

Mighty Bright son Mighty Tim changed the Utkes' breeding program forever, bringing with him the Bright Eyes Brother line.



Sheldak Ranch

**This North Dakota Appaloosa operation
has carved its own niche,
relying on proven bloodlines.**

Article by A.J. Mangum

SOUTHWEST of Fargo, the flat North Dakota landscape is broken by stands of cottonwood and narrow gravel roads that crisscross the fertile farm ground of the northern prairie. In the winter, temperatures dip well below zero, where they can remain for weeks at a time. During summer months, farmers tend corn and hay crops while enduring heat, humidity, and mosquitoes.

Despite the temperature extremes, one of the Appaloosa industry's most successful breeding operations thrives here, outside the hamlet of Sheldon. Since

the 1960s, Sheldak Ranch's owners, Dave and Kim Utke, have made their living raising colorful, athletic Appaloosas with halter-horse conformation. Horses from Sheldak Ranch have gone on to earn title after title at the Appaloosa national and world championship shows. That, and the satisfaction of three decades of buyers, provides plenty of evidence of the program's success.

The Utkes run 50 broodmares on 880 acres of lush pasture. Strong believers in the merits of pasture breeding, they divide the mares into separate bands and turn out their four stallions between May and July. Each spring the open pastures become the birthplaces of 40 or more foals, creating photogenic scenes of white-blanketed colts and fillies reaching adolescence beside their dams.

Buyers from across North America, and occasionally from Europe, converge on Sheldak Ranch in the summer and fall, drawn by the Utkes' proven track record of producing Appaloosa horses who excel both at halter and under saddle. The ranch's bloodlines—those of Appaloosa legends Bright Eyes Brother and Prince Plaudit—are strong selling points.

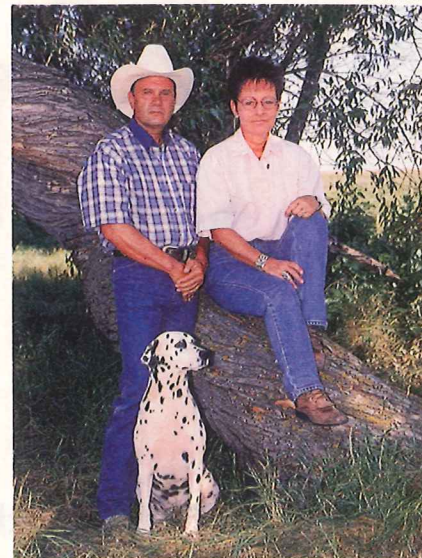
“Those bloodlines give us what we like, an athletic



Some of the most sought-after Appaloosa foals have had their start in the North Dakota pastures of Sheldak Ranch.



Prince Shannon, by Prince Plaudit son Prince's Jim, was among the most successful horses produced by Sheldak Ranch. The reserve world champion's influence on the Appaloosa breed resulted in his being inducted into the Appaloosa Hall of Fame in 1996.



Dave and Kim Utke began raising Appaloosas in the late 1960s.

halter horse," says Kim. "One who can get out and do things, but still be the epitome of a halter horse. And, no other bloodlines match Bright Eyes Brother or Prince Plaudit when it comes to disposition."

Background

Dave, raised on a farm near Fargo, and Kim, from nearby Detroit Lakes, Minn., met showing horses at the 1959 North Dakota State Fair. When the couple married in 1963, their career path was already set in stone.

"We decided right away that we'd raise horses for a living," Kim recalls. "We stuck right with it. People told us we'd never make it, but we didn't listen. There was no caution at all in those days."

The Utkes purchased a vacant ranch near Sheldon and set about pulling and replanting trees, building fences, and erecting barns.

Dabbling first in Palomino Half-Arabians, then Quarter Horses, Dave and Kim were introduced to Appaloosas in 1968, when Appaloosa breeder Laura Boggio overnighted at their ranch on her way to a horse show in Minnesota. Boggio brought with her a leopard Appaloosa stallion she was showing for Joe Stiver of Hot Springs, South Dakota. The horse caught the eye and captured the hearts of the Utkes.

