

## STREET SMARTS

# Cervi honored with street in Marana

**DAVID LEIGHTON**

For the Arizona Daily Star

Because I write the Street Smarts column for the Star, Randy Agron, Rob Brack and Jon Fenton of the local development company A.F. Sterling Homes asked me in 2021 to help them come up with a couple of street names for a small development called Sierra Pointe being constructed near North Silverbell Road and North Coachline Road in Marana.

It was important to them that the names be connected with Marana, and after doing my research, I put forth the name of world champion barrel racer Sherry Cervi, who grew up in Marana and still calls it home.

As a result, Marana now has two streets — Barrel Racer Road and Sherry Cervi Way — named in honor of their favorite hometown cowgirl.

Sherry (Potter) Cervi was born to Mel and Wendy Potter in 1975 in Tucson.

Her parents were both mem-

bers of the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association. Her father participated as a tie-down roper in the inaugural National Finals Rodeo or NFR, the season-ending championship, in 1959. He went on to compete at a high level for around 30 years.

Sherry's mother was the barrel racing champion at the 1966 La Fiesta de los Vaqueros in Tucson and a National Finals Rodeo barrel racer who competed on an ex-race horse named Auto Dial.

Sherry's older sister Jo Lynn also competed in rodeo, being selected as the 1976 All-Around Cowgirl at the National High School Rodeo Championships in Sulphur, Louisiana.

At a very early age, Sherry began her own career in barrel racing, running around in her family's front yard at the Potter Ranch in Marana on her stick pony, determined even at this point to do her best. As a child, she worked hours grooming, practicing and riding horses.

At the age of 12, she obtained



A.E. ARAIZA, ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Barrel racer Sherry Cervi from Marana makes the first turn while on her run during the 90th La Fiesta de los Vaqueros Tucson Rodeo in 2015.

her WPRA (Women's Professional Rodeo Association) card and started competing in rodeo events, having success in some areas although she struggled in her favorite event, barrel racing.

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 **VIEW:** Read about the stories behind 14 popular Tucson roads in the Street Smarts series. Point your smartphone camera at the QR code, then tap the link. **NEWSVU**

# Cervi

From B1

During her time at Marana High School, where she was an all-conference basketball player, she also continued honing her riding skills in the family's arena. During the weekends, with her mother as chauffeur, she would wake up at dawn and drive to a rodeo in some part of the state or another to compete.

At age 18 she enrolled in Central Arizona College in Casa Grande in order to join its rodeo team. But her heart was not into it, and she begged her father to let her quit school and try just one time to make the National Finals Rodeo to see what would happen.

In 1994, she began riding a gray gelding bearing the name Sir Double Delight, more commonly known as Troubles. The partnership achieved much success in barrel racing and soon after, she did qualify for the NFR of the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association. She took second place, known as the Reserve World Championship.

The following year, Sherry wed Mike Cervi Jr., a rodeo stock contractor. She again qualified for the NFR, this time wearing the coveted Number One back number as a result of being the contestant coming into the NFR with the most money earned that year. She rode a combination of Troubles and Jet Royal Speed, better known as Hawk, to her first World Championship.

Sherry Cervi's second World Championship came in 1999, at the NFR in Las Vegas, the usual spot for this event. This time she only rode Hawk, instead of the combination used in the previous championship win.

In 2001, she lost her husband Mike to a private plane crash.

She pushed on to compete in



COURTESY OF SHERRY CERVI

Actor Sylvester Stallone and Sherry Cervi in Oklahoma in 2022.

the NFR that year and to fulfill her promise, the following year, to take part in the Olympic Command Performance Rodeo team in Utah, riding Hawk.

Then, she quit rodeo in order to do some soul searching, unsure at the time whether she would return to the arena.

But after about a year she returned to her loves, horses and barrel racing.

In 2010, Cervi won her third World Champion Title, this time on MP Meter My Hay, better known as Stingray (namesake of West Stingray Drive in Marana). By this point she had become the first cowgirl in history to earn over \$2 million in earnings.

Three years later, the duo once again took a World Champion Title, the second for Stingray and fourth for Cervi, with the latter breaking the WPRA single-season earnings record. This run also in-

cluded a victory at the granddaddy of rodeos, the Cheyenne Frontier Days Rodeo.

Cervi also married for a second time, to Cory Petska, one of the premiere top-tie down ropers in the PRCA, and they are still together.

By 2016 she had become the most successful barrel racer in history and the first WPRA cowgirl to bring in over \$3 million.

She was inducted in 2018 into the National Cowgirl Museum & Hall of Fame in Fort Worth, Texas, the culmination of many years of hard work.

Today, Cervi still competes at barrel racing events, although fewer than in the past, and gives inspirational talks to youth barrel racers.

Recently, she took a photo op with movie star Sylvester Stallone, whose Italian last name means "stallion" or adult male horse.



ARIZONA DAILY STAR



COURTESY OF PAUL F. LAFRANCE

Barrel Racer Road and Sherry Cervi Way

As far as we know, Stallone doesn't have any streets named in his honor, but Cervi does.

David Leighton is a historian and author of "The History of the Hughes Missile Plant in Tucson, 1947-1960." He has been featured on PBS, ABC, Travel Channel,

various radio shows, and his work has appeared in Arizona Highways. He named four local streets in honor of pioneers Federico and Lupe Ronstadt and barrel racer Sherry Cervi. If you have a street to suggest for a column, or a story to share, email him at [azjournalist21@gmail.com](mailto:azjournalist21@gmail.com)