

Digging Out and Getting Ready at Lucky Three Ranch By Helen T. Hertz

Meredith Hodges and Lucky Three Ranch got a serious taste of winter even before the season officially began. The holiday blizzard that blanketed the Denver area and caused endless headaches for travelers left Meredith with four-foot drifts and a heck of a lot of shoveling to do. But the Lucky Three Ranch mules and donkeys fared just fine, and even an additional foot of snow that fell a few weeks later couldn't slow down the day-to-day workings at Lucky Three.

Wintry weather aside, Meredith and her team are gearing up for the coming year. A new book in the Jasper the Mule series, enhancements to the Lucky Three Ranch and Jasper the Mule web sites, and a one-of-a-kind work of art are just some of the projects in the works.

No sooner did *Jasper: A Fabulous Fourth* hit the shelves this winter, than Meredith was back at her desk working on the next book in the series. It's a surprise, but watch for details of what's sure to be another fun-filled adventure, coming this fall.

Jasper, himself, has been busy. In December he and Meredith stopped by the National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas to hang out with Tennessee Mule Artist Bonnie Shields and other members of the Cowboy Cartoonists Association. Jasper was a hit as young and old flocked to greet the fuzzy celebrity and snap a picture.

Next month, Jasper and Meredith plan to travel to Branson, Missouri, for the grand opening of RFD-TV The Theatre. Formally the Ray Stevens Theatre, this recently remodeled 2,000-seat facility will be an ideal venue for family-oriented live performance, much of which will be taped and aired on the popular television station. Details of the grand opening event and parade will be available soon. Watch RFD-TV and Meredith's own Lucky Three Ranch web site for more information.

Meredith's program *Training Mules and Donkeys*, has been an RFD-TV mainstay for more than five years now, and she continues to develop new programs of her own, all in support of longears. Right now, her production team is working on a two-part program on Bishop Mules Days, coming later this year.

Meredith is also working on new additions to her web sites, luckythreeranch.com and jasperthemule.com. This year, in addition to her popular "Ask Meredith" page, Meredith will debut an electronic newsletter packed with training tips, current events and stories and pictures from longears lovers everywhere. To get on the distribution list for monthly delivery (don't worry, we won't pepper you with e-mails every five minutes), go to luckythreeranch.com and join the Lucky Three Ranch mailing list.

About the time the newsletter debuts another hugely ambitious undertaking will near completion. Meredith has commissioned some of the finest artists in the West to sculpt a life-size bronze of her champion mule Mae Bea C.T. pulling a meadowbrook cart with Meredith aboard. Lead artist Robin Laws says nothing like it has ever been done before, and she considers the piece, done with the help of Fort Collins, Colorado artists John Taylor and Tim Joseph, her finest to date.

Robin plans to exhibit the piece at the Desert Caballeros Museum at an exhibition of works by western women artists called "Cowgirl Up! Art from the Other Half of the West." The show in Wickenburg, Arizona near Phoenix, begins March 24. Then the piece

will go to the famous Loveland Invitational Sculpture Show in August before it is permanently installed at the ranch.

Meredith's sculpture park continues to grow, and it's all to be shared. If you're planning a trip through northeastern Colorado this year be sure to schedule a tour of the Loveland-based Lucky Three. Meredith would love to show you around. In the meantime enjoy those wonderful longears!