"We were really impressed with his disposition and color," Dave says. "We bought him and that was our start in Appaloosas."

The foundation-bred stallion, Rebel Red Hawk, was by HW Little Hawk and out of Crimson Lace Of AA. An exceptional stock horse, the Utkes used him to

work their small group of cattle and help with neighbors' herd work. Already taken with the stallion's looks, personality, and athleticism, Dave and Kim crossed him on their Quarter Horse mares. The resulting foals hooked them on the Appaloosa breed.

"We got a subscription to the Appaloosa Journal and began reading about Coke Roberds and Casement and Peavy horses. We knew those were the kinds of horses we wanted to raise," says Kim.

The Utkes studied lists of leading Appaloosa stallions and began narrowing their choices of bloodlines for the program they wanted to develop. They called horse show judges from across the country, quizzing them on the horses they thought were the breed's best. The judges named sons and daughters of Mighty Bright (by Bright Eyes Brother) most consistently, and the Utkes began to develop a clearer vision of their future breeding program.

The Bright Eyes Brother influence

In 1973 a 6-year-old stallion named Mighty Tim, by Mighty Bright and out of Cherry Cordial, arrived at Sheldak Ranch, forever altering the Utkes' program. Influential Colorado horseman Lane Hudson bred the bay stallion. A perfect fit for Sheldak Ranch, Mighty Tim had been ranked as one of the nation's top 10 Appaloosa halter and performance horses in 1971 and '72.

Stocky, with white-blanketed hips, Mighty Tim stood 15.2 hands and weighed 1,450 pounds. Kim describes the stallion as having one of the smoothest gaits imaginable, despite his bulk. And, his disposition, she

recalls, was like that of a well-seasoned youth horse.

"I don't think there was a gelding in the world as safe for kids as he was," Kim says.

Mighty Tim sired foals who were both colorful and athletic, with the look of the Bright Eyes Brother family—blanket coat patterns, blaze faces, and stocky builds. Buyers responded, taking his foals from the Sheldak pastures to the highest levels of Appaloosa

show competition. Mighty Tim's ability to pass to his offspring both his looks and talent made him one of the leading Appaloosa performance and halter sires in the 1980s and early 1990s. His get earned championships at halter and in performance events like western riding and western pleasure.

The Sheldak program would also be influenced by Spittin Image, a 1966 son of Mighty Bright whom the

Foundations

Bright Eyes Brother, foaled on the Maddon Ranch in New Mexico in 1950, was sired by the Quarter Horse stallion Billy Maddon and out of the unregistered mare Plaudette, by King Plaudit and out of a Peter McCue daughter. Pedigree buffs will recognize Plaudette as the dam of three-time world champion running Quarter Horse mare Maddon's Bright Eyes. The controversy that surrounded the buckskin Appaloosa stallion's pedigree—in particular the idea that the dam of a leading Quarter running horse produced an Appaloosa foal when crossed to a Quarter Horse stallion—inspired his name. It was former *Western Horseman* publisher Dick Spencer who suggested the stallion's owner, Colorado's Cecil Dobbin, register the horse as Bright Eyes Brother.

Bright Eyes Brother won the grand championship at the 1958 National Western Stock Show before establishing himself as one of the Appaloosa breed's most influential stallions. Though he sired just 138 registered foals, he became the patriarch of a family that has earned countless national and world championship titles in halter and performance.

The bloodline remains one of the most successful and popular in the Appaloosa breed. Even today, the stallion's descendants often exhibit the trademark look of the bloodline—dun color, blanketed hips, blaze faces, stockings, and muscular conformation.

Bright Eyes Brother died at the age of 29 in Stockdale, California.

