



Twenty-one-year-old Noah Cornish, shown here at a colt-starting clinic with Buck Brannaman in Sheridan, Wyoming, participated in his first Buck clinic at age 7. He came to A Legacy of Legends to both start a colt and participate in the afternoon horsemanship class.



NICOLE POZO PHOTOGRAPHY

**Buck Brannaman and Carolyn
Hunt help pass down traditions
and respect for the horse.**

By Mary McCashin

A Legacy OF Mentors

IT'S NOT A PAYCHECK, NOT THE LURE OF A COMPETITION win or a championship buckle that drew colt-starters to A Legacy of Legends in Fort Worth, Texas, earlier this year. Rather, it's a chance to continue learning from the horse and from peers and mentors who interpret and practice the teachings of Ray Hunt and Tom Dorrance a little differently.

At what is essentially a colt-starting demo and extravaganza, hands from the United States, Canada and Australia were hand-picked by Ray's widow, Carolyn Hunt, and one of Ray and Tom's protégés, Buck Brannaman.

Some are young, some are more seasoned – but all have benefitted from the legacy referred to in the event's title. The thing about working on your horsemanship, it's crucial to have a mentor – someone who can watch and coach, teach and demonstrate.

Here are a few of the colt starters' stories and their homage to the Brannaman family who has mentored them.



Rory Bauer says his horsemanship mentors have changed his life.

Rory Bauer

DURING HIS FIRST FOUR YEARS AT MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY, Rory Bauer of Roberts, Montana, spent his school year running track and his summers riding horses for a reined cow horse trainer.

“It was an awesome opportunity because I got to ride a wide range of horses, anything from problem horses and pasture pets, to starting colts and riding performance horses,” he says.

But during his fifth year, he participated in Montana State University’s colt-starting class taught by Reata Brannaman, Buck’s daughter. And he received A Legacy of Legends scholarship in 2016.

These scholarships allow a student to learn from horsemen and -women who emulate the philosophies of Ray and Tom. Selection is based on the student’s interest level and demonstrated commitment to learning.

Rory’s mentor was Buck Brannaman himself, a path that led to him being invited to start a colt in 2017.

“This has been such an honor to be asked to come here and participate. Everything has happened in such a short period of time, it’s almost surreal. I’m starting a colt alongside people who are not only my mentors, but I’m fortunate enough to call my friends.

“I feel I am doing exactly what the Legacy of Legends intends to do. I

have been exposed to different styles of horsemanship (in the past), but was never really sold until I started to learn what the Legacy of Legends is all about. The knowledge I have gained from my mentors through this wonderful legacy has not only changed and improved my horsemanship, but also my life. It just feels good to me, and to the horse, it makes sense.”

Rory plans to complete the 16-week farrier school at MSU while continuing to ride horses for the public and start colts.

Barb Gerbitz

BARB GERBITZ MADE THE JOURNEY TO TEXAS FROM GERBITZ Quarter Horses in Tampico, Illinois. Like Rory, this was Barb’s first time starting a colt at A Legacy of Legends.

Barb’s first exposure to colt starting came during her time at Black Hawk College in Kewanee, Illinois. She was working at the time for horsewoman Donna Irvin, who helped guide Barb in starting her first colt.

As her passion grew, Barb began seeking out great horsemen who could help her learn more about starting colts, and naturally, that search led to Tom Dorrance, Ray Hunt and Buck Brannaman.

During one of her first Buck Brannaman clinics a decade ago, Barb approached Buck.

“I asked him, ‘What do you do when you’re in the barn at 4 a.m. with a troubled colt, and you know that you have a young daughter and husband at home that are relying on you?’ He went into his RV, wrote his number on the back of one of his liability releases, handed it to me and said, ‘Call me.’ So I did call him – several times!”

