

# LIVING THE DREAM: KIM AND DAVE UTKE OF SHELDAK RANCH

By Ley Bouchard, Editor

The word Sheldak is synonymous with the Appaloosa breed. Dave and Kim Utke have loved this breed and bred uniquely Sheldak Appaloosas for more than forty years from their home and ranch in the little town of Sheldon, North Dakota. All the while they have been living their dream; a dream that started in a quiet unassuming manner, much like they have lived their lives.

Kim grew to adulthood in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota, the daughter of owners of Evanston Trailer Sales. She got her first horse in grade school, at which time the "horse bug" bit hard. Kim's first horse was a small gray, grade, mare considered to be a Hamiltonian-Welsh cross. "She was part human and a lot of fun; a good first horse to have," said Kim. "We took many rides to the top of what is now called Detroit Mountain."

Utke's were very active in 4-H as children, owning the Champion horse every year. Kim was never able to go to the Minnesota State Fair 4-H show with her Champion horse since the Horse Project was not statewide. She worked hard and eventually succeeded in getting the Horse Project statewide, the year she graduated from 4-H, showing the tenacity as a teenager she would need as an adult making a living in the horse industry.

Dave grew up on a cattle farm on North Broadway in Fargo, North Dakota; as a boy, he worked with horses to perform harvests in fields dotted with shocks to be threshed. His first horse, Turnip, a 14-hand dark chestnut, crop-eared grade mare, named for her frozen ears, was safe and dependable. In his teens he became active in 4H shows, open shows and rodeo.

Their lives were moving in similar directions awaiting fate's intercession.

Kim and Dave met while showing horses at the North Dakota State Fair when it was held at Fargo's North Broadway location the summer of 1959. Although Kim was only horse-crazy, she consented to a double-date with friends. Carolyn (Opie) Motter introduced her to Dave Utke. A time before the electronic generation, email, iPods, and cell phones, they exchanged letters and occasional dates the four years while they went about their separate lives.

The rest is history. The Utke's have been married 46 years and have raised two wonderful and successful offspring: their son, Shannon, from Wyndmere, and Lori, from West Fargo, have blessed their parents' lives with six grandchildren: Shannon has two girls ages 9 and 13 and two boys ages 17 and 23. Lori has two boys, ages 7 and 10.

Lori owns a granddaughter of Mighty Tim at the Utke Ranch raising foals along with a coming 2-year-old great grandson she is starting on her own.

"It is amazing how many folks can tell a Sheldak Ranch horse by its photo" said Kim Utke. In picking their breeding stock, the Utke's always stayed true to the same type. In building up their broodmare band, the early Quarter Horse purchases were grand-daughters plus two Appaloosa daughters of Three Bars. It wasn't that they were seeking that

bloodline; they had a vision of a type of horse with a certain look. There was talk of closing the Appaloosa registry books at the time; Sheldak slowly converted over to Appaloosa mares. The Appaloosas replacing the Quarter Horse mares were all rich in the blood of the Peavy, Coke and Roberds horses, and were of the Appaloosa blood-



lines that were chosen to start the Quarter Horse breed. In the line of stallions this included Mighty Tim, Spittin Image, Mr. Exclusive. Whether potential breeding stock was purchased at the Blue Ribbon Sale at Des Moines, Iowa or from Carl Miles, Lane Hudson, Cecil Dobbin – those selected were always the highest selling, proof of their eye for top quality.

There were many complications along the way to making a name for themselves in the industry. The Utke's breeding program slipped into gear when they found that one person who believed in their vision, had faith in their knowledge of horses, and trusted their integrity. "We met Charles Feeney, explained

our dreams, and with complete confidence, he gave us a loan. Over the years, Charles never turned us down. We had to learn some control on our own," advised Kim. "When considering new purchases, Dave wouldn't say no, I wouldn't say no, and Charles had a smile on his face every time we walked into his office. So when the bank remodeled, we knew we had contributed!"

Mighty Tim was purchased in 1973 and pasture bred every year from 1973 to his passing in 1992. He settled every mare his last year breeding. Kim said, "He was definitely the founding rock of our breeding program, ending up All Time Leading Sire of National & World Halter & Performance Champions from our very own mares."

Sheldak breeding is done several miles from the Utke home in three directions from ranch headquarters. Mares foal with respective stallions in two pastures; a stallion runs with mares that have no foals in the third pasture.

Artificial insemination is seldom used. Some years they hand breed a young stallion first time around, and then turn him out with his mares for the summer. Years ago artificial insemination (AI) was used on a great old stallion that was foundered when purchased. For his last breeding season AI was used as he was down most of the time.

