

TOM CALDWELL

by DEBRA GINSBURG

For the second year in a row, the Del Mar Yearling Sale has had to bid a sad farewell to an important member of its team. Eddie Gregson's tragic suicide last year sent shockwaves through the entire Thoroughbred community. Just last February, Tom Caldwell's familiar and resonant voice was silenced forever.

The Ohio native grew up in California and made his name known in the West when he stepped onto the auctioneer's podium alongside the legendary George Swinebroad and Humphrey Finney to sell the last of Louis B. Mayer's horses during the 1950s. The auctions were broadcast live to thousands of radio listeners nationwide. Over the next 40 years, Caldwell became a familiar figure at major horse auctions from coast to coast. He never missed a sale at Keeneland or Del Mar until he was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer prior to last year's Keeneland summer sale. He died Feb. 23 at his ranch in Eagle Point, Oregon, at age 72.

A third generation auctioneer, Caldwell attended Chaffey College in Southern California and served in the Merchant Marines during World War II. Following a stint with the Army Engineers in Alaska, he followed in the footsteps of his father and grandfather by selling cows, pigs and goats at his family's stockyards. "We sold everything but the wife and kids at one time or another," he said.

Caldwell joined Keeneland's auction staff in 1957 and eventually succeeded Swinebroad as Keeneland's director of auctions in 1975. During his tenure there, he auctioned the world's first seven-figure yearling when a Secretariat half-brother to international champion Dahlia sold for \$1.5 million in 1976. Caldwell was also in the auction stand when Seattle Dancer passed through the Keeneland sale ring for \$13.1 million in 1985. The price still stands as the world record for a yearling sold at public auction.

Although Caldwell was involved with the Del Mar Yearling Sale during its early years, a more permanent union was forged in 1985 when the CTBA hired Equine Auction Services for its new sales arm, California Thoroughbred Sales Inc. Tom's son Scott was president of that company, which also brought him and his other son, Cris, into the fold.

Caldwell also sold Standardbreds at Tattersalls in Lexington. Away from the auction stand, he raised Thoroughbreds and

cattle at his Oregon ranch and was a longtime member of the CTBA. His sons have carried on the family tradition. Both Scott and Cris are fine auctioneers in their own right, and Scott's two sons have served as ringmen at Keeneland.

Other surviving family members include his wife, Mary, and daughters Georganna and Karen. Memorial contributions may be made to the St. Mary's School Community Foundation, 816 Black Oak Drive, Medford, Ore., 97504, or to a charity of your choice.



Anne M. Eberhardt Photo.