headed for "The Barn." Walter Strickler and Terry Clark operated the club. Both men had been very involved in the efforts to bring Texas to Reno. The "Brazos River Bottom" was the hot country-dance bar and the target for added support in the rodeo effort. Discussions were positive, but Houston leaders were very hesitant to go forward. The official answer was, "You stage a rodeo in Colorado and we will work hard to support you." If you ever bump into Rezac, Cunitz, or the security guard from the Allen Park Inn in Houston, be sure and ask about the "Ester Williams Midnight Synchronized Diving Exhibition!"

The Colorado delegation was not discouraged. San Antonio and the much-talked-about "Snuffy's Saloon" were just up the road. Ron Weaver and Swampy were great hosts and Snuffy's was hopping, but the official answer was, "You stage a rodeo in Colorado and we will work hard to support you."

The city of Austin was a short drive away, but the group hit this one cold turkey. The target was called "The Red River Crossing" and the people were really friendly. After a really good time, there was no official answer, but some really nice people said, "If Colorado does stage a rodeo, we will sure come to see it!"

Okay, so Fort Worth and Dallas were just up the road! A stop at "The 651 Club" in Fort Worth netted support from some really helpful cowboys and they escorted the group over to Dallas. It took all of two minutes in "The Roundup" to meet Tom Sweeney and Richard Montgomery. The Roundup was "The Mecca" for the "Urban Cowboy" and everybody was ready to rodeo, but not in Texas and not after Colorado had talked to Houston first. Colorado did get a very sincere official answer, "You stage a rodeo in Colorado and we will work hard to support you."

The delegation headed home to Colorado fully convinced. If the five largest cities in Texas were coming to the Colorado Rodeo, it was time to start organizing.

Back to the Colorado Connection

CGRA had little problem getting a vote of approval from its membership to stage a rodeo so the committee went to work. To be politically correct, the rodeo needed to be two months in front of the Reno rodeo, since that one was called the "National" Reno Gay Rodeo. As sort of preliminary competition and hoping to provide ownership of an event to a much larger area, the rodeo was established as the "Rocky Mountain Regional Rodeo."

Everything was rosy, except that CGRA could not land rodeo grounds. The answer was a flat "NO" or more delicately phrased, the answer was, "and we would be delighted to book your rodeo. What date were you wanting?" or "Oh, that date isn't available!" Nor was any other date for the next ten years. Only days before the decision to postpone the rodeo, an attorney called with the cryptic message that Aurora, Colorado had a "non-discriminating" clause on the use of its parks and that an unknown and run down little arena existed on the eastern edge of that city.

History records June 3, 1983 as the date that the Denver metropolitan area became the second location in the United States to stage a gay rodeo. As promised, Texas arrived with major support and additional contestants from California trekked across the country for the first Rocky Mountain Regional Rodeo. Torrential rains hit the rodeo, but too much effort had been spent to let a little water stop the festivities. Colorado's membership topped 390 by rodeo time.

The Texas Gay Rodeo Association

Terry Clark and Walter Strickler asked the original Colorado delegates to return to Houston for the Gay Pride Celebration in late June 1983. If Colorado could provide the books from their rodeo validating that the rodeo had not lost money, they would invite all interested individuals in Texas to attend a meeting to form the Texas Gay Rodeo Association (TGRA). The Gay Pride Celebration was a success with a reported crowd of 54,000 lining the streets. The vote to proceed to form TGRA was also a success.

Within a few short months, Texas banded together a network inside their largest cities and forged the framework for a multi-city organization. A November 1984 date was targeted to stage the first TGRA rodeo and the search began for rodeo grounds, which were finally located in Simonton, 35 miles outside of Houston. Texas became the third state to stage a gay rodeo.

The California Connection

The "Urban Cowboy" phenomenon also appeared in California in the early eighties. While Fresno and the Bay Area were the most visible at the Reno rodeos, a loosely organized group called the "Pacific Coast Gay Rodeo Association" provided contestants for both the Reno and Colorado rodeos. Hundreds of men and women attended the Reno rodeos, but the man with the burning desire to organize California was in Long Beach.

Al Bell opened "Floyd's" in Long Beach, which became one of the best Country/Western bars in the Greater Los Angeles area. Bell and Pat McGrath traveled to Reno and Denver and became hooked. As we saw in Colorado and Texas, a mere handful of enthused people is all that is needed to put life into a new association. Bell invited folks from CGRA and TGRA to visit and McGrath leaped into organizing "Floyd's Cloggers," later to become one of the best-known dance troupes in the nation. The Golden State Gay Rodeo Association (GSGRA) officially organized in 1984 and set a rodeo date for the following March. The Los Angeles Equestrian Center, located in Burbank, became the site for the fourth state to host a gay rodeo. Dozens of dance teams from around the nation performed to huge crowds.

