

## **LEGACY AWARD**

### **Recipient: Dr. Dale E. Shirley**

On September 23, 2002, Dr. Dale Shirley, former Director of Racing of Rillito Park and President of Pima County Horsemen's Association, passed away.

Before Dr. Shirley became involved in racing, he had a long career in dentistry. Dale became interested in dentistry while serving in the U.S. Navy in the 50s. Following his discharge, he went to school in Texas and received his dental degree. Dr. Shirley practiced dentistry for 31 years at the same location in Tucson. While in practice, he belonged to numerous dental organizations and later served on the State Board of Dental Examiners. He was very active in an organization know as H.E.L.P. This organization was formed to help indigent Mexican people. Dale was a pilot and routinely flew to Mexico and performed dentistry in tiny villages that were without medical or dental care. He later worked in Tucson with the Catholic Community Service making hundreds of sets of dentures for low-income individuals.

Dale always had a "need for speed" and competition. He owned and drove every type of racecar he could get his hands on. He set a world speed record in a dragster in his youth. From dragsters he moved to late-model stock cars, and then became interested in off-road racing. Dale and his son competed all over the Southwest and Mexico in races such as the Baja 500, the Baja 1000, the Rocky Point to Point Race, and the Parker 400.

Thanks to his wife, Patti, Dale's interest turned from four wheels to four legs, and in 1989 they bought their first Thoroughbred at an Arizona sale. Dale subsequently purchased 240 acres near Kitt Peak and turned the desert into a wonderful horse facility, featuring its own racetrack (the same size as Rillito's), barns, foaling facilities, round pen, pipe mare motels and numerous pastures and buildings, with room for 13 dogs—all strays. With Dale's encouragement, Patti got a trainer's license, and they began traveling the racing circuit in New Mexico, racing at Ruidoso, Farmington, Sunland, and Albuquerque.

Dr. Shirley teamed up with Steve Brody in 1996 to conduct racing at Rillito Park. He worked on a volunteer basis, donating his time, equipment and personal resources to try to make Rillito Park a success. Gale Bundrick, former Director of Pima County Parks and Recreation, said it was not uncommon for Dr. Shirley to work an 80-hour workweek from December through March. Mr. Bundrick was convinced that if not for Dr. Shirley's personal efforts, outstanding management and leadership, Rillito Park would have closed.

Dr. Shirley was a recipient of the Racing Commission Recognition Award in December 1999. Dr. Shirley was nominated on three separate occasions for the Commission's award for outstanding service to the racing industry, receiving high praise from other members of the Pima County racing community, including former Commissioner John K. Goodman, and current Chairman of Pima County Horse Racing Commission, Stephen Brody. Mr. Goodman attributes Shirley with keeping Rillito open and running as a county fair meeting after it failed as a commercial operation, and states that Dr. Shirley reorganized the Pima County Horsemen's Association and made racing viable again in Pima County. Steve Brody gives Dr. Shirley credit for the repayment of Rillito's debt, improving the racing surface at Rillito, and working continually to improve racing in Pima County.

Dr. Shirley will be missed by his many friends in the racing community. His enthusiasm and extraordinary efforts will be remembered for years.

