

## **“Caroling on Horseback”**

**On Buck! On Gunsmoke! On Lighting, On Taffy...**

**Wait a minute. Those aren't the names of any reindeer.**

**They are, however, the names of some colorfully festooned horses that help bring a little Christmas cheer to area Ranches and Sun Lake Residents. Several years ago, Dane Hovey and Herman Tietgens had a wonderful idea. “Let's go caroling on horseback”**

**After a small start of a dozen or so horses, their group has grown to over 80 decorated horses. Dane and Herman have had to add 5 hay carts pulled by tractors for all the non-riders that want to participate. But be advised; this is still a hoof affair.**

**The group starts out at the Sawgrass Preserve going ranch-to-ranch singing Christmas carols to amused residents. They arrive at the entrance to Sun Lake Estates where residents receive them with snacks and hot chocolate. The fellowship is great since most of the residents are separated from extended families. The Cowboy Carolers then ride through the woods ending up at the Wolcott Ranch for more fellowship.**

**The Cowboy Carolers share carols such as "Silent Night" as well as joyful anthems like "Hark the Harold Angels Sing." Jingle Bells seems to be a crowd favorite as well. But don't look for choir quality here. It's the spirit that counts.**

**The horses are involved too. They keep the rhythm by pawing the ground with their hoofs, while most steeds are clearly embarrassed by the Santa hats, bows and multitude of flashing lights.**

**Caroling on horseback is a tradition Dane and Herman started over ten years ago. As their quarter mile-long parade draws more attention, the number of people asking to go along for the ride has grown. We had 80+ horses and twice that in non-riders last year.**

**Riders put a lot of work into setup to prepare all of the gear. Every light strand needs a battery pack. Arrangements have to be made for the wagons and tractors. Pulling the resources together for safety. Some of the riders are part of the Sheriff's Posse and are experienced Equestrians. They act as Trail Bosses. Other groups include the "Florida Cowboy Mounted Shooters", "Alt oona Trail Riders", "Cowboys for Christ" and other various Ranches.**

**But Dane and Herman approach it all with aplomb -- the event is one way they celebrate their Christmas - "Western style". "Some people think its crazy, Dane shared," "But it's a way of preserving a little bit of the way it used to be." And I believe there's something special about that.**

**They want each of you to understand how important this event is to both of them. Our annual ride depicts one of the reasons we choose to live here. Our Friends, Family and Neighbors play an important role in our happiness. Your friendship, love and devotion mean the world to us.**

**Each of us thank you from the bottom of our heart.**

**Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!**