The Arizona Connection

Things were also shaking in Phoenix as early as 1982, when a small group traveled to the Reno rodeo and Tish Tanner won the title of Miss Reno National Gay Rodeo. Arizona would come to life in the fall of 1984 when King decided to open a second "Charlie's" in Phoenix. The bar opened in early November and since King and Kenny Cunitz lived and breathed rodeo, it was only a matter of weeks before the Arizona Gay Rodeo Association (AGRA) formed. In December 1984 the new group targeted January of 1986 for their first rodeo.

Arizona became the fifth state to host a gay rodeo and the event took place in the most unique arena facility on the south side of Phoenix: a Mexican Charro rodeo arena with an attached dance hall known as the Corona Ranch.

Would Gay Rodeo Have a Future?

With four rodeos now scheduled and more contestants joining each day, Jakino felt that an umbrella organization was needed to provide unity between the rodeos and fully standardized rules for the contestants, as well as guiding the growth of gay rodeo's future. Leaders from Colorado, Texas, California, and Arizona were invited to Phoenix for a preliminary discussion. Jakino and Jesser from Colorado, Clark and Strickler from Texas, Bell and McGrath from California, and King and Cunitz from Arizona all agreed to proceed to organize the umbrella organization.

The Articles of Incorporation of the "International Gay Rodeo Association" were filed in Colorado and the four associations met again in March of 1985, in Denver, and elected a temporary board with Jakino presiding. A formal convention date was scheduled for September of 1985, again in Denver, to standardized rodeo rules and plan objectives for growth.

The Oklahoma Connection

The "Urban Cowboy" syndrome was alive in Oklahoma, too. Les Krambeal and Walt Rupperecht had been to Reno and owned a great bar in Oklahoma City called "The Bunkhouse." Krambeal made contact with CGRA members and asked for guidelines to help organize the Oklahoma Gay Rodeo Association (OGRA) in the summer of 1985. When Krambeal learned that there was a scheduled convention to finalize a new organization in Denver that September, both Krambeal and Rupperecht lit every fire necessary to prepare the framework for OGRA and made plans to appear at this convention and ask for recognition of their state association.

OGRA was accepted at the IGRA convention in Denver and truly became the unabashed joyful child of the rodeo world. Friends from Colorado went to Oklahoma City often and OGRA's enthusiasm was contagious. By the fall of 1985, Oklahoma announced they had scheduled a rodeo for July 1986.

The International Gay Rodeo Association

With ten years of gay rodeo history already in the record books, a gathering of rodeo junkies gathered to formalize the future of gay rodeo in Denver in September of 1985. Nine months of preparation already had been invested in efforts to assure the continuity, growth, and heritage of the Country/Western lifestyle in the gay community. Colorado, Texas, California,

and Arizona were each represented by five delegates. The convention opened by recognizing the newly formed Oklahoma Gay Rodeo Association and their four delegates.

The five founding states of the International Gay Rodeo Association (IGRA) elected Jakino as their Founding President and formally adopted the Articles of Incorporation in the state of Colorado. They ratified the bylaws, approved events, standardized rodeo rules, and committed the organization to the fostering of national and international amateur rodeo and other equestrian competition and related arts, crafts and activities which encourage the education on or preservation of "Country/Western" lifestyle heritage.

History has recorded 14 gay rodeos (nine Reno rodeos, three Colorado rodeos, one Texas rodeo and one California rodeo) prior to the formation of IGRA. The convention also scheduled the sanctioned rodeo season for 1986, running from November 1, 1985 to October 31, 1986:

- Texas - November, 1985
- Arizona - January, 1986
- California - March, 1986
- Colorado - June, 1986
- Oklahoma - July, 1986
- Convention - September, 1986 (in Denver)

During 1986, interest in gay rodeo continued to grow and Oklahoma passed their enthusiasm into surrounding states. The second IGRA Annual Convention in Denver welcomed and seated the Kansas Gay Rodeo Association (KGRA), the Missouri Gay Rodeo Association (MGRA), and the New Mexico Gay Rodeo Association (NMGRA). This convention also approved a new framework for the IGRA bylaws to allow future growth. They also accepted a bid from California to host the first IGRA Finals Rodeo in Hayward, California at the end of the 1986 rodeo year.

