Leisure | Behind the Scenes

Rancho de los Caballeros

A day behind the scenes with Robin Sewell and the team from Arizona Highways Television at a Wickenburg dude ranch

Say I polled a room of people and posed this question,

“So, how did Robin Sewell acquire the Arizona Highways Television show?” The replies would vary.

“Well, look at her; she’s beautiful!”, “She is as gracious as she is lovely.”, “She is intelligent and articulate.”

“She is a very persuasive speaker. I’ll bet she knew the right people.”

“She is so passionate about her ideas and Arizona’s beauty and grandeur.”
WHICH ANSWER IS RIGHT? ALL OF THEM, OF COURSE.

But perhaps the biggest reason Robin Sewell was able to seal the deal with Arizona Highways is because she is so passionate about Arizona. In her own words, Sewell comments, “This television show gives me the opportunity to do what I love...travel and explore new frontiers and use the wonderful medium of television to showcase Arizona’s spectacular landscape and the engaging people who live here.”

Having moved to Arizona in 1989, Sewell is a familiar face in Arizona. She was anchor on News Channel 15 for seven years. Born in the Bronx, she moved to Northern California as a child and that is where her roots are. She graduated from UCLA with a degree in Theater Arts and was actually planning a career in the entertainment business, but instead she established her niche as a newscaster and has since worked on both sides of the contiguous United States.

After spending a day “Behind the Scenes” with Robin Sewell and the crew from Arizona Highways Television, I realized that, yes, she is a pretty face, very smart and extremely gracious, but it is her passion for the state of Arizona that radiates when you talk to her.

Sewell has put together a superior staff that produces quality television. The members of the team have fun; the camaraderie was evident. They bantered and joked and then immediately got down to business.

Don’t think Sewell’s idea of teaming with Arizona Highways was a unique thought. The magazine has been inundated with requests over the years. Publisher Win Holden told Sewell, “If I had a nickel for everyone who approached me about an Arizona Highways show, I’d be a rich man.” But it was Sewell’s persuasion and charisma that eventually won him over. I am sure that Arizona Highways and the Arizona Office of Tourism have never had a moment of regret either. Airing in the Valley on Channel 12, Sewell has taken this locally produced television show (first shown in April of 2004), built it from the ground up and made it the number one show on Saturdays at 6:30 pm. Now in its third season, Arizona Highways Television is shot in high-definition and shown in Phoenix, Flagstaff, Tucson and Yuma. Sewell is currently involved in negotiations that would result in national and possibly international exposure.

Besides learning that Sewell is a devoted mother to one-year-old Milan, I also learned that she has Native American ancestry. It was only after obtaining the rights to the show that she discovered that her own paternal grandfather used to write poetry for Arizona Highways Magazine, a fact in which she takes great pride. Sewell is delighted with her latest venture in broadcast television which
allows her the opportunity to showcase the wonder and beauty of Arizona, connect the State's diverse communities, entertain, educate and encourage viewers to get out and explore Arizona.

Sewell credits the overall success of Arizona Highways Television to the support of partner Arizona Highways Magazine and the television program's sponsors: Arizona Office of Tourism, Arizona State Lottery, APS, Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage, Wells Fargo Bank and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Arizona. Sewell says, “We are bound together by our strong sense of community and our desire to promote Arizona's #1 industry – tourism.”

Where was Arizona Highways Television when I caught up with it? In Wickenburg at Rancho de los Caballeros, an historic ranch that has been saddling up dudes for fifty-eight years now. It was here that real cowboys were teaching Sewell and good friend Lin Sue Cooney how to be real cowgirls. I would like to say that Rancho de los Caballeros is one of Arizona's best-kept secrets, but guests were there from all over, including Canada, the East and West coasts and our very own Valley of the Sun. The visitors ranged in age from an adorable little girl in a pink cowgirl hat to a couple who could have been celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary.

