NCHA Vice President Election

Who Are Those Guys?

Vice president candidates Bruce Richerson and Mike Rutherford Jr. talk about their views and the hot issues facing the National Cutting Horse Association. Compiled by Mark Thompson

Longtime National Cutting Horse Association judge and cutting horse rider Bruce Richerson, Alexandria, La., and second-generation cutter Mike Rutherford Jr., Buda, Texas, a prolific non-pro rider, have been nominated as 2012/2013 NCHA vice-presidential candidates.

The winner will serve one year as vice president, starting at mid-June's NCHA Convention, then serve one year as president-elect and one year as NCHA president starting in June 2014.

Ballots were mailed to NCHA members in late April. They must be mailed back by late May or early June. An independent auditing firm will count the ballots June 12, and the NCHA expects to announce election results late that afternoon.

Richerson, 58, born and raised in central Louisiana, operates a commercial cattle business originated by his great-great-grandfather and continued by his father. Bruce and his wife, Becky, have three sons, Andy, Jeremy, Joshua, and a daughter, Angela, ages 24-33. Jeremy and Joshua are involved with the cow/calf operation.

An NCHA judge since 1986, Richerson has also earned $144,059 in his career as a rider, primarily as a weekend cutter, but also at occasional limited-age shows.

Rutherford, 52, son of Houston resident and former cutting horse rider Mike Rutherford, has business interests including oil and gas exploration, real estate and ranching. He has been an NCHA judge, and he competed as a non-pro cutter since 1989 and had earned $460,95 as a cutting rider heading into 2012, according to Equi-Stat records.

Rutherford's career highlights include making the 2008 NCHA Futurity Non-Pro finals with a horse, Quite The Fat Cat, who also placed third in the Open finals with trainer Ryon Emerton. Rutherford finished among the NCHA top 15 any-age Non-Pro riders in 2010. His longtime girlfriend and cutting trail traveling companion, Teri Lynne Waggoner, won the 2010 NCHA $50,000 Amateur World Championship.

Questions & Answers

Quarter Horse News sent a list of questions, including some submitted by readers, to Richerson and Rutherford. They emailed back their responses, which are listed below. (Note: It has always been the policy of Quarter Horse News to present candidates in alphabetical order of their last names. All mentions of the two candidates along with the order of their responses are in alphabetical order.)

QHN: Why are you running for vice president?

Bruce Richerson: I love cutting and am committed to the NCHA, preserving its heritage and promoting the future of our sport.

Mike Rutherford Jr.: To assist Ernie [incoming NCHA President Ernie Beutenmiller], Barbara [incoming NCHA Vice President Barbara Brooks], the Executive Committee and staff in assuring a financially sound and growing association that treats all its members equally and with dignity.

QHN: Please explain how your business and industry experience equips you for the big job of representing cutters—from the grassroots and weekend competitors to the well-financed and major limited-age players.

Bruce: I am a self-employed, successful businessman and through my experience as an NCHA director and Executive Committee member I have acquired knowledge of the processes, policies and procedures essential to the well being of the NCHA.

Mike: I am one of them. I have shown non-stop for several decades, climbing through the ranks and having gained an insight of what works, what doesn't, and most importantly why. Operating 16 offshore plat-
forms and over 100 onshore oil and gas wells, dealing with the people, companies, banks, governmental agencies, etc; in addition to, being involved in international dealings with foreign governments and industry. I believe my experience will be an asset to staff and our governmental body.

QHN: Do you believe enough has been done to educate trainers and horse owners about new drug-testing policies implemented this year at the Fort Worth limited-age shows? If not, what else could be done? How do you think the program has worked so far?

Bruce: The NCHA has adequately attempted to educate members regarding the newly implemented drug testing policy through publications such as the Chatter as well as the Internet through webinars. It is important that the membership takes advantage of educational opportunities when offered.

Mike: It's too early to tell. At the time of this writing the Super Stakes has been under way for five days. It would be premature for me to have reached an educated opinion on our policy. However, the most important element of the policy is the equal and equitable application of it.

We need to remember that this policy was designed with the horses' welfare in mind, not who owns it or who exhibited it.

QHN: What advice would you give the next NCHA executive director, and how would you work with that person to help improve the sport of cutting over the next three years?

Bruce: My advice: Roll up your sleeves and "dig in!" In addition, get to know the membership. I would be available to aid him in becoming more familiar with the processes, procedures and policies of the NCHA using the experience I have gained through serving on the Executive Committee.

Mike: Be fair, open and honest with all members and treat them like they matter, because they do. I think I have a good presence in our Capitol and would be an asset in continuing our current state program, seeing said program expanded with the NCHA as a beneficiary, assist in the rebuilding of our finances and the disclosure of same in an understandable and forthright format.

QHN: Are you satisfied with existing specifications in the NCHA Open, Non-Pro and Amateur divisions, or do you think changes should be made to improve competition?

Bruce: The "stair step system" that is currently in place seems to be working well, but in listening to the membership, there is definitely some concern as to our current class structure and leveling of the playing field within the Non-Pro — more so at aged events. Some of these issues have been addressed through the implementation of the "60-year-old rule" that allows non-pro members with a limit on earnings back into the Amateur and Limited Non-Pro classes.

Mike: I am a strong advocate for building a stronger and deeper Amateur division. In doing so, the Open and Non-Pro will rise with it. Our trainers and their families face a daily battle managing rising expenses and smaller purses. The most significant thing the NCHA can do to help build our industry is to create an environment that encourages economic activity. To accomplish this, the Amateur has to be the leader.