Many of us in the gay community are familiar with the "Imperial Court" system that exists in many larger cities around the country. The idea for a "gay rodeo" originated with Phil Ragsdale in 1975. As the "Court Emperor" of Reno, Nevada, Ragsdale decided to raise money for the Muscular Dystrophy Association by means of a gay rodeo. The first available date at the Washoe County Fairgrounds was October 2nd, 1976, and Ragsdale began planning at once. At first, he was not able to find any farmers or ranchers willing to lease livestock for a gay rodeo, but eventually the animals were secured and the rodeo went on as scheduled. There were not very many contestants or spectators that first year, but Ragsdale decided to keep it as an annual event. The event became known as the National Reno Gay Rodeo and every year thousands of dollars were raised for Muscular Dystrophy through competition of the titles of Mr., Ms., and Miss National Reno Gay Rodeo.

In 1981, an energetic group of Texas contestants attended the Reno rodeo. During the weekend, Miss Texas bumped into Wayne Jakino of Denver, Colorado. "She" ridiculed Wayne because of the small representation from Colorado, and Wayne vowed that the next year his state would show up in force. One-month later Wayne, Ron Jesser, and seven other men formed the Colorado Gay Rodeo Association (CGRA).

When Colorado returned to the 1982 National Reno Gay Rodeo they were 400 strong, including a mounted drill team and some 43 contestants. Comedienne Joan Rivers was the Grand Marshall that year, and there were over 10,000 spectators in the grandstands. The contestants from Colorado gained support from other contestants to push for uniform rules in order to improve the quality of the rodeo.

That following winter, a group from Colorado traveled to Houston to encourage the formation of the Texas Gay Rodeo Association (TGRA) and a rodeo in that part of the country. Texas promised to support Colorado if they would lead the way with their own rodeo. On June 3rd, 1983, Denver became the second city in the U.S. to host a gay rodeo. Many contestants came from Texas and California to the first Rocky Mountain Regional Rodeo, only to experience torrential rain throughout the weekend. But the rodeo went on anyway! They had all been through too much to let a little water stop the festivities. In late June, the TGRA was formed and scheduled their first rodeo for the following year. The Eighth National Reno Gay Rodeo was held in August with the largest number of gay dance groups ever assembled at a rodeo and the grandstands filled with over 12,000 people.

In 1984 the Golden State Gay Rodeo Association (GSGRA) was formed in California. That was also the year of the Ninth Annual National Reno Gay Rodeo, which was the last rodeo held in that city due to financial difficulties. In November of that year, Texas held their first rodeo a few miles outside of Houston and in December, the Arizona Gay Rodeo Association (AGRA) was organized in Phoenix.

In March of 1985, gay rodeo moved to the West Coast as GSGRA hosted their first rodeo at the Los Angeles Equestrian Center in Burbank. The rodeo organizations from Colorado, Texas, California, and Arizona decided that it was time to have more uniformity in their rodeos and scheduled a convention in order to standardize rules and objectives of their associations. In September, the convention was held in Denver, where the Oklahoma Gay Rodeo Association (OGRA) was seated as the fifth Member Association, the International Gay Rodeo Association (IGRA) was formed, and Jakino was elected as the Founding President.

IGRA continued to expand in 1986 with repeat rodeos in Colorado, Texas, and California as well as two new rodeo locations in Phoenix and Oklahoma City. Jakino served his second term as IGRA President and Denver was again the location for IGRA's second convention where three new Member Associations were seated: Kansas (KGRA), Missouri (MGRA), and New Mexico (NMGRA).

In 1987 Les Krambeal (OGRA) began serving as IGRA's second President. At the IGRA Annual Convention in Albuquerque, the Silver State Gay Rodeo Association (SSGRA) from Nevada was seated as the newest Member Association. Many new contestants decided to compete that year and several of the rodeos lasted up to twelve hours each day. As a result of these lengthy rodeos, it was decided to split the Member Associations into two geographical areas. Division I consisted of California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Nevada while Division II consisted of Colorado, Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Missouri. This split would place three rodeos in each region with approximately half the number of contestants competing in each.

This was also the first year that a Country/Western dance competition was held during the IGRA Annual Convention. Several gay country bars around the country organized it and it proved to be popular evening entertainment. The convention delegates voted to add the dance competition as an annual convention event. This was also the year for IGRA's first International Finals Rodeo which was held in Hayward, California, near San Francisco. The IGRA Finals Rodeo brought the top contestants from throughout the year to compete for each Event Championship buckle as well as the titles of All-Around Cowboy and All-Around Cowgirl.

