

# The legacy of an Oklahoma son

By Sarah Allison, South Coffeyville, Okla.

The building reads “McSpadden and Associates” and is located in Chelsea, Okla. Upon entering the building, a stern, yet gentle voice says, “Come on in. Nice to see you.” Interior rooms are filled with memorabilia from years past; each holds a memory and place in the heart of a man called a “son of Oklahoma.”

Each photograph tells the story of a man who most Oklahomans have heard of, met or maybe called “friend”: Clem McSpadden.

“They may not be the best photographs, but they are memories of my life,” McSpadden said.

Born in 1925, his childhood was spent on two ranches in Rogers Coun-

ty: the Bushyhead Ranch near Chelsea and his great-uncle Will Rogers’ ranch in Oologah, Okla.

The Bushyhead Ranch has been in his family since the mid-1800s and was settled by his great-grandparents.

McSpadden was named after his great-grandfather Clement Vann Rogers, a member of the first Oklahoma Constitutional Convention and for whom Rogers County was named. This family heritage helped mold McSpadden and his destiny.

McSpadden graduated in May 1943 from Oologah High School and started at Oklahoma Agricultural and Mechanical College in September 1943.

“I did not finish my first semester

because I was certain I was going to be drafted, so I enlisted in the U.S. Navy,” McSpadden said.

McSpadden served during World War II. After the war, he returned to school. Through the Navy, he logged enough hours to return as a junior.

“I started back after World War II,” McSpadden said. “Hundreds and hundreds of veterans were going to school on the GI Bill [of Rights].”

Back at Oklahoma A&M after the war, McSpadden was determined to finish his degree and fulfill a promise he had made to his mother and father.

“One of the greatest things that happened while I was at Oklahoma A&M was that I walked on the basketball team during Mr. Henry Iba’s years as a coach,” he said.

During college, McSpadden and five other students helped start the collegiate rodeo team in 1947. He also worked as a radio broadcaster for the Cooperative Extension Service, the introduction of a voice heard in rodeo arenas around the world. He graduated in 1948 with a bachelor’s degree in animal husbandry.

“I have been able to do what I wanted to do, with people I like to do it with,” McSpadden said.

He has served as general manager for the National Finals Rodeo, the Old Timers Rodeo and the Indian Nation Finals Rodeo.

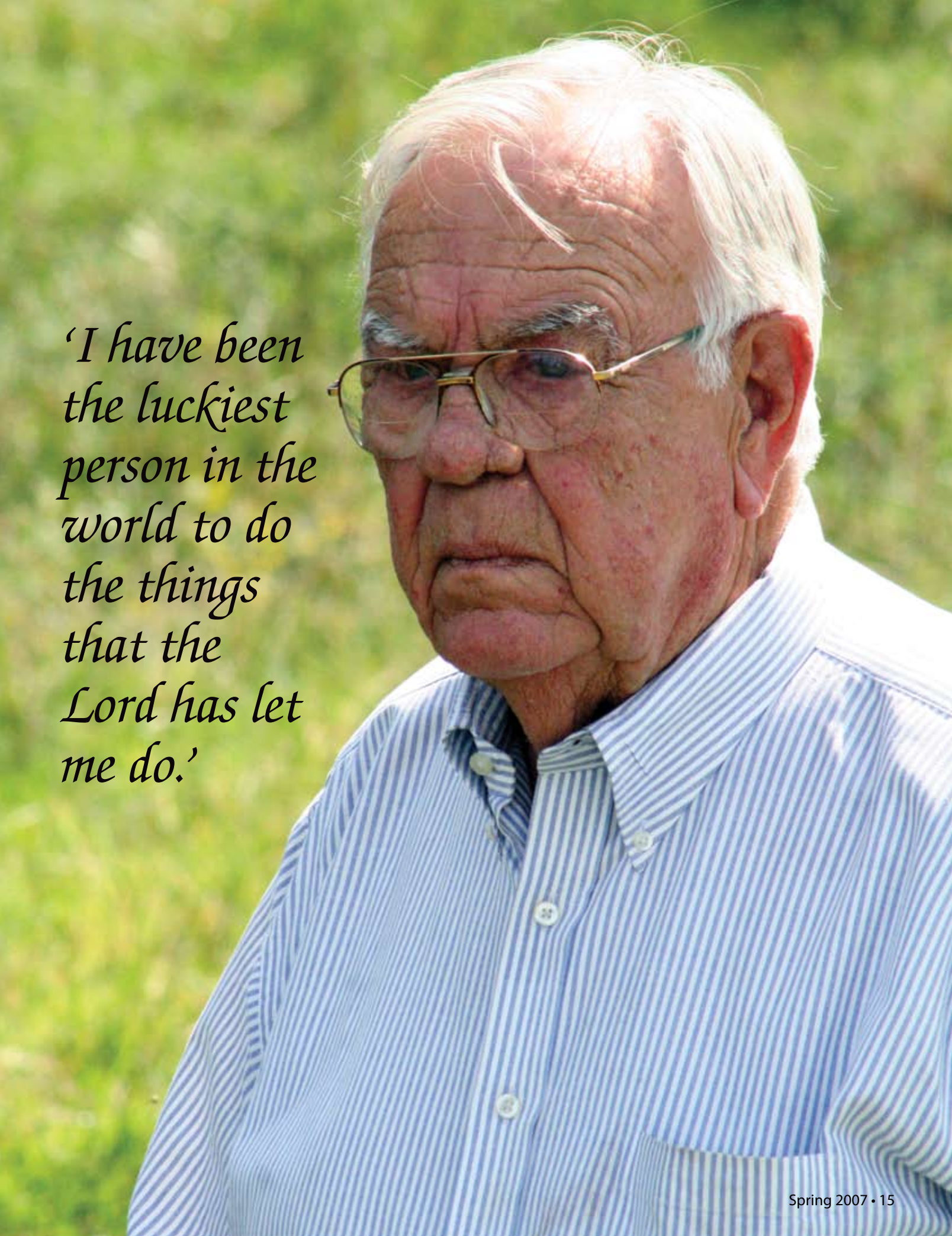
He has announced in such places as Hawaii, “the Challenge Cup” Rodeo between the United States and Canada and at the Winter Olympics in Calgary. McSpadden also has announced in Mexico and Argentina and was the first rodeo announcer from the United States to announce the Canadian National Finals Rodeo.

