

Cam-plex City

Driving down Garner Lake Road, Laura smiled excitedly as thousands of white camper tops came into view on her left. She sped past the green fields that are full of R.V.s, horse trailers with living quarters, and the occasional tent. Her smile grew bigger as she glanced down Windmill Drive and saw golf carts, pedestrians in cowboy hats, and, in the far distance, horses being exercised. After passing a second camper-filled field, Laura turned east and continued past yet another sea of R.V.s, eventually turning left onto a small two-lane road. On her right was Wrangler Arena, which was currently full of riders practicing for the big event. Laura turned left into a large parking lot. After scrounging for a spot to park, she climbed out of her truck and tugged her cowboy hat on. There wasn't a cloud to be seen in the azure blue sky. It was a perfect Wyoming summer day, and a perfect day to volunteer at the National High School Finals Rodeo.

Every four years, for two years in a row, in the third week of July, the National High School Finals Rodeo comes to Gillette, Wyoming. For seven days Gillette's multi-events center, the Cam-plex becomes a city within a city. With a population of around 1,500 humans, 1,700 horses and just as many cattle and goats, this rodeo "city" actually becomes the seventh biggest metropolis in Wyoming. People from Australia, several Canadian provinces, and almost all fifty states make up the population of the temporary city. Residents are split up into six "neighborhoods" or campgrounds. The modes of transportation are golf carts and horses. This small city even has its own law enforcement, and everyone goes to the same church. The Cam-plex organizers could be viewed as the city council, the high school cowboys and cowgirls as the employees, and the blue shirted volunteers as the "city workers".

Today, Laura's volunteer post was across the grounds, but she still had time so she decided to take the long way. In front of her was a new red brick building, known as the Wyoming Center. This week it was the Cam-plex City's "mall". About sixty businesses and organizations from all over the country came to provide the shopping-deprived citizens of Cam-plex City and Gillette with hours of fun. Laura blissfully made her way through the crowd, stopping every now and then to examine the intricate tooling on a saddle or to laugh at the ridiculous amount of sparkles on a purse. Finally, it was time for her shift to start, so Laura tore herself away from some custom-made bridles, and made her way to the north end of the building.

Upon exiting the building, she crossed a green lawn that had several nets set up for volleyball. To her right was a long metal building that housed the cutting arena, and in front of her was an identical building. The second building housed a mechanical bull, a dance floor and arcade games. It was a place for the young people of Cam-plex City to hang out and socialize. Laura passed through a breezeway that connected the two buildings. Concession stands flanked the doorway, and Laura had difficulty wading her way through the crowd of hungry people. She turned left through another pair of doors and entered the cutting barn. This building was full of the sounds of mooing cattle, the snap of leather against horseflesh, and the quiet murmur of the crowd. Laura glanced longingly at the cutting competition, but she had wasted too much time at the "mall" and couldn't stop to watch. She exited the building and crossed another expansive parking lot. Golf carts loaded with teenagers armed with water-balloons whizzed around her. Laura headed to a little white shack that sat at an intersection, where she was to provided

information, direct wayward golf carts and horses, and keep a sharp eye out for dehydrated people.

After her shift, Laura settled down with family and friends in the grandstands, as the sun slowly sank behind the distant stables. She surveyed the scene before her, the cowboys getting ready at the chutes, the long line at the lemonade stand, and the various Rodeo Queens singing autographs for shy little boys and idolizing girls. Laura leaned back, ready for an evening full of popcorn, lemonade, and, of course, rodeo. It's a perfect way to end a perfect day in Cam-plex City.

Written by Madison Beaver