

them to have a home cooked meal and enjoy our house.”

The homemade dinners have been a hit with the performers, Schiferl said. “The group ‘Riders In The Sky’ emailed me, asking for our recipe. The credit for that (meal) goes to our daughter, Megan,” she said.

When the visiting acts set up for their performances, they are floored by the arena’s acoustics and lighting, Schiferl said.

“My really good friend, Don Saxton, works with a Sioux Falls music and sound company. He also produces western albums,” she said. “When this (concert series) all started, we just said we needed a sound man to run our sound and lights that first time. Now, he does it for every concert. We couldn’t do it without him.”

Schiferl admitted she was nervous about the acoustics at first, but it has gone well.

“I don’t think one of the artists hasn’t commented (positively) on the sound,” she said. “They think, ‘Wow! The sound is really great!’ There’s no explanation. It just works.”

So far, the concerts have drawn audience members from as far away as Milwaukee. Concerts frequently draw fans — some by the busload — from Omaha, Lincoln, Sioux City, Sioux Falls and points to the west.

“As far as being a singer myself, I hope it helps (with booking acts),” she said. “I know maybe what the audience enjoys and maybe what they like.”

Schiferl holds a long-lasting connection with country music.

“When I was attending YC (Yankton College), I was a music major and did my thesis on bluegrass music. I went to Nashville to study blue grass music, which is my love,” she said.

“I started talking to people (in Nashville) and decided these people are like me. I just really enjoy meeting people. Everyone (performing) here has been really down to earth. I think you find that with almost anybody in this kind of music.”

While Schiferl enjoys promoting concerts, she also knows it’s a business.

“We are charging \$25 in advance or \$40 at the door (for tickets),” she said. “The first year we did this, the ticket prices were \$25 in advance and \$30 at the door. It wasn’t enough of a difference, and we didn’t have enough chairs set up. We have to rent

most of the chairs, so we need to know (the exact number) in advance so we don’t have people sitting on the floor.”

Ticket sales aren’t enough to cover all the bills, and sponsors help cover the difference, Schiferl said.

“When we really got started, Mark Hunhoff of Mark’s Machinery (in Yankton) was one of the first guys who stepped up and helped me pull off this crazy idea,” she said. “We have other sponsors, but I would consider Mark as my gold level sponsor. He has been a lot of help.”

The “silver” and “bronze” level sponsors are West-Hodson Lumber, Doyle Stevens Construction, Crofton Farm Supply, Town & Country Insurance, and Lewis & Clark Lodge, all of Crofton, Neb.; Pit Charger and Cedar Security Bank of Fordyce, Neb.; and Yankton Livestock and Clark’s Rentals, both of Yankton.

While some things have changed over the years, Schiferl has kept one thing constant.

“We want people feeling it’s wholesome, family-oriented entertainment,” she said. “The goal is, anytime people come here, they can feel comfortable and have a really good time. There hasn’t been a performance so far without a standing ovation. People are here to have fun.”

Schiferl shows, with hard work and a little luck, dreams do come true.

“People think we’re nuts for what we’re doing (with the arena), but there aren’t a lot of these opportunities,” she said. “You’ve got to have a passion in life and believe in something. It’s tough to keep going at times, but we pull it off.”

For more information about the WJ Ranch, call (402) 357-2102 or visit online at www.schiferlswjranch.com.

■ by Randy Dockendorf

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