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National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum Mourns the Passing of former RHS President Sharon Shoulders

OKLAHOMA CITY, OK – Sharon Shoulders, a longtime supporter of the Rodeo Historical Society (RHS) and National Cowboy Museum, and wife of 16-time Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA) World Champion Jim Shoulders, passed away from complications of COVID-19 at her home in Henryetta, Oklahoma, on Saturday, January 30, 2021, surrounded by loved ones.

“The West has lost a true ambassador with the passing of Sharon Shoulders,” said Museum President & CEO Natalie Shirley. “She was the epitome of a hard-working Western woman who cared tremendously for her family, friends, community and lifestyle. I’m sure Sharon and Jim are happy to be reunited again.”

“Whether she was running the family ranch or serving as RHS president, Sharon was always hard at work upholding the Western way of life,” said RHS President John McBeth. “Though she will be sorely missed, Sharon has left each of us a wonderful example of a life well lived.”

A former RHS president and board member and the 2005 recipient of the Tad Lucas Memorial Award, Shoulders was born in Bell, California, in 1929. In 1941 her family moved to Oklahoma; Sharon and Jim met at school in Tulsa, Oklahoma and married in 1947, the year both graduated high school. For their honeymoon, the Shoulders traveled to a rodeo at Madison Square Garden in New York City, where Sharon was asked to ride a horse in a rodeo parade, for which she had to borrow the proper rodeo clothes.

In 1951 the Shoulders bought a ranch in Henryetta, Oklahoma, where they would eventually raise four children. While the children were young, Jim spent much time on the road rodeoing, tasking Sharon with running the ranch. She learned to saddle and ride a horse to check cattle. Striving for a breed of cattle that would produce leaner beef, Sharon became one of the first Salorn cattle (French Salers and Texas Longhorn) owners in Oklahoma, later becoming president of the Salorn Cattle Association.

When Jim began producing rodeos and holding rodeo schools, Sharon learned how to time events and serve as a rodeo secretary. She was instrumental in establishing the Ladies Fashion Show

and Luncheon during the National Finals Rodeo (NFR) in Oklahoma City, with proceeds donated to the Justin Cowboy Crisis Fund. This luncheon is still being held at the NFR today. Along with her friend Donna McSpadden, Shoulders was also critical in the founding of H.A.N.D.S. (Help A Needy Diva Survive), a group that offers support and financial assistance to those in the rodeo world who lose a family member, have a serious injury or health issue or encounter other serious problems. For nearly 20 years, Shoulders was at the forefront of this important organization.

The Shoulders were committed to the development of the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City (known today as the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum), where many of Jim's trophies, saddles and other memorabilia are housed. In fact, the couple attended the ground-breaking of the Museum itself when, on a cold, blustery day in the early 1950s, Jim turned over the first shovel of dirt on Persimmon Hill.

A longtime Sunday School teacher and active member of the First United Methodist Church in Henryetta, Shoulders is survived by her brother, James Heindselman; her daughters, Jana and husband Robert Soza, and Marcie and husband Joel Roth; and son Marvin Paul and his wife Lori Shoulders; grandchildren Dana, Justin and wife Kim, James, Rob, Patty, Ellie, Buzz, Grace, Derek, Ashton, Langley and Logan. She was preceded in death by her husband, Jim, and daughter Jamie.

A celebration of life is being postponed at this time due to restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Burial was at the New Sonora Cemetery with immediate family only. When it is safe to gather, a public memorial will be held at the First United Methodist Church in Henryetta, Oklahoma. Contributions can be made in Shoulders' behalf to the First United Methodist Church, 1212 Lake Road, Henryetta, OK 74437, or the Justin Cowboy Crisis Fund, 101 ProRodeo Drive, Colorado Springs, CO 80919.

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About the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum

The National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City is America's premier institution of Western history, art and culture. Founded in 1955, the Museum collects, preserves and exhibits an internationally renowned collection of Western art and artifacts while sponsoring dynamic educational programs to stimulate interest in the enduring legacy of the American West. For more information, visit nationalcowboymuseum.org.

About the Rodeo Historical Society

The National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum's Rodeo Historical Society (RHS) helps preserve and interpret the history of rodeo in the North American West for the education and enrichment of its diverse audiences. RHS membership supports the rodeo programs of the Museum, including the prestigious Rodeo Hall of Fame, an ongoing oral history project and acquisition of collection materials for the American Rodeo Gallery. For more information, visit nationalcowboymuseum.org.