

Circle

Thirty years ago South Dakotan Lee Warne started with a horse named Bambi E. Visitors came from miles away to see the statesman's wild-colored horse. With the renewed interest passers-by have taken in his leopard Appaloosas, Warne has had to doublecheck his calendar to confirm the year.

STORY BY FRANK HOLMES

"Of all the stories I've heard told about my grandfather," Warne continues, "I guess the one that sticks out most in my mind is the one about his wood-chopping accident.

"He was out chopping firewood one day when the axe slipped in his hands on a downward stroke. He laid open his calf muscle from top to bottom. Pierre, South Dakota and the nearest doctor was a four-day round trip back then, so Grandpa just went into the house, doused that cut with kerosene to sterilize it, took a needle and a bunch of old black thread, and sewed himself up. He'd take a stitch, wipe the sweat off his forehead, mutter a few appropriate adjectives under his breath, and take another one."

With this type of pioneer hardiness as their heritage, it only stood to reason that the Warne clan would grow and prosper on the Northern Plains — and prosper they did.

Born January 1, 1922, Lee Warne is a third generation South Dakotan. He earned a degree at the University of South Dakota, then left for the Army, returning to his home state following World War II with a young bride, the former Helen Williams of Nashville, Tennessee.

About 1950, Lee Warne tossed his hat into the political arena and began a lifetime of public service. Included among the public offices held by the venerable statesman are



At Expo '82 in Orlando, Florida, Helen and Lee Warne accept a bronze medallion as the breeders of Top Deck's Lancer.

Republican state representative for two years, Republican state senator for four years, township school clerk for 21 years, Sully County commissioner for 22 years, president of the USD Alumni Association and president of the USD Development Commission.

It was during the late '50s, at the height of his senatorial career, that the path of Lee Warne — farmer, rancher, family man and public servant — crossed with that of a fledgling breed of western horse and yet another title was added after his name — pioneer Appaloosa breeder.

"Living within commuting distance of Pierre as I did, it was sometimes hard to get away from the pressures of the legislature," remembers Warne. "I began looking for a hobby — something I could get involved with that would be relaxing but that wouldn't take a lot of my time."

"I have always loved horses and I have always liked things that were a little different, so I started looking around for a horse that would fill both bills. I.D. Weeks, a friend of mine who was the University of South Dakota president at the time, told me about a horse trader in Iowa who had a wild-colored two-year-old Appaloosa stallion that could probably be bought."

That colt turned out to be Bambi E, F-2497.

Bambi E was foaled in 1954 on the Fort Morgan, Colorado ranch of P.S. "Doc" Edwards. His sire was Woodrow Sheik, F-502, an own son of the great leopard stallion, Sundance, F-500. Bambi's dam was PVF's Butterfly whose sire is listed as the Deiter Leopard and whose dam was a Thoroughbred mare by Senator Grey. Sundance's sire was a horse named Daylight who was an own son of the famous Starbuck Leopard. His dam was "a little black Thoroughbred mare out of Mexico."

"The first time I laid eyes on Bambi, he was not what I would call an awe-inspiring individual," Warne remembers. "He was kind of skinny and kind of small, but there were some things that I saw in him that I really liked.

"He had a beautiful head with a quiet, intelligent way of looking around, and he was quite refined in comparison to any of the other Appaloosas that I had seen up to that time. He was also very athletic which I really liked, so I took the plunge, bought him, and took him back with me to South Dakota.

"I wanted to keep him sort of hid out until I could feed him up and get a little growth and bloom on him, but that just didn't work out. The word got out around Pierre that Lee Warne had gone off his rocker and bought some crazy colored horse