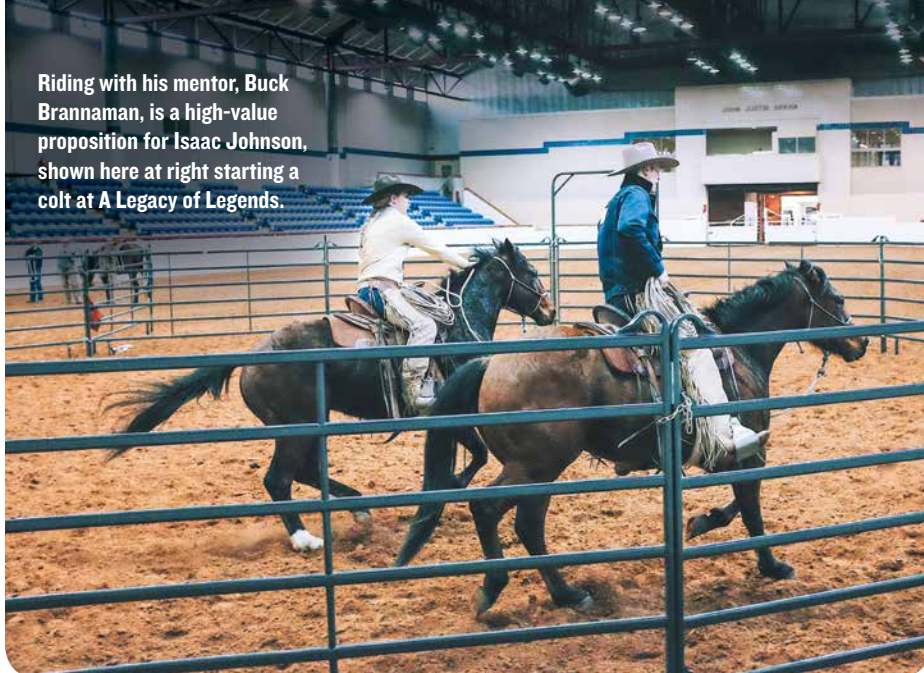
Buck recognized Barb’s quiet nature with a horse, and she was one of the participants he personally selected.

“It is such an incredible honor to me, to know he respects me and he wanted me here,” Barb says, her eyes welling with tears. “This experience and this opportunity to learn cannot be measured.”



Barb Gerbitz, starting her inaugural colt at A Legacy of Legends

Riding with his mentor, Buck Brannaman, is a high-value proposition for Isaac Johnson, shown here at right starting a colt at A Legacy of Legends.



MANDY HOWE

Isaac Johnson

ISAAC JOHNSON, 28, HAS WORKED FOR THE BRANNAMAN FAMILY since 2011, helping Reata teach the MSU colt-starting class, supporting Buck while he is on the road traveling, and helping Buck's wife, Mary, with things around the ranch. In 2016, Isaac was awarded the Top Hand award at the 10th Annual Top of the West Horse Sale.

"The most important part to me is being there for Buck. He has been there for me and helped me out so much, my loyalty to him is pretty dang strong. Coming down here and riding (at A Legacy of Legends) is pretty special because I get to be around him, and that's what it's about for me. The more I get from him, the more I'm able to pass on later.

"This is not about me showing off my stuff, this is about me seeing how much more I can learn from him. If I have a question, I'm going to ask him, and I don't care what anyone else is really thinking, other than what he thinks about how I'm doing things."

Isaac graduated from Montana State University in May and plans to head out on the road with Buck this summer and fall. He is also planning to build a small breeding program, as well.

"Legacy allows me to ride around Buck," Isaac says. "He's the best there is, and it allows me to continue to learn from him, and I cherish that time. Any chance I get to ride, I'm a happy man."

Michael Sparling

MICHAEL SPARLING AGREES THAT ANY TIME WITH HORSES MAKE him a happy man. His first career was that of an academic, studying ancient Hebrew and the history of the Near East at Harvard University.

Michael had been introduced to horses at a young age, but didn't begin refining things until he started working with Buck in 2010.

"I didn't like the person I was becoming. Academic life promoted a lot of stress and a drive for perfectionism. It was a high-pressure environment. I needed something that made me better as a person. My tendencies for perfectionism and

overthinking things had me miserable there. And I could have done the same thing with horses, but working with horses helps me keep those tendencies in perspective. This is the lifelong pursuit that pushes me toward a more balanced life.

"It's such an honor to be part of A Legacy of Legends, to carry on Ray Hunt's legacy. It's a powerful message and a lifelong pursuit. It is always good to connect with people who believe in that legacy."

Michael has started colts alongside several of the participants before.

"It was fun. Some of us have ridden together a fair bit over the past few years. It's nice to get together; we're just hanging out starting colts. Some people I hadn't met, so it was nice to get to know them and see

them work. There were slightly varying styles, which was nice. It created a unique dynamic. We all just enjoy getting together and starting colts together."

Michael makes his home in River Falls, Wisconsin, offering training and lesson packages to the public.



NICOLE POJO PHOTOGRAPHY

Michael Sparling is finding life balance as he continues to learn about horses.

Carolyn's Thoughts

CAROLYN HUNT WAS IMPRESSED BY THE COLT STARTERS.

Too often, she says, "young people today have an entitlement problem. They think they deserve certain things in life without putting in the work.

"That's not the case here. These young people don't shy away from dirt or work. They appreciate what is being offered to them here, and they work hard to get as much out of it as possible." 🐾

Mary McCasbin is a freelance writer from Mocksville, North Carolina. A Legacy of Legends was sponsored, in part, by AQHA. Visit www.alegacyoflegends.com to learn more about the 2018 event.