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Guymon Pioneer Days Rodeo

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World champion Etbauer family put Guymon on the map

GUYMON, Okla. – It's been two decades since Robert Etbauer won the first of back-to-back saddle bronc riding world championships.

That 1990 title was the precursor of many great things to come for the family originally from South Dakota that transplanted its roots in the Oklahoma Panhandle community of Goodwell. In the last 20 years, the Etbauer clan has earned eight world championships, numerous circuit titles, a pair of Linderman Awards and college crowns.

"I think in order to win a world title, it's something you've got to want and to work at," said Trell Etbauer, the two-time reigning Linderman winner who excels in saddle bronc riding, steer wrestling and tie-down roping. "It's something you've dang sure got to work at, because there are a lot of other guys out there that want to win it, too."

Trell is Robert's son. He grew up on the family land south of Goodwell and was a standout cowboy through his youth. He attended his father's alma mater, Oklahoma Panhandle State University, and he won the steer wrestling championship in the National Intercollegiate Rodeo Association his freshman year. Since then, he's made a name for himself as one of the best all-around cowboys in the game.

And while Robert, Dan and Billy Etbauer made their names riding ferocious saddle broncs, Trell is proof that the entire clan is pretty handy, no matter the rodeo task involved. In fact, it will be a family affair the end of April and first of May when the Guymon Pioneer Days Rodeo opens in Texas County, Okla. Performances are set for 7:30 p.m. Friday, April 30; 2 and 7:30 p.m. Saturday, May 1; and 2 p.m. Sunday, May 2.

"It's our hometown rodeo," said Kasey Etbauer, who added the family's eighth world title in 2009 when she won the heeling championship in the Women's Professional Rodeo Association. "I think the people here are just great. They're supportive of their bronc riders, because this is the Saddle Bronc Riding Capital of the World, but they're also more excited about their locals than seeing any other world champion roll in."

Kasey is married to Dan, one of the three brothers who made their way to the Sooner State in the 1980s. Robert was first, moving to Goodwell to attend Panhandle State and compete on its rodeo team. Dan followed suit, competing at the college level, then Billy basically moved into the small town to compete in ProRodeo with his brothers.

Then the brothers and their longtime traveling partner, current Panhandle State rodeo coach Craig Latham, put Goodwell on the national map. Dozens of qualifications to the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo followed. And now one of the biggest and best events in the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association happens in Guymon every year.

"For Texas County and the Guymon rodeo, the Etbauers mean everything," said Paul Peterson, a Panhandle State rodeo team alumnus who has served as the Pioneer Days Rodeo pickup man for several years. "They got people in the community to support it. They've supported it and put their time in to help that rodeo.

"They've been great for all of Texas County, for the college and for that rodeo."

After Robert won his pair of titles in 1990-91, Billy followed with five more: 1992, 1996, 1999, 2000 and 2004. Kasey added the most recent crown, but it's not all she does. In fact, there's not much she can't do. During the Pioneer Days Rodeo, she'll be part of the barrel racing competition. Billy's wife, Hollie, also races barrel horses around cloverleaf patterns and could also be part of the field.

"I think a lot of the reason we have had our opportunities is that Dad, Billy and Danny have worked real hard for it," Trell said. "It's something they've really wanted, and they helped each other out to get there. They kept pushing one another.

"There's a bunch of stuff I've learned, and probably the main thing is if you get in a bind, just keep trying. The good Lord will take care of everything else. As long as you're willing to work at it and try your tail off, things will work out."

One of the things people know about most rodeo folks is that they're not afraid of hard work. When you make a living on the rodeo trail, it's just part of the way of life. It's also part of producing an event, and the Etbauer brood has been instrumental in the growth of the Pioneer Days Rodeo. From knocking on the doors of potential sponsors to lending their work and their talents to the event, the rodeo has seen phenomenal growth over the past two decades.

"From a rodeo perspective, I'd say the Etbauers put Guymon on the map," said Ken Stonecipher, a longtime member of the committee that produces the annual rodeo. "Because of their involvement, along with a bunch of great volunteers, they really made the Guymon rodeo improve in leaps in bounds. They did the same thing for the Panhandle State rodeo team ... taking what was a pretty good rodeo team and making it world class."

That, in a nutshell, says a lot about what the family has meant to the Texas County community. But it's also the drawing card for nearly 1,000 contestants who will make their way to the Panhandle for the Richest Rodeo in Oklahoma.

"What makes this rodeo special to me is that it's my hometown rodeo, right in the back door," Trell Etbauer said. "It's the one I went to and watched ever since I was a little kid, back before it was a big rodeo. I remember wishing I could compete in it, and now I get that chance.

"It makes it even better now that it's one of the bigger rodeos. The committee's done a lot of work to make it that way. I love to go out and compete in front of my hometown crowd."