

2011 ROBLANS OF THE YEAR

Carol Tucker and Wade Taylor



Carol Kester Tucker was a volunteer mainstay for organizations all over the North County.

If there are gardening tools and cleaning supplies in eternity, Carol Tucker is probably busy sprucing up Paradise now.

Her life's work ended when Carol was called to her heavenly reward last September. So she wasn't at the gala dinner last month to receive the honor bestowed on her posthumously by the Paso Robles Chamber of Commerce. But she was very much there in spirit. In her 89 years, this descendant of ranching pioneers tutored a few generations of Roblans in community involvement, volunteerism, and cherishing their agricultural roots.

Take, for instance, Carol's nephew Wade Taylor, chosen by the Chamber of Commerce to be her co-Roblan of the Year. Not only did his plucky aunt give lessons in tractor driving and the care of hawks, owls, ravens, deer, rabbits, ducks, rats, and chipmunks.

She also impressed the growing boy with acts of valor, such as fighting off a pack of hogs, armed only with a broom, when they invaded the garden in the middle of the night ("You know how mean those things are?").

Most importantly, Carol modeled a powerful drive to care for things, like parks, community groups, and people. A fixture in service associations all over the North County, she'd pick up litter, clean and polish, help organize, and assist at events. Over a lifetime of pitching in, Carol imprinted many others, including Wade, who's now up to his elbows in service projects.

In naming Carol Kester Tucker and Wade Taylor the 2011 Roblans of the Year, the Chamber of Commerce salutes a family heritage of hard work and dedication to the community, especially to preserving the North County's pioneer past.

Their ancestors, the Kesters and Shaws, began converging around here in the 1870s before the city of Paso Robles existed,

settling in the countryside. The Shaws landed in the Shandon area, while the Kesters took to Parkfield, the Carrisa Plains, and ultimately to Shandon.

They were an enterprising bunch. The Shaws helped co-found the town of Shandon. The Kesters are credited with bringing the first tractors to those eastern reaches, the first registered Black Aberdeen Angus herd to Shandon,

By Chris Weygandt Alba

dren. The Depression brought its trials and misfortunes. Her father and both her brothers died in their prime. Her young marriage ended in tragedy and she remained a widow for the rest of her life.

But Carol's zest survived intact. In an interview the year she was Pioneer Day Queen, it wasn't the adversity she dwelled on; it was the many pleasures of farm and ranch life. Entertainment was



CAROL TUCKER

and French bull frogs to the Estrella River, adding an innovative delicacy to the dinner table.

Roy and Emma (Shaw) Kester baptized their four children – Carol, her two brothers, and her younger sister Marilyn (Wade's mother) – in the Estrella and raised them on the Carrisa Plains and Shandon, where they met hardship with resourcefulness and humor.

The family has celebrated that pioneering spirit ever since, making a family tradition of Pioneer Day and the Pioneer Museum. The Kesters' 1919 Holt tractor still rumbles down the street in the Pioneer Day parade and resides at the Pioneer Museum, along with other family antiques like a wagon, a buggy, a Fageol truck, and a 1914 Model T.

They're enthusiastic participants too. Carol's sister, Marilyn Kester Taylor Dauth, was a Belle Attendant in the 1940s, and Wade's paternal grandfather Clyde Taylor was Pioneer Day Marshal in 1961. Carol herself took a break from cleaning the museum in 2002 to serve as Pioneer Day Queen. And Wade? He's been in the thick of it for over 30 years.

For early dry-land farmers and ranchers, there were good years and bad, and Carol's family shouldered its share of bad. A medical crisis at age six left her unable to have chil-

part of the family constitution, and their joint efforts provided lots of amusements.

While the four Kester children had their chores to do, she said, "We kids didn't have to work hard. We played a lot. I remember how much fun it was to do the laundry, to stay up all night baling hay, the picnics we had while gathering wood."

In the early years of the Depression on the Carrisa Plains, her father worked the ranch in the daytime and nights at a soda mine. When her mother protested against the unvarying winter diet based on chickens, pigs, and cows, Roy moved the family enterprise to Shandon, Emma's hometown. He imported a herd of the renowned Black Aberdeen Angus beef cattle and introduced bull frogs from Buttonwillow to spice up their diet.

When Roy died in 1940 and his sons went off to war, Emma and her teenage daughters rolled up their sleeves and ran the ranch. Servicemen worked the fields and formed a band that entertained family, friends, and soldiers every weekend, dining on chickens personally dispatched by Marilyn and Carol.

