



HONORING THE LEGACY BUILDING THE FUTURE

a campaign for the National Western Center



STORIES AND IMPRESSIONS FROM LEADERS OF THE NATIONAL WESTERN CAPITAL CAMPAIGN

March 2019

Editor's Note: [The Honoring the Legacy...Building the Future](#) campaign for the new National Western Center boasts a [leadership team](#) with some of the West's most prominent business leaders and philanthropists. This occasional note shares their insights and experiences as Stock Show and National Western insiders. Featured in this installment is Ron Williams, a campaign vice chair and the former president and CEO of the Gary-Williams Energy Corporation. Ron hasn't missed a Stock Show since the 1960s. In November 2018, Ron and wife Cille announced their \$10 million donation to the campaign; the new version of the Yards – which have made the Stock Show the Stock Show for more than a century – will be named [The Cille and Ron Williams Yards](#) in their honor.

Ron Williams: *Honoring the Legacy campaign co-chair
Former President and CEO, Gary-Williams Energy*



More than a half-century later, the Yards are still 'magic'

One might wonder how this oilman fell for the National Western Stock Show. Suffice it to say that, while my principal occupation focused on oilfields and refineries, my heart was always in farming and ranching.

I grew up Farnam, Nebraska, a town of maybe 250. We didn't farm or ranch – my dad was the school janitor – but others did, and from the time I was old enough to drive a tractor, I worked in the fields and pens. In 1965, my cousins and I piled into a car and drove the 300 miles into Denver. We stayed in a cheap motel on Colfax Avenue and spent a long weekend at the Stock Show, most of it in the Yards and what we called “up the hill” back then – today, it's that space below the exhibition halls, where you'll find ranchers brushing and blow-drying their livestock.



We took it all in and learned. Coming from a small town, the magnitude of the Stock Show left a considerable impression. We came back the next year, and the next, and... well, I've not missed a Stock Show since.

I graduated with an accounting degree from what's now the University of Nebraska at Kearney and moved to Denver in 1967. One thing led to another and I became partners, with Sam Gary, in Gary-Williams Energy. I've lived in a city – this city – ever since, but ranching never left my blood. (My mom used to joke: “Ron, if he had his druthers, would be Roy Rogers.”) For a long time, the Stock Show served as my annual farming-and-ranching fix. “Magic” might not be the right word, but I did feel there was some real magic to the place.

When I climb the stairs up to that walkway over the Yards and look out across the pens, I see in each a greatly compressed, temporary proxy for a sprawling ranch somewhere out there. From the very beginning I came across familiar faces from Nebraska in and around those pens. As the years passed and new acquaintances became friends, there were more and more familiar faces. The Stock Show may be about business, but it's also a sort of reunion.

Now some of my old friends are gone. But their children and grandchildren – fourth and fifth generation cattlemen and women – are there to say hello. Maybe that's what the magic is really about.

I'm still not Roy Rogers, but I do have my own ranch now. In the early 1990s, I and my wife Cille, who hails from a ranch near Santa Barbara, California, bought a cow-calf operation in south-central Kansas. Being in the business has given me an even greater appreciation of the role the Stock Show plays in improving herds and boosting the efficiency of ranch operations.

Back when I was driving into the National Western from Nebraska, and for many years after that, expanding one's herd involved turning bulls out to the cows. Now, the Stock Show is to no small degree a cow-and-bull genetics expo, with artificial insemination and embryo transplants being industry standard. At our ranch, if we didn't artificially inseminate, we'd need about 55 bulls. We get by with just 10. It makes for better genetics, and it sure beats having a bunch of flaming bulls to grapple with.

I hope all this gives you an idea why the Yards mean a great deal to Cille and me, and we're thrilled to be able to support the new vision for them. Expanding to 20 acres, the 800 pens will enable a 30 percent increase in the Yards' business during the Stock Show. And unlike today's permanent pens, they will be removable, enabling a flexible-use space for all sorts of other events throughout the year. I look forward to standing up on a brand-new overhead walkway, looking out across the pens, and seeing a lot of familiar faces.



For news, updates and more on the Honoring the Legacy campaign for the National Western, visit

honoringthelegacycampaign.com

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