Krambeal began his second term as IGRA President in 1988 and the six divisional rodeos were all very successful that year. At the fourth IGRA Annual Convention in Fort Worth, two more Member Associations were seated. They were Oregon and Wyoming as the tenth and eleventh members of IGRA. The 2nd IGRA Finals Rodeo, which had been scheduled for Reno, did not take place. Originally scheduled for the Lawler Events Center, the contract was canceled and court action to force the center to perform was not successful.

A contract with a private ranch sixty miles east of Reno was made void when the local homophobic District Attorney filed an injunction two days before the rodeo in order to stop the event. Two days in court as well as a trip to the Nevada Supreme Court failed to overturn the injunction. Many people canceled their trips when word got out about the possibility that the rodeo would not happen. More than 100 contestants and 600 spectators who did arrive found themselves only to attend the evening parties. IGRA officers referred to the bylaws and awarded two sets of Event Championship buckles and All-Around Champion buckles to the top point contestants throughout the year from each of the two rodeo divisions.

In 1989, Division I added one more rodeo to the circuit. The Greater San Diego Rodeo brought the total number of divisional rodeos to seven. Gerald Ford began serving as the third President of IGRA. The 5th IGRA Annual Convention returned to Albuquerque that year where two more associations joined IGRA. They were Montana's Big Sky (BSGRA) and Utah (UGRA). Early in the rodeo year, Ford found it necessary to resign from the presidency because of increased personal business obligations. The IGRA Board of Directors appointed Linn Copeland (KGRA) for the remainder of the year. The 3rd IGRA Finals Rodeo was held in Phoenix as scheduled and was very successful.

The year of 1990 was one of tremendous growth for IGRA. Copeland began her second term as IGRA President and the IGRA Annual Convention was held in Wichita where four new Member Associations were seated. Northwest (NWGRA) representing Washington, Oregon, and Idaho; North Star (NSGRA) representing Minnesota and Wisconsin; Tri-State (TSGRA) representing Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky; and Diamond State (DSRA) representing Arkansas were added to the IGRA family. This was also the second year in a row that the IGRA Finals Rodeo was held in Phoenix and it turned out to be another very crowded event.

In 1991 Bob Pimentel (NMGRA) began his first term as the fifth President of IGRA. The 7th IGRA Annual Convention was again held in Albuquerque where two more associations joined IGRA. They were the Atlantic States (ASGRA) representing Maryland, Virginia, and Washington, D.C. and the Southeast (SEGRA) representing the state of Georgia. New rodeo locations were approved for Colorado Springs, San Francisco, Tucson, and Washington, D.C. IGRA then split the rodeo circuit into three divisions with plans for a fourth division when at least one more rodeo was scheduled in the eastern part of the country. IGRA's first

International Sponsor came on board when the Miller Brewing Company agreed to have the Miller Lite brand provide support for all rodeos around the country. The 5th IGRA Finals Rodeo was held in Wichita.

The 1992 rodeo year was Pimentel's second term as IGRA President. The 8th IGRA Annual Convention was held in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul. The Nevada Gay Rodeo Association (NGRA) became a Member Association and the Northwest Gay Rodeo Association (NWGRA) added the Canadian Province of British Columbia to their group of three states, making IGRA a truly international organization. In October, IGRA finalized the negotiations and entered into a three-year agreement with Miller Lite to become an International Sponsor of gay rodeo. Phoenix was once again the location for the 6th IGRA Finals Rodeo.

In 1993 Roger Bergmann (GSGRA) began serving his first of three terms as IGRA's sixth President. Billings was the site of the 9th IGRA Annual Convention where three new Member Associations were seated: Illinois (ILGRA), Heartland (HGRA) representing Nebraska, and the Alberta Gay Rodeo Association (AGRA) as the second Canadian Province to join IGRA. Three new rodeos, located in Minneapolis/St. Paul; Kansas City, and Seattle were part of the total of 15 rodeos leading up to the 7th IGRA Finals Rodeo held in Fort Worth.

The 10th IGRA Annual Convention was held in Little Rock where the Michigan International Gay Rodeo Association (MIGRA) was seated and the state of Iowa was included as a part of HGRA. Since the Alberta association's acronym of AGRA was the same as Arizona's, there had been considerable confusion during the past year. Alberta agreed to have their membership establish a new name for their association. Within a few months Alberta had changed their name to the Alberta Rockies Gay Rodeo Association (ARGRA). The 1994 rodeo year had four new rodeos in the United States (Palm Springs, Chicago, Little Rock, and Atlanta) and the first IGRA-sanctioned rodeo held outside of the United States (in Calgary, Alberta, Canada). Because of the additional rodeos in the eastern part of the United States, IGRA implemented the change to four rodeo divisions. For the 1994 rodeo year, there were a total of twenty rodeos leading up to the 8th IGRA Finals Rodeo in Denver.