He was tapped by the Partners of Alliance, created by President John F. Kennedy, to be in charge of the exchange program between Oklahoma and Txlacala, Mexico. McSpadden produced rodeos and served as liaison between the states.

McSpadden embarked into politics in 1954 when he was elected to the Oklahoma Senate. His political career



At age 81, Clem McSpadden still feeds his cattle at his Bushyhead Ranch near Chelsea, Okla. (Photo by Sarah Allison)



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has seen ups and downs, but his political passion has continued with a love for people and a desire to see the common man achieve greatness.

"I like politics, and I have been able to do it for more than 50 years," McSpadden said.

He served in the Oklahoma Senate until 1972, having served as the youngest president pro tempore in state history.

"He loves politics and does it well," said Donna McSpadden, his wife of 44 years.

In 1972, McSpadden was elected as a Democrat to the Ninety-third Congress. He was given the honor of being the first freshman member in the history of the U.S. House of Representatives to serve on the rules committee.

While in Washington, he helped create the Rural Caucus, a group that originated with a few members and has now grown to several of both parties, all committed to the success of rural America.

"Clem McSpadden is a very powerful, influential Oklahoman who has served us well," said Jerry McPeak, Oklahoma state representative.

After McSpadden's time in the U.S. Congress, he ran for governor of Oklahoma. During the race for governor, he experienced one of the greatest moments of his life.

"The biggest thrill besides my family is that when I ran for governor Mr. Henry Iba endorsed me," he said.

Although he lost that race, it gave him the opportunity to "chase other things," he said.

"No one likes to lose," McSpadden said. "If something happens you don't like, sure it bothers you, but the sun will rise the next day."

The sun did rise, and he started



*Clem McSpadden has owned cattle since he was a small boy. (Photo by Sarah Allison)*

organizing rodeo events on the Bushyhead Ranch. In 1975, he began the "World's Richest Roping" competition, pitting the best against each other. In 1983, he established the Bushyhead 101 roping competition still held each year on Labor Day weekend. The rodeo career that began during his college days is still going strong some 60 years later.

In 1983, he also started the government relations firm, McSpadden & Associates, LLC, where he and his son Bart are partners to this day. The company, a legislative consulting and lobbying firm, also employs McSpadden's grandson James.

"Politics is a very interesting game," McSpadden said. "Government has gotten so big; every walk of life needs a lobbyist."

To honor McSpadden for his 80th birthday, his wife and their son Bart created an endowed annual scholarship for him at Oklahoma State Univer-

sity. The recipient must be a full-time student within the OSU Department of Animal Science and maintain a 2.5 grade point average.

"I have been the luckiest person in the world to do the things that the Lord has let me do," McSpadden said.

As his wife accompanies him along the journey of life, McSpadden said it has not just been his life but it has been "our life."

"The greatest achievement of my life is my family and the way I have been able to raise them and to see those same values now in my grandchildren," McSpadden said.

McSpadden has two older children. Paul and wife, Connie, have two sons, John and James. His daughter Kay is married to Joe Lucas.

Now, in the later years of his life, McSpadden said he enjoys his time working at the Capitol, in a rodeo announcer's booth and at the Bushyhead Ranch, as well as spending time with the children of Bart and his wife, Katie: Noah, Chloe and Tucker.

"Donna is my No. 1 worker, supporter and truly the glue that holds the outfit together," McSpadden said.

"In life, if I have learned anything, it is you have to pay your dues," McSpadden said.

"Be persistent and when you do, good will happen. Even if you have a set back, good will come out of it. It makes you better as a neighbor and friend." ☺

## *Accomplishments*

*1989 National Cowboy Hall of Fame Inductee*

*1990 ProRodeo Hall of Fame Inductee*

*1998 Ben Johnson Memorial Award Winner*

*2001 OSU Animal Science Graduate of Distinction*

*2002 OSU Alumni Hall of Fame*

*Author of 'The Cowboy's Prayer' and 'If Our Flag Could Talk'*