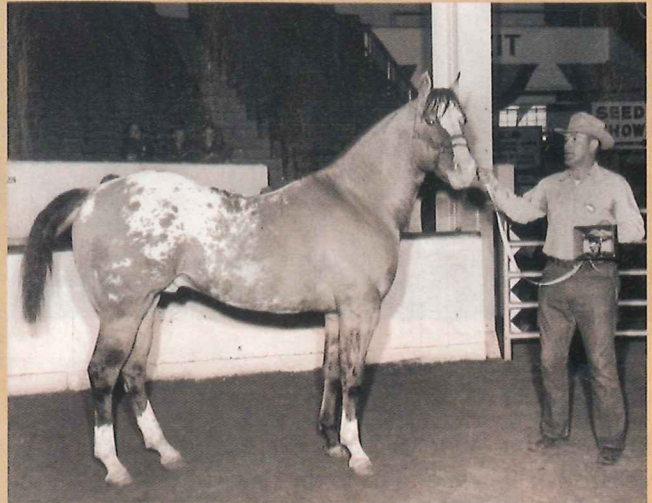
A leopard Appaloosa stallion with sorrel spots, **Prince Plaudit** was foaled in 1963 on the Alamosa, Colo., ranch of Hank Wiescamp. By Red Plaudit and out of the Quarter Horse mare Princess Rita, the colt was bought as a 2-year-old by Texas horseman Carl Miles, the owner of influential Appaloosa stallion Joker B. Prince Plaudit's conformation reminded Miles of the foundation Quarter Horse Old Fred, who appears repeatedly in Prince Plaudit's pedigree.

Miles promoted Prince Plaudit aggressively, campaigning him at halter and earning grand championships at the Fort Worth, San Antonio, Southeastern, and National Western stock shows. Prince Plaudit became a household name on the Appaloosa scene, and interest in breeding mares to him built rapidly as his progeny earned him national or world get-of-sire championships in 1969, 1975, and 1976.

In 1974 Miles sold Prince Plaudit for \$260,000—far and away a record price for an Appaloosa at the time. The buyers, Texans Doug Stone and Dickie Turner, syndicated the horse, with Pennsylvania breeder David Stahlman becoming the chief shareholder.

Prince Plaudit sired 675 foals. His progeny have earned the highest honors in Appaloosa show competition, excelling both at halter and under saddle at the national and world levels.

Prince Plaudit died in 1988 at age 25.



Bright Eyes Brother.

COURTESY APPALOOSA JOURNAL



Prince Plaudit.

COURTESY APPALOOSA JOURNAL



KIM UTKE

The Utkes currently use four stallions, including **Imagine** (left) and **Crystal Prince**. A few-spot leopard, **Crystal Prince** has a 100 percent color-producing record on Appaloosa, Quarter Horse, and Thoroughbred mares.



KIM UTKE

Utkes bought in 1981; Mr. Exclusive, a 1968 Bright Eyes Brother son who came to the ranch in 1988; and Rockin' Sidney, a 1986 son of Spittin Image. All three stallions are sires of national or world champions.

After 19 seasons at Sheldak Ranch, Mighty Tim died in 1992 at age 25. The Utkes' mare herd still includes some of his daughters. Though the better part of a decade has passed since his death, the Utkes still marvel at Mighty Tim's power as a sire.

"Mighty Tim was spectacular," Dave says. "When we got him, we weren't after a show horse. We wanted a sire. You could cross him on Appaloosas, Quarter Horses, or Thoroughbreds and get champions."

The Prince Plaudit line

In 1973 Dave and Kim traveled to the Abilene, Tex., ranch of breeder Carl Miles. They returned with Prince's Jim, a 1969 few-spot leopard by Prince Plaudit and out of a daughter of another influential Appaloosa stallion, Joker B. In all, Prince's Jim sired 201 foals, perhaps most notably 1974 stallion Prince Shannon, a leopard out of Mighty Bright daughter Barretta Bright.

Prince Shannon earned the 1975 reserve national yearling stallion championship before establishing himself as a sire of successful show horses. In the 1980s Prince Shannon's get led the nation in category after category of show competition, quickly earning him a ranking among the Appaloosa breed's leading sires of halter and performance horses. To date, his get have earned 10 bronze medallions in Appaloosa show com-

petition, as well as 10 national and world championships and numerous top-10 rankings across the board in halter and performance categories. Prince Shannon was inducted into the Appaloosa Horse Club's Hall of Fame in 1996.