Dave and Kim employ no staff or hired help, even seasonally during foaling. In an average year, they sell 25 foals. Their daughters Shannon and Lori help with the major task of cutting wood in the fall - the ranch house is heated with wood - and help on an occasional weekend if they come home. Lori helps with halter breaking of the foals in the fall. Dave and Kim share crop the grain and hay acreage as there is too much for two to do. If square bales are wanted, they put them up themselves. If Lori happens to be out the day the bales are ready to pick up, she will help; otherwise, Dave loads the bales by hand as Kim drives the trailer along the rows. The bales are then hauled home where Dave unloads them into the barn, usually on the hottest summer day.

"If someone has a dream, with enough perseverance and insight coupled with folks telling them they can't do it, balanced with being told they can, they just may be able to do it," said Kim. "And with a good open-minded, understanding banker like Dave and I had."

"Some may have been right telling us we were crazy to raise horses," said Kim. It is no easy life Utke's picked for themselves, but it is the only life they would chose even if they had a chance to go back and start again.

# SHELDAK RANCH

..... Where Quality Bloodlines are Timeless...

## Sires of 2009 foals due mid-April



### Imagine

(String Of Stars) sire of:  
 2008 Nat'l Champion N-P Aged Mares  
 2008 World Champion Youth Sr Mares  
 2008 Res Nat'l Champion Aged Mares  
 2007 Res World Champ N-P 3 YO Mares  
 2007 Res World Champ Youth Sr Mares  
 2006 Res World Champ N-P 2 YO Mares  
 2008 World Champ Sr Judged Heading  
 2006 World Champ Jr Judged Heading  
 Additional Nat'l & World Champions:  
 Imaginary Gold, Kissuponastar,  
 Mr Imaginator, Star Imagination, etc.  
 Grand sire Colored By Vision:  
 15-time National & World Champion



### Awestruck

(Awe Striker) sire of:  
 Champion Halter Offspring  
 Champion Lounge Line Offspring  
 Champion Hunter In Hand Offspring  
 Champion Hi Pt Most Colorful  
 Champion Hi Pt N-P Offspring  
 By Awe Striker—Res Nat'l Champ,  
 Leading Sire Halter Horses  
 Leading Sire Halter Class Winners  
 National Champion Offspring  
 Bronze Medallion Offspring

40 years of Champions including 2008 Halter & Roping World Champions

[www.sheldakranch.com](http://www.sheldakranch.com)

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## Sheldak Ranch Reference Sires



**King David** (Prince David)  
 Bred by: Sheldak Ranch  
 Leading Sire Halter Horses  
 Leading Sire Halter Champions  
 National Champion Halter Sire  
 World Champion Halter Sire  
 National High Point Halter Sire  
 Nat'l Get Of Sire Champ-Canada  
 World Get Of Sire Champ-3rd  
 Superior & Supreme Champ Sire  
 Internat'l Grand Champion Sire



**Spittin Image** (Mighty Bright)  
 Winner/High Point in 6 Events,  
 Halter, Pleasure, Calf Roping,  
 Reining, Team Roping, Steer Daubing  
 Grand, Reserve, Hi Pt Stallion  
 High Point Performance Champion  
 Denver, Nationals, Worlds, etc.  
 National & World Champion sire  
 Hi Pt Halter & Performance Sire  
 National Champion Producers  
 World Champion Producers



**Master Star** (String Of Stars)  
 Multiple World Champion Sire  
 National Top Ten Sire  
 ROM, Futurity Champion Sire  
 Nat'l Champion Sire-Canada  
 Nat'l Grand Champion Sire-Canada  
 Sired by String Of Stars:  
 National Champion Stallion  
 Superior, ROM Halter Sire  
 National Champion Producers  
 World Champion Producers



**Mighty Tim** (Mighty Bright)  
 Nat'l Top 10 Halter/Perf Horse  
 Winning 9 different events  
 Leading Sire Halter/Perf Horses  
 Leading MGS Nat'l & World Chs  
 Nat'l & World & Hi Pt Halter Sire  
 Nat'l & World & Hi Pt Perf. Sire  
 Superior Halter & Performance Sire  
 ApHC & Supreme Champion Sire  
 World Champ High Point Sire, etc.  
 All from Sheldak Ranch mares!



**Acclaim** (Prince Chicaro)  
 Honored Appaloosa/'84 Olympics  
 World Champion Stallion (1st-1st-1st)  
 National Top Ten Yearling Stallion  
 Bronze Medallion Winner  
 California State Champion  
 Over-All Cal-Bred State Champion  
 Southern California Champion  
 Arizona & Grand Canyon Nat'l Ch  
 Spotted Valley Regional Champ, etc.  
 All-Star & World Champion Offspring