In 1995 Bergmann began his final term as IGRA President. The Pennsylvania Gay Rodeo Association (PGRA) was seated at the 11th IGRA Annual Convention in Chicago. In this year there were 21 divisional rodeos scheduled which included one new rodeo, the Greater Motown International Rodeo in Detroit. The 9th IGRA Finals Rodeo was again held in Denver.

Minnesota's own Tom Vance began his first term as the seventh President of IGRA at the start of the 1996 rodeo year. During that year, IGRA entered cyberspace by establishing a Web site at <http://www.igra.com> where you could find current information about the IGRA and all of the rodeos around the country. You could also link to Web sites for many of the IGRA Member Associations. The 12th IGRA Annual Convention was held in Omaha and the 10th IGRA Finals Rodeo was held in Albuquerque.

The 1997 rodeo year was the second term for Vance as IGRA President. The 13th IGRA Annual Convention was held in Salt Lake City during the last weekend of July. At this convention, only the second woman ever to be elected President hailed from Kansas, the

same state where the first woman elected as President of IGRA. The 11th IGRA Finals Rodeo moved back to Phoenix during the weekend of October 23rd-26th, 1997.

The 1998 rodeo year represented Linda Frazier's (KGRA) first term as President of IGRA. The 14th IGRA Annual Convention was held in Baltimore from July 29th-August 3rd. The 12th IGRA Finals Rodeo was held in Phoenix during the weekend of October 22th-25th. The year of 1998 was also the first year that IGRA eliminated using divisions for rodeo competition. All IGRA contestants competed equally for the 20 slots open in each event at the Finals Rodeo.

The 1999 rodeo year will be Frazier's second term as IGRA President. The 15th IGRA Annual Convention was held in Long Beach, California from July 28th-August 2nd. The 13th IGRA Finals Rodeo was held in Little Rock October 28th-31st. The 1999 rodeo schedule welcomed a new rodeo to the circuit, the Sierra Stampede in Sacramento, California in mid-August and welcomed back the Southern Spurs Stampede (formerly the Dixieland Rodeo) in Atlanta in mid-September.

California's own Craig Alan Rouse began his first term as the ninth President of IGRA at the start of the 2000 rodeo year. The 16th IGRA Annual Convention was held in Las Vegas from August 3rd-6th and the 14th IGRA Finals Rodeo was held in Albuquerque from October 19th-22nd. The 2000 rodeo schedule welcomed a new rodeo to the circuit, the Salt Lake City Rodeo from June 2nd-4th.

The 2001 rodeo year was Rouse's second year as IGRA President. The 17th IGRA Annual Convention was held in Long Beach from July 26th-29th and the 15th IGRA Finals Rodeo was held in Palm Springs from October 18th-21st.

The 2002 rodeo year was Rouse's third year as IGRA President. The 18th IGRA Annual Convention was held in Cleveland from July 25th-28th and the 16th IGRA Finals Rodeo was held in Wichita from October 10th-13th.

The 2003 rodeo year was Rouse's fourth year as IGRA President. The 19th IGRA Annual Convention was held in Phoenix from July 31st-August 3rd and the 17th IGRA Finals Rodeo was held in Tulsa from October 23rd-26th.

The 2004 rodeo year was Rouse's fifth year as IGRA President. The 20th IGRA Annual Convention was held in Denver from October 14th-19th and the 18th IGRA Finals Rodeo was in Omaha from October 14th-18th.

As with any large organization, there are losses as well as gains. Over the years Oregon, the Cowboy State (Wyoming), Silver State (Nevada), Tri-State (Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky), Northwest (Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and British Columbia) and Big Sky (Montana) were not able to keep their individual members active and their organizations have since dissolved. Two of those associations were able to reorganize and become involved with IGRA. That was the state of Nevada, who joined as the Nevada Gay Rodeo Association (NGRA) and the Pacific Northwest Gay Rodeo Association (PNWGRA).

The International Gay Rodeo Association (IGRA) currently has many Member Associations representing states and the District of Columbia. IGRA is going strong and hopes that you will

get involved with one of our Member Associations or perhaps promote the formation of a new association where IGRA is not active.