There is something for everyone at Rancho de los Caballeros. Even rebellious teenagers would find it hard to feign boredom there. A heated pool, tennis and croquet courts, and an 18-hole golf course (ranked by Golf Digest and Travel and Leisure Golf Magazine as one of America's top resort golf courses) all grace the property. Of course, you will find an abundance of "cowboy" activities on the main agenda. The ranch, with its 20,000 acres, boasts 100 horses for exploring rugged trails and watching glorious sunsets. Activities abound everywhere: wildlife tours, horseback riding, hiking, helicopter and hot air balloons rides, even jeep tours are available. Bird watching and cattle round-ups are just a few of the numerous activities for participants. Part of the fun was watching the grandparents alongside their grandchildren, all rounding up cattle in a friendly competition.
that pitted groups of “cattle rustlers” against each other.

I visited with two young boys who had struck up a friendship. The one from New Jersey appeared to be around seven, the other, a Phoenician, closer to ten. I never did see them with their parents; they just moved from one activity to another with each other. The younger one, whose head was barely above the pool table at which he was playing, said his favorite activities were skeet shooting and horseback riding. His newly found friend concurred.

The ranch is secluded and self-contained. The only traffic around those parts involves horses and an occasional golf cart. The staff is so omnipresent that children are safe and secure. Los Caballeros offers an entire morning of children’s programs for ages five to twelve. From 6 pm until 9 pm, the counselors again round up the young cowpokes for games or a marshmallow roast around a campfire. Many of the adults present enjoyed these same activities at Rancho de los Caballeros as a child and have returned to build memories with their own children. If your little ones are too young for the children’s programs, the staff will make every effort to secure a babysitter for them if you give notice with your reservations.

A couple from Canada said that they had been vacationing there for the past thirty years, bragging that it had changed very little. They liked the fact that they could come year after year and expect the same beauty and quality that they had enjoyed since 1976. Even though the ranch has added new features with modern luxuries, it has remained true to its original design. It is this authenticity that keeps people returning.

Breakfast and lunch are buffet-style, all under the supervision of the award-winning Chef Richard Lepree who yells his “yehaw” with a British accent. Straight from England, he won’t just dazzle you with his good looks and charming smile; he will amaze you with his gourmet selections that change daily. You don’t have to be a guest to enjoy them. Just drive fifty miles northwest of Phoenix and you will be basking in superb Western hospitality and devouring food that is sure to keep you coming back for more.
Barbecues and cookouts, where the singin’ cowboy Will Dudley will keep everyone entertained, are a must. This self-proclaimed “loner” can talk your leg off with his tales of the Wild West. Dudley loves the ranch and claims it is one of his favorite places. Our real education about Rancho de los Caballeros came from his own “unbiased” point of view.

If your definition of camping does not include a tent, sleeping bag or a port-a-potty, then never fear. The Wild West could never have dreamed of sleeping quarters like the ones you will find here. Los Caballeros has seventy-nine charming and unique casitas and suites that have handcrafted Santa Fe-styled furnishings, Southwestern art and Mexican tile work that lend originality to each room. Each casita features a private patio, bath, air conditioning, television and telephone with dataport. Many of the casitas connect, providing additional room and flexibility. Every five years, Owner Rusty Gant and General Manager Jeff Deming redecorate each casita, providing new bedding and decor that is unique to each room and complementing the hand-painted furniture and rustic architecture.

Several packages are available for golfers and horseback riders. But ladies, if you are up for an adventure without the men, round up your cowgirl friends and ride on in for the “Giddy-Up Gals Getaway.” Limited to twelve, this package is designed just for the girls to rejuvenate the souls and soothe the spirits. Sisters, moms and daughters or best friends can take full advantage of the countless array of amenities. No cooking, cleaning, laundry or children – just good old-fashioned fun with the gals.

Escape from the city life temporarily as you experience the true Wild West at Rancho de los Caballeros. This wide-open range ranch will place you in the midst of rugged trails and stampeding horses. Witness a blazing sunset, feel the heat of a mesquite campfire and savor the smell of a Southwestern barbecue. Whether your daily footwear is a pair of cowboy boots or stylish stilettos, you are sure to enjoy this historic guest ranch and golf club that honors the style of the skillful-riding Spanish caballeros who brought their hospitable lifestyle to the uncultivated desert landscape.

The Gant family’s Rancho de los Caballeros is located at 1551 S. Vulture Mine Road, Wickenburg, AZ 85390. For reservations call 800.684.5030 or 928.684.5484. You can also find more information at www.sunc.com.