The Prince Plaudit bloodline continued to play a role in the Sheldak program through stallions like the Wiescamp-bred Prince David, by Prince Plaudit, and his son, King David, as well as Prince Plaudit great-grandson and world champion halter horse Acclaim. All three stallions sired world and national champions.

Today

The Utkes' insistence on using quality stallions hasn't eased, and the bloodlines that captivated them during their first years in the Appaloosa business still define their operation. Their current lineup includes Crystal Prince, a 1992 son of Acclaim and the Mighty Tim daughter Cherry Lace; King Of Kings MI, a 1993 son of King David and the Mavis Peavy mare Pride's Ducie; Imagine, a 1990 son of Skipper W-bred Image of Stars and the Quarter Horse mare Slippertone Dixie, an Impressive granddaughter; and Skip Of Stars, a 1997 son of Imagine and Lad's

NEW

For only

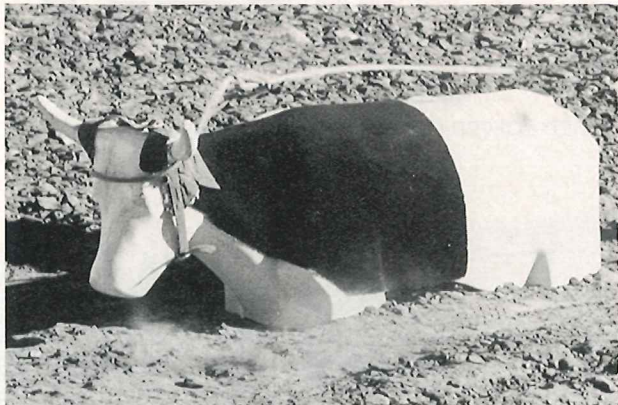
\$219⁹⁵

plus shipping and handling.
Texas residents add 6.75% sales tax.

**AVAILABLE FOR
IMMEDIATE DELIVERY**

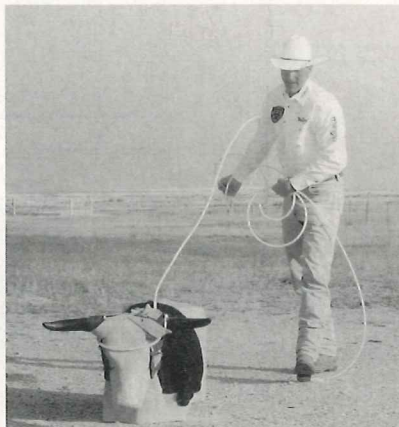
From the makers of Buford

Jakesteer



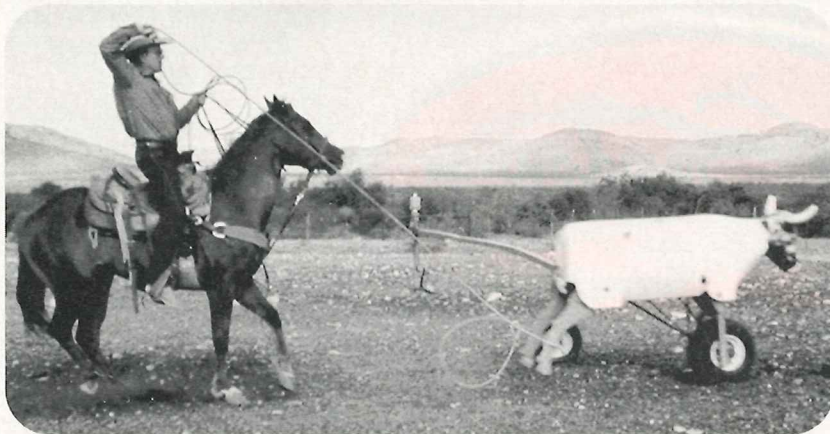
Used and endorsed by 7-time world champion header, Jake Barnes

- ✓ Jakesteer is the official roping dummy of Booger Barter events and used in all dummy ropings
- ✓ Life-size roping dummy made of durable plastic
- ✓ Horn lengths of 24 to 34 inches that adjust independently to 4 different positions
- ✓ Most life-like dummy on the market, lets rope curl without interference from bale of hay
- ✓ Come see the Jakesteer and Jake at the USTRC Finals in Oklahoma City and at the Christmas show in Las Vegas
- ✓ Check out our show specials



BUFORD

The best practice you can get.



