

## **County Commission Update: 1<sup>st</sup> Annual Wild Horse & Heritage Days**

By Wade Mathews, Public Information Officer

The wild horse has long been recognized as an icon of Tooele County. And rightly so, since the west desert in Tooele County is home to the largest wild horse herd in Utah. Many people make the drive out west to view the majestic animals in their natural habitat. The wild horses are the subjects of hundreds of photographs, some of which have been featured in the Tooele County Emergency Preparedness Calendar over the years.

In part to recognize the long and storied history of the wild horses in Tooele County, the Commissioners joined with Tooele County Parks and Recreation to create, organize, and promote the upcoming First Annual Wild Horse and Heritage Days. The three day festival is meant to highlight and focus on the legendary wild animals that have a connection to the history of the old west.

County Commissioner Jerry Hurst said for some time the commissioners have wanted to create a new marquee event that Tooele County could be known for. “We discussed several things and then thought of our heritage here. We have more wild horses here than anywhere else. We used to call them mustangs but there’s been so much inter-breeding that we don’t call them mustangs any more. Plus the pony express, we have more miles of untouched pony express trail than any other place. What we want to do is step back in time and celebrate our heritage: the pioneer spirit and the cowboy spirit,” he said.

Many of the activities and events will make you feel like you are stepping back in time. And they will provide fun and entertainment for people of all ages. There will be pioneer games and activities originating in the 1800’s for the kids, booths and demonstrations, a cowboy poetry contest, Yippie-Tie-I-Idol (a yodeling contest fashioned after American Idol), a BBQ competition, a pony express relay race, an antique tractor pull, and a horse pull.

Commissioner Bruce Clegg said, “Last year we had the horse pulls and got a lot of comments on how much people enjoyed it. Our area has one of the greatest horse pull organizations and some of our local citizens have won the national horse pull contest many times. It is an event that is very fun and exciting to watch.”

That’s not all the First Annual Wild Horse and Heritage Days has to offer. It is being held in conjunction with the 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Wild Horse and Burrow Festival and Auction. There will also be a Festival of Learning during which four top clinicians will teach people how to train horses using 45 head of horses captured in our county and available for adoption. Cost for participation in the Festival of Learning is \$100 per person for three days. There will also be a Lil’ Cowhand Rodeo, and a Ranch Rodeo, featuring a lot of our local cowboys, followed by

fireworks. And headlining the Wild Horse and Heritage Days is world renowned, cowboy poet, Baxter Black. The veterinarian turned cowboy poet is putting on a great show you won't want to miss.

Each year Wild Horse and Heritage Days will honor a community member who has contributed greatly to the success of this great county. This year's honoree is former school teacher, mayor, and county commissioner, Teryl Hunsaker. Commissioner Clegg said, "The event committee selected Mr. Hunsaker out of seven nominees, based on his efforts to promote Tooele County, including helping to establish the Deseret Peak Complex."

Commissioner Hurst said, "I want to thank the great committee and the sponsors. The committee has been working hard and we're excited about this great event we've put together. Already we have \$50,000 in sponsorships. We've had fantastic support." Commissioner Hurst is already looking forward to the Second Annual Wild Horse and Heritage Days. He said, "Next year we'll add a bus tour to go out and see the wild horses. We also want to coordinate a bus tour out to see the pony express re-ride in action."

"We need events that bring people together to celebrate Tooele County and our Heritage. With this economy sometimes staying at home is a good alternative. This event will be very worthwhile without costing a lot. I think it will become an event that returns and continues to grow each year," added Commissioner Clegg.

Admission to the Wild Horse and Heritage Days is free. However some events require purchasing tickets. The Ranch Rodeo is \$10 for adults and \$5 for youth, ages 4 to 12. The Horse Pull is also \$10 for adults and \$5 for youth, ages 4 to 12. A \$15 combo ticket to see both the Ranch Rodeo and the Horse Pull is available.

General admission tickets to the Baxter Black Concert are \$15. VIP seating and a chuck wagon dinner are \$30. You can also purchase a \$25 general admission ticket which includes the Baxter Black Concert, the Ranch Rodeo, and the Horse Pull.

You can purchase tickets, see the event schedule, and get more information online at [wildhorseandheritagedays.com](http://wildhorseandheritagedays.com) or by calling 843-4020.

Everyone is encouraged to celebrate Tooele County's pioneer, old west and wild horse heritage by attending the First Annual Wild Horse and Heritage Days. It will run from Thursday, June 7<sup>th</sup> through Saturday, June 9<sup>th</sup> at the Deseret Peak Complex.