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THE NAVAJO NATION

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Rodeo great Jim Shoulders, 16-time champion, visits Navajo Nation President, First Lady in Window Rock

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Rodeo legend Jim Shoulders paid a visit to Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., and First Lady Vikki Shirley on Tuesday as he and his wife traveled to the National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas.

“You honor us with your presence,” the President told him. “If there’s anything we can do to make your visit better, please let me know.”

Mr. Shoulders, now 76, competed professionally from 1945 to 1970, winning world championships 16 times. He has made several visits to the Navajo Nation capital where his wife of 55 years, Sharon, said she likes to buy Navajo jewelry.

“The last rodeo where I entered the bull riding and bareback riding was Houston in 1970,” he said. “I placed in both events, too.”

In 1949, the 21-year-old Shoulders won his first championship when the Rodeo Cowboys Association named him World Champion All-Around Cowboy. The meant Mr. Shoulders was inducted into the newly founded Museum's Rodeo Hall of Fame in 1955.

Mr. Shoulders played a significant role in bringing rodeo into the mainstream of competitive sport. The World Champion All-Around Cowboy title was bestowed on Mr. Shoulders again in 1956, 1957, 1958 and 1959. He also was named World Champion bull rider seven times and World Champion bareback bronc rider four times for a total of 16 World Championships, a record he still holds.



Sharon and Jim Shoulders, a legend in rodeo, visit with Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., and First Lady Vikki Shirley, as they travel through the Navajo Nation on their way to Las Vegas, Nev., on Tuesday.

"It starts with M and ends in Y," he has said about what has changed the most since his competitive rodeo days.

The prize money contestants are competing for now has increased dramatically since the \$18 Shoulders made for winning the bull riding in Oilton, Oklahoma, when he was 14 years old.

"It was the 4th of July and I'd been working the wheat harvest for 25 cents an hour," he has said. "I thought \$18 dollars for one day's work was pretty good," recalls Shoulders.



A young Jim Shoulders going for 8 seconds

Fifty-seven years ago, Wrangler asked Mr. Shoulders to sign on as an endorsee and represent the company. It's believed that no other U.S. company has had a continual endorsee for as long as Mr. Shoulders has been with Wrangler.

"I've been with Justin Boots just about as long," said Shoulders, "The best thing about my job is I get to go to a lot of rodeos."

His endorsee jobs also include signing autographs at retailers and doing special promotions for the companies.

Mr. Shoulders was honored by the Rodeo Historical Society with the prestigious Ben Johnson Award during the annual awards ceremony on October 23, 2004, at the National Cowboy & Western Heritage Museum in Oklahoma City.

Despite injuries, Mr. Shoulders competed, once bending a steel pin that had been placed in his shoulder a few rodeos earlier. Mr. Shoulders is still one of the best representatives of the sport.

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