



THE RIO BLANCO COUNTY PIONEERS ASSOCIATION
proudly confers the
Spirit of the Pioneers Award
Posthumously upon
Bryce William Purkey

The Spirit of the Pioneers Award was created for the purpose of honoring those hardy and determined individuals and families who exemplify long-term servant leadership representative of the early day pioneers who travelled in challenging, trying adversity to ultimately settle in the White River Valley. Their proud legacy lives on in the pioneer descendants; some of whose families have remained continuously throughout many generations in Rio Blanco County.

Bryce was known throughout the Meeker and surrounding area for his generous nature, giving his time, money, and other resources to any and everyone, friend or stranger alike. Pop or Papa Bryce as he was lovingly known to generations of 4-H kids, who wanted him to personally auction off their steer, fat hog, chickens, or lamb, because they knew that Pop would work the crowd to get them the highest amount possible for their animal. Bryce was a self-taught auctioneer, never going to auctioneer's school, he loved sharing his talent with the community by volunteering at their auctions, including Calcuttas at the Ranch Rodeo on the Fourth of July, the Sheepdog Trials, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and various golf tournaments. He helped hundreds of clubs, organizations, and benefits by giving of his time and talent. He auctioned off everything from an apple pie to a hundred thousand dollar ranch. His voice is well known throughout the White River Valley and will be sorely missed.

Bryce had the gift of gab. If you ran into him at the Post Office, you'd better not be in a hurry, because he could keep you there for a good half hour. Anyone who ever had the opportunity to hear one of his stories was one of the lucky ones. Bryce had an amazing memory; he could remember names, dates, times, places and everything else down to the smallest detail. Bryce served in the U.S. Army from 1955-1957, where he met and married Doris Jean Griffith in Denton, Texas, on June 16, 1956. After returning to Meeker, Bryce built Purkey Packing Plant in 1963, and operating it for nearly 50 years until 2004 when his son Jay took it over. Bryce could still be found working there up until a week before his death. Bryce had many other business adventures throughout his life, including M&P Roustabouts, which he co-owned with Gerald Morris; and White River Roustabouts, which he co-owned with Leland Hoyle. He also had a hay ranch in Utah, a cattle ranch in Rifle, a water truck, and he previously owned White River Motel and Trailer Court, and Purkey Livestock. His final adventure was his small ranch in Powell Park where he always ran a few cattle. The spring was his favorite time when the cows started calving. One time it was so cold out he put a newborn calf on the floorboard of his old blue Oldsmobile to warm him up, he said the calves paid for it, they may as well enjoy it. He was very active in the community, he and his wife Doris were both charter members of the Meeker Jaycees, where for many years they provided the town with a deep pit BBQ beef lunch after the Fourth of July parade. Bryce and the other Jaycees would spend all night keeping watch on the BBQ pit, pulling out the 100 pound chunks of meat just in time to serve hundreds of hungry people.

Bryce also served on the Sanitation Board for 20 years where his answer when discussing purchasing a new computer system was "we don't need a computer, all we need is a Big Chief tablet and a pencil." He was very active with the 4-H/FFA livestock sales, volunteering his time in the arena as auctioneer or ring man, whatever was asked of him. He would also buy back many of the livestock in the sale and butcher them in his packing plant. In 1998, the Rio Blanco County Fair Book was dedicated to him. Bryce was born on Aug. 14, 1932, in Rifle, Colorado, to John Frank and Josephine Mae Hawkins Purkey, he joined big sisters Betty Kay and Helen Geraldine and big brothers James Clyde and Harry Walter at home. Later little sisters Beverly Jane, Janet Gayle, Sandra Margaret and Patricia Ann were welcomed into the family. Betty, Janet and Sandy survive.

Bryce married Doris Jean Griffith on June 16, 1956, in Denton, Texas. To this union three children were born, John Thomas, Jay Lex, and Cindy Louise. Doris, his Texas Sweetheart, preceded him in death.

The RBCPA is honored to recognize Bryce William Purkey for his distinguished service to youth as an educator, historian, and community servant leader, and for special contributions to the citizens of Rio Blanco County, State of Colorado and Nation. He is a humble, significant member of our Rio Blanco County community and will forever remain an icon and a legacy of its history.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and seal this Twentieth Day of August 2022

Sam Love
Sam Love, President, RBCPA