The Kester sisters developed a lifetime principle: Do the work that needs to be done, and it's better if you do it together. That became their legacy to their family

and community. One memorable day, for example, they showed Marilyn's granddaughter Carli Bradshaw how it's done.

A teenager at the time, Carli had 50 chickens on her hands from an FFA project at the Mid-State Fair, and the poultry processor at Cal Poly was down. One morning, Marilyn pulled up in her Buick Riviera with Carol in tow. She donned a workshirt, pulled an ax from the trunk, slung it on her shoulder, and headed for the henhouse.

Carol trailed along, protesting, "We can't kill 50 chickens in an afternoon."

To which Marilyn responded, "We used to kill eight chickens every weekend on the ranch to feed the workers Sunday dinner. We can do this."

"Carol didn't want to kill anything," recalls Carli, who is now a local ag teacher. "She was a real animal lover."

Carol resigned herself and commenced a priceless lesson for her great-niece. While Marilyn wielded the ax, Carol demonstrated the vintage art of plucking, cleaning, and packaging poultry by hand. By day's end, the old-fashioned way, the ladies sent all 50 chickens to the freezer.

Irrepressible and industrious like his Aunt Carol, Wade Taylor laughs at the terror he has experienced in the company of mules.

He has photos that memorialize the moments. In one he thunders down a track astride a big, fast mule that could beat racehorses, if it chose to stay on course instead of veering out of control. In another, one of his first Pioneer Day journeys aboard the Conestoga wagon, dread is visible on his face and in his rigid body. "It's a long way down from that seat," he points out.

But more than 30 years as a volunteer on the Pioneer Day Committee have made Wade an ardent supporter both of mules and of the historic wagons they pull. Since inheriting the job of managing wagons and teams in the Pioneer Day Parade in his 20s, he's made an avocation of preserving that mode of trans-

portation. His day job is real estate, but his calling is restoring wagons at the Pioneer Museum.

"I have four wagons at home to rebuild," he says, "but I go down to the museum and work on wagons for relief, like someone else might fly a plane." For variety, he harnesses his team of Percheron draft mules and hits the trail, routinely raising eyebrows at the steep roads they can navigate.

Wade was "raised on horseback" on a Parkfield cattle ranch homesteaded by his great-grandfather; his father Dudley and his grandfather Clyde were professional rodeo competitors, and his grandmother Florence is remembered in the Cowgirl Hall of Fame in Salinas.

Trail rides and rodeo contests were an essential part of life. When Wade was six years old, he drove a single-horse buggy in the Pioneer Day Parade carrying his sister Teresa. Flossie was an old horse, but still, he says, "Imagine turning a kid loose like that."



Wade Taylor devotes countless hours to preserving Paso Robles history and quality of life.

lyn with great care, down to sandwiches individually tailored, wrapped, and labeled with family members' names.

After graduating from Cal Poly with

a degree in ag business management, Wade went into real estate appraisal and sales. He soon heard

When his parents moved Wade and his three sisters to town, the ranch in Parkfield remained a home base. Large family excursions were a fixture, organized by Aunt Carol and his mother Mari-



WADE TAYLOR

the call to get involved. One thing led to another. He has volunteered, chaired, and served on boards for a host of organizations and events.

The Pioneer Day Committee put him to work right away. They gave him the Conestoga wagon to drive after some training by former wagon master Ken Johnson. He practiced at the fairgrounds for weeks. When Ken retired, the committee made him manager of all the wagons and teams. In 2010-2011, he served as chairman of the parade. He's also on the Pioneer Museum board of directors. The Paso Robles Trail Riders, too.

Wade joined the Paso Robles Rotary Club and went to work on numerous committees, doing

everything from health fairs to fun runs. They named him Rotarian of the Year in 2009-2010. They recently told him he's their president elect for 2014.

In announcing Wade as co-Roblan of the Year, the Chamber of Commerce described him as "someone who appreciates and advocates the special nature of Paso Robles...and demonstrates the true good will and fellowship in the community."

Wade, on the other hand, heaps accolades on everyone else, the people before him and alongside him who make this "such a beautiful place to have roots and connections."

He's just doing what he was taught to do, he says, by his late aunt Carol Tucker and his mother, Marilyn Dauth, who followed Carol to heaven last November. Consummate volunteers and hard workers, they're responsible, he believes, for what he has become.

With that legacy, the Kester sisters are still at work among us.