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NEWS RELEASE

Auctioneer championship down to the final fast-talkin' 10

CALGARY – He's always been a straight shooter . . . and he's always wanted to be a fast talker.

Jake Bettencourt is only 30, but he's already come full circle on his vocational dreams. Bettencourt grew up on a dairy farm in California's San Joaquin Valley, and as far back as he can remember, he wanted to be the man at the mic at nearby Turlock Livestock Auction Yard in Hilmar, Calif. – a job he's held since 2008.

"All I ever wanted to do was be a livestock auctioneer, and work for Turlock Livestock," said Bettencourt on Friday afternoon. "We used to take our cows to Turlock – and as a young man, for lack of a better term, I just fell in love with the auction method of selling, the way the auctioneer conducted the sale.

"It might sound like a dopey story, but it's the truth. I enjoy the industry, the cattle, the people I work for, and my customers," added Bettencourt. "I enjoy what I do, man. I'm happy to get up every day and go to work. Not everybody can say that."

Bettencourt will be one of 10 finalists competing at the Calgary Stampede's 23rd annual International Livestock Auctioneer Championship on Saturday, July 16 under the Big Top. The tongues of some of North America's top auctioneers start wagging at 11 a.m. sharp, and the champion will take home more than \$5,500 in cash and prizes, including a handtooled Stampede champion belt buckle.

Bettencourt made the final cut, along with nine other golden throats, on Friday afternoon during preliminaries at Strathmore's Calgary Stockyards. All 21 hopefuls, hailing from as far away as Wyoming, Iowa, Kentucky, and Australia, were put through their paces by selling seven drafts of cattle each.

"Every time a cow walks in the ring, I try and remember that I'm working for the owner of that cow," said Bettencourt, who graduated from Missouri Auction School in 1999, and spent the first few years of his career conducting fundraiser auctions. "It's my job, my responsibility, to get every last dollar, quarter, dime, out of her for my consignor.

"If you do that, if you're straight in your dealings, and you treat people well, and do good business, people will return," he added. "People have choices on where they can take their cattle, whether it's another auction yard, a private sale, putting them on the internet. People need to support the local yard, but auction markets need to work hard for their customers, too."

Revvng up those motormouths in Saturday morning's final, alongside Bettencourt, will be Rob Bergevin of Stavely, Alta., Mike Nuss of Minatare, Neb., Justin Gattey of Ponoka, Alta., Cliff Pahl of Hanna, Alta., Travis Rogers of Westlock, Alta., Jay Romine of Mt. Washington, Ky., Shawn Gist of Westrose, Alta., Brennin Jack of Regina, and Rodney Burnett of Armstrong, B.C.

Calgary Exhibition and Stampede Limited

Box 1060, Station M, Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2P 2K8 1.800.661.1260 T 403.261.0101 F 403.265.7197 www.calgarystampede.com



Saturday's 10 finalists will each auction off four brand cattle, as part of the Stampede's annual Brand Consignment Sale, plus one Black Box item. As always, they'll be judged on rhythm, clarity, voice control and intonation, appearance, mannerisms, deportment, repartee and timing, and livestock knowledge, as well as their ability to spot bids and conduct a sale.

"Your knowledge of the cattle – their quality, what they're worth – is important. That's what you're paid to do," says Greg Sanderson, the chair of the Stampede's International Livestock Auctioneers committee. "And bid spotting's a big thing. You miss a bid, that can cause the consignor quite a bit of money.

"And at the end of the day, how you come across to people, and how you present yourself, is critical in the auctioneering business. If people like you, you're 75 per cent of the way there."

The Black Box factor has been introduced to the International Livestock Auctioneer Championship in recent years as a way of engaging the public, and giving the men in charge a little extra challenge by moving them out of their comfort zone. This year's Black Box items include golf packages, automotive tools, and cuts of meat.

With its history and its caliber of competition, the Stampede's International Livestock Auctioneer Championship has become one of the premier events of its kind in the world, alongside the World Livestock Auctioneer Championship in the United States.

The Stampede's championship is a one-and-done affair, with no repeat winners allowed. Eight of the past 10 winners have been Americans, including last year's champ Tom Frey of Creston, Iowa. The last Canadian to claim the crown was Peter Raffan of Armstrong, B.C., in 2008. "It's a real feather in your cap if you can win this deal," said Sanderson. "It's great exposure. A lot of people are going to be watching the way you operate."

Also involved in Friday's preliminary round were Tim Dowler of Winnipeg, Erik Dunsbergen of Picture Butte, Alta., Brandon Frey of Creston, Iowa, Michael Jennings of Condon, Alta., Andrew McDowell of Vandalia, Ill., Adam Redland of Ten Sleep, Wyo., Tyler Rosehill of Olds, Alta., Tyler Slawinski of McCreary, Man., David Whitaker of Ames, Iowa, and Andrew Warden of Tamworth, Australia.

The Stampede will be webcasting all events held under the Big Top this year. Visit <http://ag.calgarystampede.com/big-top-ustream-2011> for live streaming of Big Top action.

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For more information, please contact:

Annemarie Pedersen
Ag Media Committee Chair
C 403.689.2116
F 403.262.3067
E agmedia@calgarystampede.com

Todd Kimberley
Agriculture Media Writer
C 403.815.2752
F 403.262.3067
E tkimberley@calgarystampede.com

Sharon Yeast
Agriculture Program Coordinator
T 403.261.9316
F 403.262.3067
E syeast@calgarystampede.com

The Calgary Stampede is a volunteer-supported, not-for-profit community organization that preserves and promotes western heritage and values. The Stampede contributes to the quality of life in Calgary and southern Alberta through its world-renowned 10-day Stampede, year-round facilities, western events and several youth and agriculture programs. All revenue is reinvested into Calgary Stampede programs and facilities. For more about the Stampede, visit www.calgarystampede.com.