Call for a price and free video.

800-828-3895

ROPE-O-MATIC SYSTEMS, INC.

Box 357 • Marathon, TX 79842 • Ph. 915-386-4202

Or visit us at <http://www.rope-o-matic.com>

WE ACCEPT VISA AND MASTERCARD.



KIM UTKE



Cherry Slippers, a Mighty Tim daughter, and her foal by King David make their way past a stand of cottonwoods.

KIM UTKE



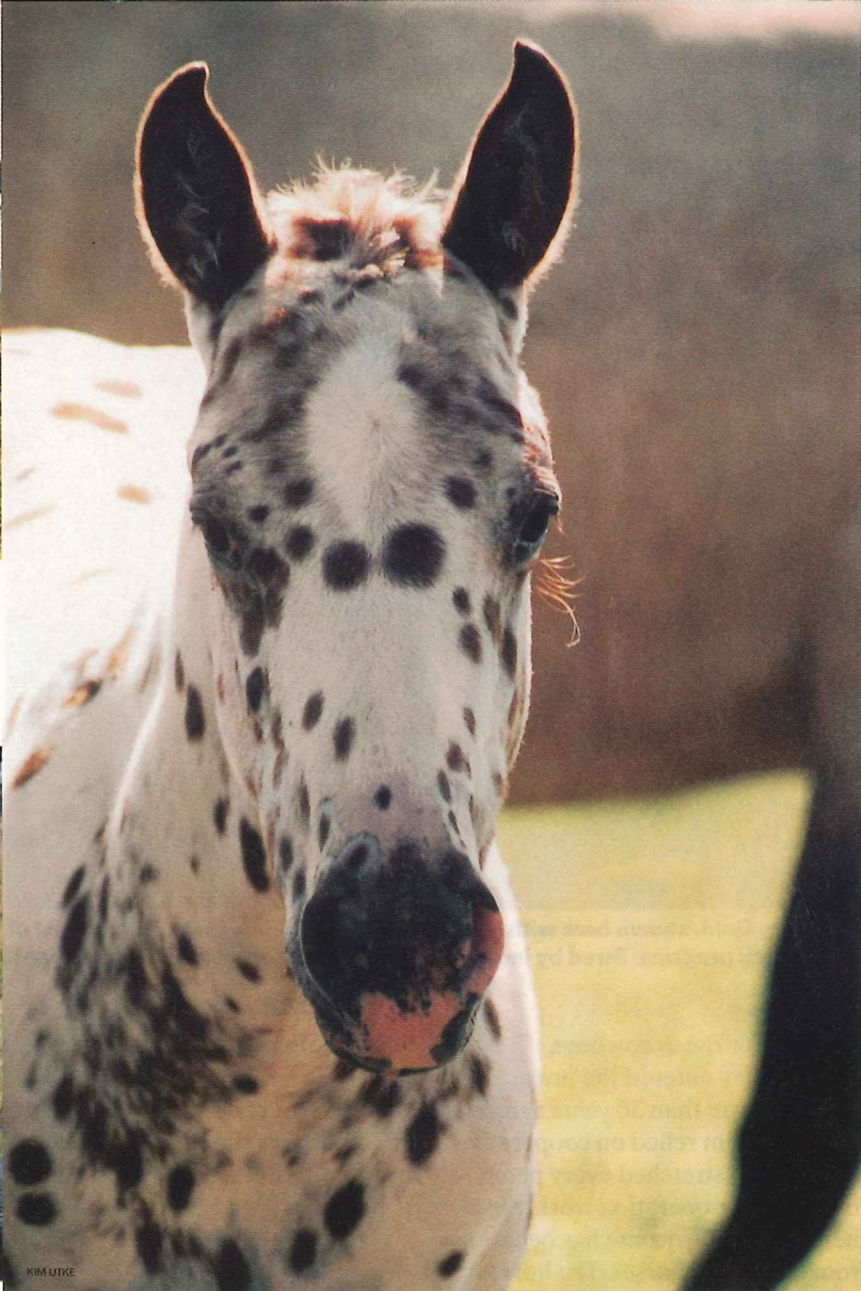
Cameo Image's leopard son by Crystal Prince has a coat pattern reminiscent of Prince Plaudit (see sidebar).

