

2009 Hall of Fame

Bill Garver 2009 IQHA Hall of Fame Inductee

Illinois has been home to thousands of horse crazy kids who came on the scene, did what they could make work, and then either found their niche in the wonderful world of horses—or, finally out-grew the bug that had bit 'em and went on to other things.

Bill Garver was one of those Illinois horse crazy kids. He got hooked on horses as a kid riding gamers. But unlike many of those kids, it took him awhile, until he finally found his niche. They say money is the root of all evil, and it was

money that got Bill re-associated with the horse industry after he married Betty—whom he had courted on horseback—and had gotten a good start on his family that included nine children.

Bill was elected president of his high school alumni association—and then he learned the association was facing a \$400 debt, and none of the members had a clue about how that debt could be paid. Bill found a way. He staged a horse show at Decatur, IL. And he got most of the costs covered for free. One friend judged the show, another stewarded, and nobody charged him a cent.

But there was stumbling block. Bill couldn't find a show announcer, so he did it himself. The show went off as planned with the usual pleasure classes and games—and a crowd big enough to pay off the \$400 debt. That show made Bill Garver a horse show announcer, and he got his start in the early fifties. Just a few weeks later, a “for-pay” job made him a professional. One show led to another, and soon Bill was announcing on a regular basis: local shows, saddle club shows, county fairs, and even Quarter Horse races that were part of some county fairs back at that time. He never announced any of the society shows that were often part of county fair offerings, but he did a whale of a lot of western shows, a few Arabian shows, and he called a lot of quarter horse races. The races were his wife, Betty's favorites, but back at that time, Betty generally stayed home with the kids as his announcing career took off.

Bill remembers one of his early Quarter Horse shows as a time when he knew there was “big money” in what he was doing. The show was at Tuscola, IL, and when it was over, the person who hired him asked Bill what he owed him for announcing the show. Bill told him, “Whatever it is worth to you.” And the guy said, “Well, I paid Harold Baker \$50 to judge the show, so I'll pay you \$40.” And that was “big money” because at the time, Bill was being paid \$32 a week for working at the packing plant. Bill got to know a lot of people through those early years, and a number of them were Quarter Horse people. So he joined the Illinois Quarter Horse Association, and in 1957 attended their annual meeting in Bloomington.

A guy named Gordy Hannagan was one of the young guns at the time. Gordy told Bill he wanted to introduce him to someone, and that person was Franklin Rust—a prominent Quarter Horse breeder from Bloomington. He was also the director of the Illinois State Fair. A few weeks later, Rust called Bill and hired him to announce the Western Horse Show at the 1958 Illinois State Fair.

Bill announced the State Fair show for 45 years—his last being the 2003 Fair. And throughout that same period, Bill announced virtually every horse show and futurity the Illinois Quarter Horse Association held in Springfield, IL.

Among State Fair dignitaries and IQHA officers and show officials, Bill Garver was a trusted name and a great friend. He became a part of the fabric of the western and Quarter Horse shows in Illinois and was revered and respected by everyone who ever worked with him.

When it came to name recognition, however, those who knew him never forgot his name. But there were hundreds—and perhaps thousands of Quarter Horse people who never knew his name. And there is good reason. When Bill announced a show, there was never a crisis...his job always got done. He was the wheel that didn't squeak. He says, “I kind of tried to stay out of the way. I didn't talk about judges, and I didn't talk about exhibitors.”

Illinois Association is proud to name him the 2009 member of the Illinois Quarter Horse Association Hall of Fame.

