



PONOKA STAMPEDE GOLDEN CIRCLE OF CHAMPIONS

By Dianne Finstad

The Ponoka Stampede has joined the Golden Circle of Champions, providing a boost for some youngsters and their families who really need it.

You can see joy on the faces of youngsters experiencing a day of dreams, who are ordinarily dealing with huge life challenges.

The initiative originated in California, to raise awareness and provide funds to help local children battling pediatric cancer, through the spirit of rodeo. C5 Rodeo's Gillian Grant first heard about the program while working a rodeo in San Diego. She was so moved by their presentation, she felt it would be a great fit in Canadian rodeo as well.

So a small group of volunteers came together to debut the Golden Circle of Champions at the 2024 Canadian Finals Rodeo. The bright yellow signature wild rags brought visibility, and funds were raised to support young Sullivan and his family. Sullivan faces multiple challenges, including a rare brain cancer. But thanks to the Golden Circle of Champions, he got a chance to meet some of his rodeo heroes – the pickup men! Funds raised also helped Sullivan get to Las Vegas to take part in the big Golden Circle of Champions annual banquet at the NFR.

Since then, Sullivan, who is from Thorsby, has become an unofficial ambassador for the program in Canada, as it partnered with more than fourteen rodeos across the country to recognize children and their families in each rodeo community. Sullivan also appeared at the Ponoka Stampede, where he was treated royally as he celebrated his eleventh birthday!

The Golden Circle for Ponoka also brought in Sebastian,

a fun-loving 9-year-old who lives in Ponoka with his parents, Valerie and Peter, and his little brother Felix. Sebastian was born with a bowel atresia and has been through several surgeries since he was a baby.

A special bonus for both boys and their siblings was getting outfitted in full western gear at Jones Boys Western Wear! The Golden Circle wild rags were sold during the rodeo to raise funds for both families. Any funds raised go directly to the families to help them deal with the additional costs of supporting children through life-threatening illnesses.

Grant has been helping rodeos become familiar with the program.

“Ponoka was amazing,” she noted. “Directors spent time with the kids, they had cake for them in the Senators Box and the families got to ride in the Fan Wagon.”

“Ponoka Stampede is a big deal, and to see the Golden Circle there goes a long way in extra mileage and awareness for the program.”

“It’s all volunteer help, and we just want to give these families some normalcy outside their usual medical rigor.”

The unique experiences and heartfelt connections help create lasting memories for children facing medical challenges by uniting communities through generosity

and support of these affected families. Ponoka Stampede was proud to join the program.

To see more about Golden cowboys and cowgirls, or the program itself, head to goldencircleofchampions.ca