Excitement, by Bright Lad.

The signature look of the Sheldak foals becomes evident after a walk through the ranch pastures. Colorful, muscled colts and fillies, many with the blaze faces or leopard coats that define the Utkes' chosen bloodlines, converge en masse on any visitor.

"People think we imprint-train them and spend a lot of time working with them," Kim says with a smile as she wades through a group of 3-month-old foals wanting her attention. "These haven't even been haltered yet."

Once the foals are old enough to



This Crystal Prince son carries both of the Sheldak Ranch's signature bloodlines—those of Prince Plaudit and Bright Eyes Brother.

wean—usually 5 to 6 months—mares are pulled out of the pasture one by one. In the fall Dave and Kim bring the foals to the ranch headquarters, where they work with groups of four or five at a time, haltering them and breaking them to lead.

In the meantime, Dave and Kim pursue a marketing plan that's served them well for decades. A skilled photographer, Kim is rarely without a camera in the summer, shooting photos of the foals almost daily. She wades through hundreds of prints, selecting those that best represent each foal, then posts the images on the ranch Web-site. The

Utkes also produce an annual sales catalog detailing each of the year's foals. Although the catalog is sent to everyone on an extensive mailing list, Dave and Kim field daily calls from potential customers requesting copies.

In addition to Appaloosa enthusiasts seeking future breeding stock or competitive mounts, buyers include midwestern ranchers looking for stock horses. Many of the Utkes' solid-colored colts—those who lack the "chrome" that appeals to buyers looking for Appaloosa color—have found homes on cattle operations, where they've

ANTI-MICROBIAL

The Next IMPORTANT NEW WORD

In Your Equine Vocabulary!

WHY?

"I've Never used a product so Effective
and with IMMEDIATE RESULTS"
Dr. Jack McPhaul, DVM, Phoenix, AZ

NEW to the Horse & Pet Industries,
Experience IMMEDIATE RELIEF
for Itching, Thrush, Scratches,
Fungus, Infections & More!

NEW Patented Formulas
Leave skin & hair soft!
Non-drying or irritating!
GUARANTEED!



Now Available...
A Complete Line of
Antimicrobial Products
for Horses & Pets!

CALL NOW For
IMMEDIATE RELIEF!

Equine Elite Labs

The Product Name for Your Animals' Comfort
Call Toll Free (877) 738-2873
Visit our Website!
<http://www.equineelite.com>

DUAL WHEEL CONVERSION KITS FOR PICK-UPS & SUBURBANS

Arrowcraft

PRODUCTS



THE Dynamic Dual

- Eliminates sway when towing
- Increases Traction & Stability
- Increases Tire Life
- Easy Installation: Requires no axle changes
- Steel & Aluminum Rims
- Custom Styled Fenders

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Arrowcraft Products
5022 Leafdale Blvd.
Royal Oak, MI 48073
Ph. 248-280-0210

SOULMATES

THERE'S SOMETHING SPECIAL ABOUT AN ARABIAN.



