

✦ PARKER COUNTY ✦ TODAY

OUR COUNTY'S MAGAZINE



3 Veterans Day tales
BRAVE HEARTS

COWGIRL CHICKS
All-American Girls

KERRY KELLEY
bits & spurs



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ALL-AMERICAN
COWGIRL CHICKS



Left to right: Haddon Norris, Biven Norris, Hollie Brown, Leah Stevens, Katherine Sorensen, Kerrie Pytlik, Shannan Maxwell, Katherine Brown, Caitlin Malone, Sadie Carter
Front row: Ginger Duke, J.W. Stoker, Trish Carter, Cristan Carolan

Founded in 1999 by Trish Lynn Carter and longtime friend Katherine Brown, the team is composed of 18 talented horsewomen between 16 and 40 who perform in groups of 12 or more. Carter and Brown, the coach and assistant coach, both ride with the team and call themselves the old ladies of the group.

Also known as the All American Cowgirl Chicks for their red, white and blue spangled uniforms – lots and lots of spangle – members carry the American and Texas flags in all performances, as well as flags honoring all branches of the American military (Brown's husband is in the United States Air Force).

Not only do the Chicks ride with the colors of the flag proudly displayed, there also is a smattering of pink that adorns their saddles, blankets and

uniforms. Carter proudly says that they ride "for the red, white, blue and pink." The team rides to honor our country and our military but donates all profits earned to various charities. Those causes include Susan G. Komen for the Cure (hence, the pink ribbons), Make-a-Wish Foundation, Cook Children's Medical Center and even individuals in the towns where they perform who need medical care or medication for cancer treatment. The Chicks have even been known to fill a pantry full of food for a chemotherapy patient in need. The team members volunteer their time and talents for these worthy causes while traveling around the state with their horse – and in some cases their families – in tow, performing for adoring fans.

The Cowgirl Chicks' performance has several components. Many times, team members serve as the

"flag poles" in a rodeo grand entry, standing sentry as the performers and officials snake through them while being introduced. Often, they continue holding the flags while the crowd says the Pledge of Allegiance and sings the national anthem. The Cowgirl Chicks warm up the crowd with a concert-level performance, along with family-friendly dance choreography performed without their trusty mounts.

Then the thrills begin. The girls and their horses take turns trick riding at full speed around the arena. The last act is the part of the program the Chicks are famous for. Their equestrian drills, performed at a full gallop on horseback, are precise and show-stopping. The exact drills depend on the venue or the rodeo producer, but no matter where or what, it's an unforgettable sight.

"When you're carrying a flag, you don't have as much control over your horse. It's a lot harder. The noise and fireworks the girls use can also spook lots of horses," Stoker says.

Horses, known for their individual temperaments, are carefully selected for each Cowgirl Chick. "For trick riding, you need a horse with a good disposition, not real flighty, but not lazy," Stoker said. "What makes it (trick riding) sell is that it looks daring with the horse running fast. When you're learning a trick you start it slowly so you don't lose your

He assists the girls and the horses with their stunts, teaching how to hold on, where to place feet, how to balance and how to stand on special trick riding saddles that have extra handles and places to grip with their hands and feet.



J.W. Stoker coaches a Chick

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Under the neck performed by Holli Brown

courage. Your horse has to have a good brain and like to run. You need a smaller-sized horse so you can kick off and do the tricks."

Carter is honored to have Stoker as a coach. "We could never be where we are without his help," she says.

"Each girl does a different trick,"



Fender drag performed by Hattie Carter

Brown explains. "It depends on the rider and the horse which tricks they can perform. You have to be in sync with your horse. We put on a good show, not just repeating the same trick over and over."

Brown's daughter Holli trick rides during the show and performs a stunt that scares even her mother. "It's called the full fender, and it terrifies me – it's the one I hate the most," Brown says. "She is literally leaning out on the side of the horse close to the ground. She also passes under the horse's neck and hangs upside down."

Practice, obviously, is serious business. The Cowgirl Chicks show respect for their coaches, addressing them as ma'am and sir. Both coaches emphasize that the atmosphere is very supportive and encouraging. "These girls work very hard," Carter says. "They also have to love each other because we spend so much time together."

The main business of a recent team meeting revolved around fundraising activities to support the team's upcoming trip to California. It's no small or inexpensive feat to take a dozen or so riders, trailers, horses, uniforms, saddles, blankets, bridles, feed and other equipment on a cross-country trip. Wrapping up the meeting, the team reviewed a pink ribbon saddle pad they plan to use in the upcoming parade as a symbol of their commitment to finding a cure for cancer.

Whether it's at the birthplace of indoor rodeo in the Fort Worth Stockyards Coliseum or in Pasadena this coming New Year's Day, the All American Cowgirl Chicks deliver an unforgettable show with plenty of sparkle, smiles and determination – and an equal determination to raise money for worthy causes. Carter fondly says about her team, "These girls are very dedicated and devoted to what they do. They have lots of heart." 🍎

Katherine Brown



NOTE: For more information on the Cowgirl Chicks, visit their website at www.cowgirlchicks.com.