

# The Bandera PROPHEET

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Great Texans inducted in Frontier Times Museum Texas Heroes Hall of Honor

The Frontier Times Museum celebrated three great Texans on Friday, with an induction to the Frontier Times Museum's Texas Heroes Hall of Honor.

This year's inductees were Hollywood actor and former owner of Luckenbach, Guich Koock; renowned metal artist, Esther Benedict; and, posthumously, beloved blacksmith, welder and farrier, Adolph Stricker. Established in 2009, the Texas Heroes Hall of Honor honors Texans who have exemplified what it means to be a great Texan and to embody the spirit of Texas. Russell Hevenor, of Hevenor Lumber and Hardware, served as the Master of Ceremony, and musical entertainment was provided by Cowboy Capital Troubadour and Bandera Balladeer, Danny White.

Born in upstate New York, Esther Benedict spent her childhood on the family farm, where she fell in love with horses. The youngest of eight, her mother, while playing the organ, gave her paper and pencils to keep her occupied in church. Her father preached. This led to a love of art and creating. By the end of high school, she had to make a choice between her two loves – a career in art or a career with horses. Benedict decided to fulfill her love of horses with a degree in horse management from the State University of New York at Delhi. Once her degree was completed, her path then led her to Oklahoma State Horse Shoeing School in Ardmore, Okla. She returned to New York to become a master farrier by achieving the highest level of the American Farriers Association Certified Journeyman. She ran a successful business for 16 years when she began to yearn to pursue her art. She realized she could utilize her talent of horseshoeing and working hot iron to create art by taking the steel and heating it with a torch, bending and manipulating it by hand,

creating a “line-item sculpture.” Horses were the first topic because of her years of working with them and her familiarity with their movement and musculature.

After a visit with friends in Texas, Benedict fell in love with the Texas Hill Country. She relocated to Bandera and is now a Texan in heart and spirit. Her sculptures are nationally known and she fulfills commission from across the country. Locally, her work can be seen on Main Street as her metal horse sits atop the Western Trail Antique Mall and her larger than life cowboy boots sits in front of the Bandera CVB Visitor Center. “Sculpture is exciting, it's many sided, it's touchable....It is hardy and can withstand the elements, and over the centuries it still stands. How exciting and thrilling to be able to create a piece that will outlive the sculptor, and still gives to each viewer a piece of the message or feeling that was inspired by God,” Benedict said.

Adolph Julius Stricker was such an essential member of Bandera, the community petitioned the draft board during World War II to spare him because he was needed more at home. A genuine horseman, Stricker worked as a blacksmith and farrier. He started working for Colonel W. T. Johnson and the World Championship Rodeo, touring alongside fellow Hall of Heroes inductee, Toots Mansfield. Stricker was responsible for shoeing the broncs and working the shoots during the competitions. After a few years, he joined Everett Colburn on the lighting C Ranch, shoeing horses and other ranch duties.

Stricker spent his life working with cattle and livestock, including goats and sheep. Establishing a welding shop in 1939, he utilized his talents as a blacksmith, farrier, and welder in support of the ranchers and farmers in Texas. It was these talents that led to the community requesting that he not be drafted. They desperately needed him stateside to repair and fix their equipment and farm implements. As a result of the petition, Stricker was not drafted into the armed services, but rather served as an essential resource for farmers and ranchers who were tasked with feeding Americans and the U.S. military.

“Adolph Stricker was one of those unsung heroes of the rodeo, who worked in the background and helped make the World Championship

Rodeo what it came to be. Many of those who served behind the scenes were ordinary Americans who did extraordinary things. Adolph Stricker was one of those people,” Historian Dr. Vernon Williams said.

Sixth generation Texan, Guich Koock grew up on a ranch south of Austin. The family lived on the second floor of a Victorian ranch house as his mother had turned the first floor into the Green Pastures restaurant. The restaurant was well known as it was open to all races in a time of segregation. In high school, Koock was a driver for author and folklorist, J. Frank Dobie, a 2009 Hall of Heroes inductee. Driving for Dobie led him to meet many prominent Texans, including Tex Robertson, who hired him to work at Camp Longhorn. At Camp Longhorn, he befriended Cactus Pryor and Hondo Crouch. As a student at Texas A&M, he studied English and History. For His Master's thesis, he interviewed children of former slaves. He was also awarded a Lomax Fellowship from the University of Texas to collect Texas folklore from South Texas ranches. In 1970, Koock teamed up with his childhood friend, Hondo Crouch, to buy the town of Luckenbach, Texas for \$30,000, from the original family who had founded the town. Along with Kathy Morgan, Koock and Crouch went about reinventing the sleepy town outside of Fredericksburg. Koock dreamed up fantastical events such as the Luckenbach World's Fair and went on the Johnny Carson's Tonight Show and the Dinah Shore show to publicize the town.

It was in Luckenbach that Steven Spielberg's casting director spotted Koock and recruited him for a supporting role in *The Sugar Land Express* (1974). His portrayal of folksy and funny characters led to the Koock traveling between Texas and Hollywood, where he played roles in movies such as *Piranha* (1978) and *North Dallas Forty* (1979), and television shows such as *Carter Country* (1977-79) with Victor French and Ken Holliday, *Lewis & Clark* with Gabe Kaplan (1981-82), and *She's the Sheriff* (1987-89) with Suzanne Somers. Known for his comedic work, his favorite role though was in the TV mini-series, *The Chisholms* (1979), where he played a villainous character.

Koock is a true Texas Renaissance man with many talents from storytelling, to horseman, to businessman, and even artist and sculptor. It

is fitting the museum is honoring Koock during the museum's 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Koock has played an important role in the museum's history. Along with Genie Strickland, Koock created the Texas Heroes Hall of Honor in 2009 as a way to promote the museum and Bandera around Texas by honoring Texans from around the state. A reception followed the ceremony with a viewing of each inductee's displays, showcasing artifacts and memorabilia from their lives and careers. The displays will be in the museum's Hall of Heroes exhibit until April 2024. The museum is at 510 13<sup>th</sup> Street.