ARABIAN HORSE AMERICA

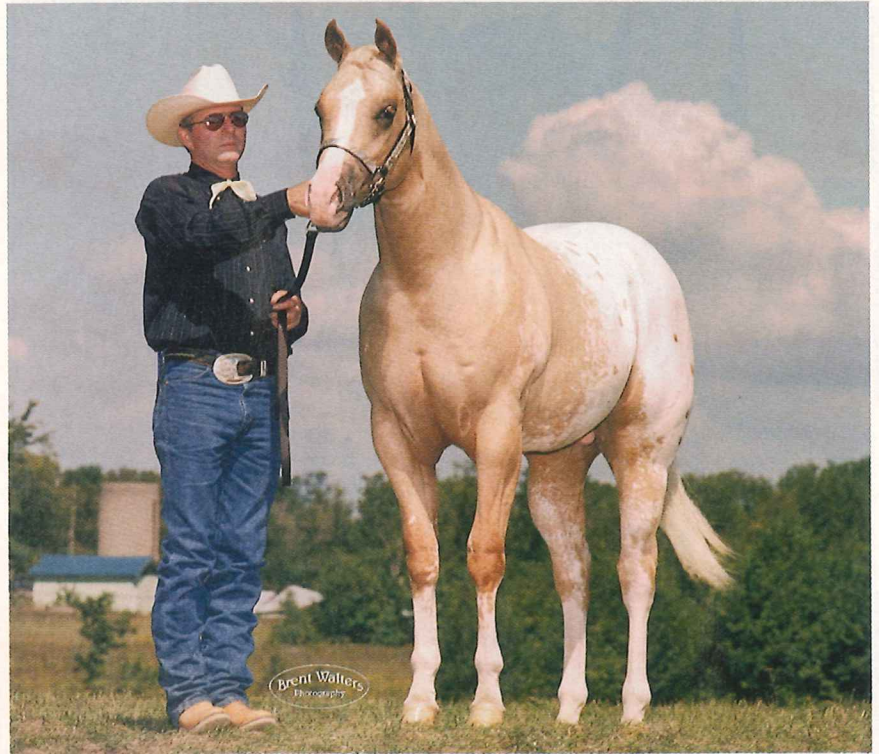
The Horse That Lives In Your Heart

Call for your
FREE Guide to Ownership.

1-877-551-2722

www.arabianhorseamerica.com

BRENT WALTERS PHOTOGRAPHY



Imaginary Gold, shown here with Ontario trainer Laurence Hiatt, is a product of the Sheldak program. Sired by Imagineate, the colt is double-bred Mighty Bright.

CONSIDER HORSESHOEING AS A CAREER WITH REGGIE KESTER AS YOUR TEACHER

Come to OKLAHOMA STATE Horseshoeing School and receive the personalized teaching of nationally known farrier, REGGIE KESTER, and his staff. Learn cold and hot/corrective shoeing with bar stock on LIVE FEET ONLY!



Enjoy living in the heart of rodeo, race & show horse country. Send for more information today!

PLEASE SEND ME YOUR FREE BROCHURE

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

**OKLAHOMA STATE
HORSESHOEING SCHOOL**

Box 28B RR1 • Ardmore, OK 73401
or call 800-634-2811 • Okla., call collect: 580-223-0064
www.horseshoeschool.com
osh@brightok.net • www.horseshoes.com/okstate

excelled for ranch cowboys.

When they entered the horse business more than 30 years ago, Dave and Kim relied on cooperative bankers and stretched every penny to make their operation work. Since then, their only income has been from the sale of horses. The horse business has more than paid for their ranch and its expansion, an accomplishment in itself given the nature of raising horses for a living.

Robert Lapp, a member of the Appaloosa Horse Club's board of directors and an expert on Appaloosa history, puts the Utkes in a category of breeders that has influenced the breed as a whole.

"I've spent an enormous amount of time over the past few years researching the Appaloosa breeding industry," he says. "While many of the breeding farms that helped build the Appaloosa industry are no longer in existence, (Sheldak Ranch) is one of the few programs that have thrived, producing top-of-the-line Appaloosas who help others start their own breeding programs and

add to our breed's respectability in the horse world.

"The farm represents what I call an Appaloosa pipeline, a source of top-quality horses anyone would be proud to own." 🐾

Sheldak Ranch

Dave and Kim Utke
5743 145th Ave. S.E.
Sheldon, ND 58068-9733
701-882-3344
www.sheldakranch.com



"But, Hon! He gets trailer-sick and both of you can't ride up front with me!"