

Well, if you didn't get the chance to come play with us this Winter Camp, I'm sorry to say... But, YOU MISSED OUT! We had beautiful weather, super-cool campers, awesome counselors, the best animals, new ranks being passed, flashy buckles being awarded, crazy dance party and New Year's celebration, traditional Olympic competition, and a memorable show on Saturday! Whew. It wears me out just recapping for you.

Opening day, dressed, pressed, excited and ready to go. We had our favorite country band, Prairie Fire, heatin' up the Cowboy Club stage to welcome our families to our 2009 Winter Camp session. Our counselors and staff took their posts awaiting the arrival of their campers. So many familiar faces (and how they have grown in such a short time) walking down good 'ol Main Street, as well as new faces, bright eyed and ready for a fantastic week.

That night we had a grand Olympic Opening Ceremony take place in the Horse Palace. Our weathered and exhausted torch bearer, traveled on foot, all the way from Athens, Greece(!) to Rawhide Ranch, keeping the flame alive the entire way, to get to the podium... just to sneeze it out! Luckily, he used his outdoor skills, rubbed two sticks together and quickly rekindled the flame, which set the "official" Olympic Torch ablaze for the week's games. 4 brave and powerful teams, led by fearless RH leaders, were created - The Confuzzled Coupons from Costco, The Legit Lucky Luscious Lassoing Ligers from the Land Before Time, The Recycling Dappled Dinosaurs from Denmark, and The Zebralicious Zebras from Zimbabwe. Let the games begin! Throughout the week our Olympic teams battled with Dodgeball, a Scavenger Hunt, a Dutch Auction, Capture the Flag, and Wacky Relay Races. When it was all said and done, at Closing Ceremonies, the Zebralicious Zebras took home the Gold. But everyone walked away with the traditional Olympic quote on their hearts, something that we can all put stock in: "The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part, just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well." At that, our captains put out the flame to close our valiant games... until next year.

Simultaneously taking place during the week, our campers gained new skills and polished up old ones – from riding a horse bareback, to teaching manners to a challenging and strong willed stock farm animal, to ground handling skills with our ponies, to defying gravity with challenging moves on a vaulting horse. From taking a chance and trying something new, to finding value in themselves through their experiences and in turn building their confidence as individuals, to creating new friendships and rekindling old ones, to dedicating themselves to accomplishing a new level of expertise, to demonstrating character through action. What a week and what an incredible group of young people that lend a promise of a bright future.

Thursday was our BIG NIGHT of delicious food, good service, speeches, certificates, buckles, slide shows and reminiscing, as well as games, dancing, singing, sparkling cider, party hats, countdowns and balloons. We celebrated all of our campers for being part of our Rawhide family, honored some of our hard working campers for their achievements at camp for 2009, and we lived up our last night of 2009 with our New Year's dance party. After a long night, the kids were troopers and still managed to get out of bed and get to flagpole (many still in their pj's, but there) for breakfast by 7:20am the next morning. Tap, tap, clap, clap, snap, snap, Good Job!

For our last night of camp we gathered together for our traditional "Closing Campfire." We sang, we clapped (in many creative fashions), we laughed, we hugged, we reflected, we cried... "Mmmm I want to linger, Mmmm a little longer, a little longer here with you." Thank you campers and thank you staff for keeping the spirit of Rawhide Ranch alive through your friendships, accomplishments and hearts. I can't wait to see you this summer!