QHN: What is your opinion of migrating to a level system for the non-pro divisions, such as the reining industry has done for its non-pro riders? Levels would be based solely on earnings.

Bruce: There is merit to the concerns of non-pros as to the topic of a level playing field. However, this topic needs to be addressed through the NCHA Convention process by the members through their state directors or appropriate standing committees.

Mike: Absolutely not. Their [NRHA] system creates a greater disparity and we have a system that is working, yet requires some minor modernization as our sport continues to grow. The playing field will never be completely level for all and if we try to accomplish that we will be chasing our tail and creating a new set of problems.

QHN: Do you think that the weekend shows' classes are currently divided is the fairest possible manner of separating horses and riders? If not, what changes would you suggest for providing weekend cutters with the most level playing field possible?

Bruce: There is always a possibility to better any program, but I feel that the current weekend show class structure works well. If I were to look at any changes in the classes, it would be to possibly change the limits of the Novice horse classes.

Mike: Yes, I have shown extensively in weekend competitions, as well as judged, the last several years and have enjoyed the level of competition I was not only facing in the Non-Pro classes (sometimes with frustration) but witnessing in other classes. I would suggest that we look at raising the $3,000 Novice and $10,000 Novice classes to $5,000 and $15,000 Novices, respectively.

Our weekend purses have grown moderately and the horses that have placed out of the Novice classes and are not of Open caliber seem to have depreciated substantially in value, and raising the threshold would add value back for owners and trainers. However, I would be cautious as to not raise the classes too high as to interfere with Open entries.

QHN: AQHA records reflect that far fewer horses were bred in recent years. How do you see this drop impacting the cutting industry?

Bruce: With fewer mares bred, we will definitely see a decline in the number of horses in training, which will in turn have an effect on trainers. However, I think that owners will begin to focus more on quality rather than quantity and those horses that are successful will increase in value. Time will tell the exact effect this will have on entries in the LAEs.

Mike: Using the Thoroughbred industry as a barometer, I see the good ones increasing in value; statistically there are fewer of them and consequently more competition to own or ride them.

QHN: Why do you think the NCHA should/should not continue the World Series format in the race for the Open and Non-Pro World Champions?

Bruce: There are pros and cons to the format as to qualifying for our current Open and Non-Pro World Champions. However, through the venue of the Mercuria/NCHA World Series of Cutting we have achieved worldwide exposure for the sport of cutting. This format has enabled the NCHA to secure a great sponsor in Mercuria Global Energy Solutions. I'd also like to mention that beginning in 2012, a new World Finals format for the top 15 of all weekend classes will be held in Fort Worth, along with the Mercuria/NCHA World Finals.

Mike: I think they should continue the format. It has accomplished what it was intended to do, showcase the best of the best; however, to gain participation I believe we need the addition of an Amateur class, a Novice class and a Novice Non-Pro class, thus increasing the marketability to our members, show producers and sponsors. Lastly, if we are going to play music in the finals from the "hoodie" we should rescind our "hoodie rule!"
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the large investment in our horses, they receive the best of care in the equine industry. As far as the cattle are concerned, there is very little stress on those used for cutting competition.

Mike: I would ask them to come along with me or most any other cutter and see how our horses are treated before reaching such an uneducated conclusion, pretty plain and simple.

QHN: What are your ideas for how the NCHA could improve its system of governance and the representation of its diverse membership?

Bruce: I don’t think that there needs to be a change. Our members are well represented through their state directors and our regional governance system that is currently in place. All members can be heard, if they so choose, through our convention process.

Mike: Be more forthcoming with the doings of our governance and more equitable in how each member is treated. They deserve no less.

QHN: The economy has presented challenges for the NCHA and its financial bottom line. Do you see any places to trim expenses or any ways to simply make more money?

Bruce: Our current officers and Executive Committee are working very closely with our CFO and Finance Committee, closely monitoring the expenses of the NCHA. Our marketing department should continue to work to maintain our current sponsors while soliciting new sponsorships.

Mike: The economy has created challenges, but we as an association have created many of our own hardships. Again, I am a strong believer in building a house from the foundation up, not the roof down. By building a stronger Amateur class, we have a broader base in which to increase sponsorship participation.

QHN: Saying that the NCHA wants to maintain transparency with its members is one thing. What are some ways you think could ensure that happens?

Bruce: NCHA has made a great effort to correct the perception of the lack of transparency by having more involvement of state directors by keeping them better informed through email and directors newsletters. I encourage members to talk with their state directors and regional Executive Committee members when they have questions.

Mike: By offering all our members the financials and processes in a more understandable format. We as an association need to be “beyond reproach” with our members, no more “cat and mouse.”

QHN: Should the NCHA Convention continue as it is (every other year in Fort Worth, then East and West in the other years), or be held every year near Fort Worth?

Bruce: It should continue as is since we are a national organization.

Mike: It should continue its present course. We are a “National Association” and as such should make the Convention more accessible for our membership to participate.

QHN: What’s a pressing issue you’d like the NCHA to address soon as an association?

Bruce: Bringing unity to the members of the association by continually seeking ways to deal with issues within the association to avoid lawsuits involving the NCHA. This would free up time and money that should be directed toward positive developments for our association.

Mike: The lawsuits that are in front of us and the bickering amongst the governance and the membership. We are all in this together. Like a family, we can discuss our differences, but at the end of the day, it’s about riding great horses for big purses with equitable judges and having fun.