

PEOPLE

Ron Bergeron embraces Davie, both old and new

By Betty Williams
Sun-Tattler staff

To Ron Bergeron, he is, in some ways, a victim of his own success.

The Davie land developer and owner of Bergeron Land Development Inc. has made his fortune off the land — bulldozing the same orange groves that he tended as a young man for agricultural owners.

Yet, the private Bergeron remembers with affection the serenity of former days in Davie. So much so that when he decided to build a house, he flew his plane over southwest Broward to pinpoint a location where he believed development would have to stop. He found it — facing the Everglades off State Road 27.

There, on 100 acres, he built his western-style mansion, complete with a 20-acre pond, his own private rodeo arena and tennis courts.

It's a far cry from the modest home where he grew up in Davie — a house his parents built out of scrap lumber on Burris Road (named after Bergeron's grandfather, Charlie Burris).

"We had a pitcher pump outside. I didn't see TV until I was seven years old and that was at my granddad's," Bergeron says. "At that time, Davie was Everglades and agriculture."

"I remember we had rats come through the wall. My mother shot them with a little .22. I'll never forget how good she could shoot."

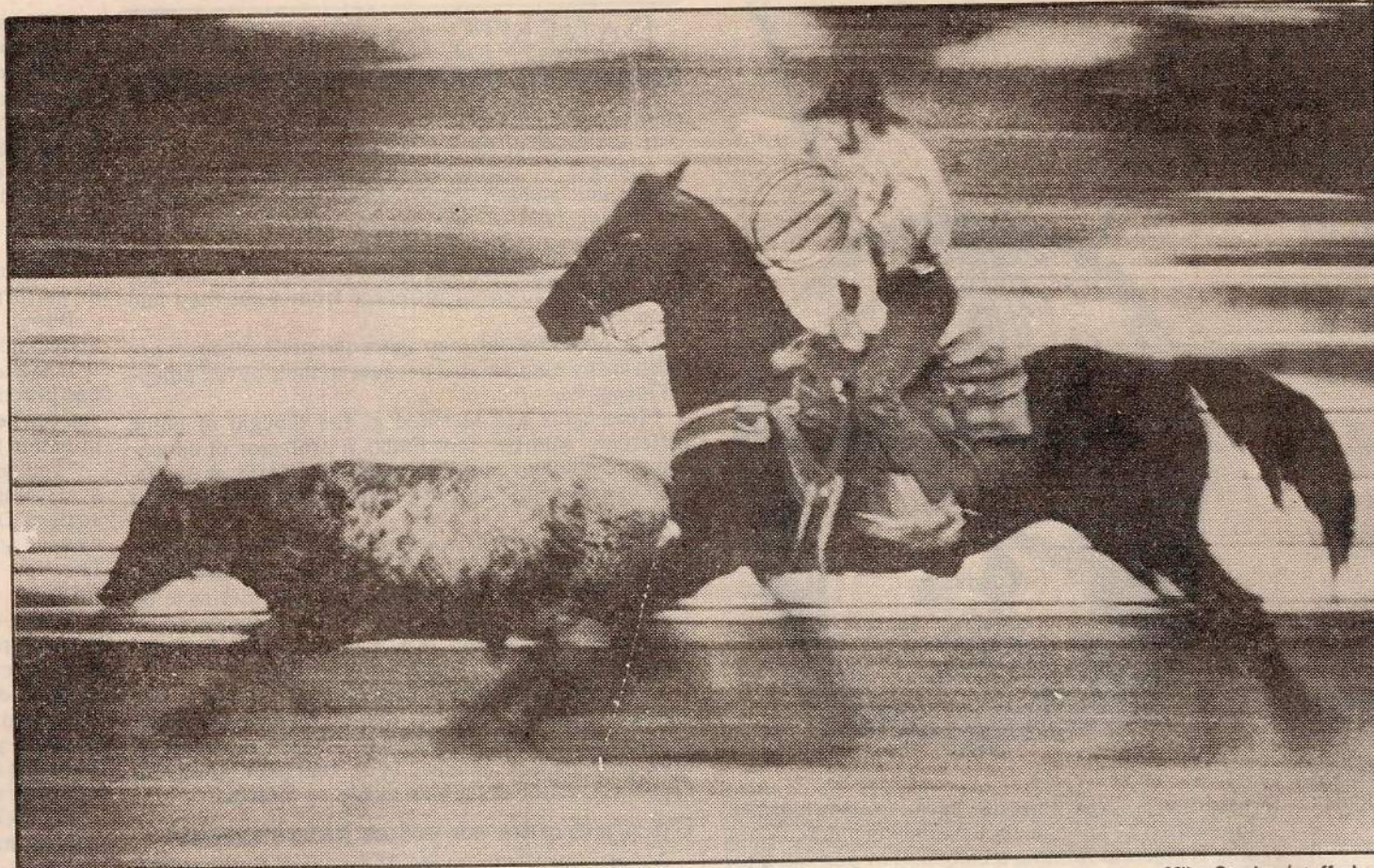
Bergeron's parents owned one of the first grocery stores in Davie. Later, they opened their own restaurant, Percy's Steak House.

Young Bergeron worked as a busboy for the family business.

"I was the best. I got tips. I could throw a tablecloth 20 feet before you got there, and it would land on the table," Bergeron says.

Being the best at whatever he did was essential to Bergeron. The trait, he says, came from his father, Percy, who died in October.

"My dad was a great athlete. He played college football at LSU. And ran against track star Jesse Owens. They both beat existing world records at the same time,"



Mike Stocker / staff photo

Davie's Ron Bergeron can practice roping on his own rodeo arena, part of his 100-acre homestead

Bergeron says.

Bergeron says it was his father's influence that inspired him to become an athlete — first as a halfback on Stranahan High School's football team (they were state champions in 1962); and later in the rodeo arena where he was named the best team cattle roper by the South Florida Team Ropers Association in 1983.

"I believe that sports really help all young people — it teaches you to be competitive in life and that hard work will make you the best in what you're trying to accomplish — whether it's physical or

mental," Bergeron says.

He's carried that philosophy throughout his business career, starting with the \$235 he paid for a farm tractor when he was 19. It was all the money he had at the time. He used the tractor to help farmers plant orange groves or clear orange grove tracts to be used for pasture.

The one tractor grew to about five tractors in a period of four years. Bergeron would sometimes mow throughout the night, bringing a peanut butter and jelly sandwich for dinner.

Then, on a visit to the bank to borrow

money, Bergeron says he took a look around him at the wealthier customers, and came to a realization.

"All people who had money and were successful owned land — Perry, Waldrup, the Davie dairies. All these people with hardly no teeth in their mouth, cow manure between their toes and barefoot. They owned land. That was in the mid '60s."

"It struck me. In order to be successful, you had to buy land. They're not making any more of it."

He decided to trade his farm tractors in for bulldozers — except one tractor which

he kept to ride into downtown Davie. He had already sold his car for investment capital.

It was during this period that Bergeron recognized that urban sprawl was reaching for Davie.

Bergeron took the risk. He persuaded the banks to give him heavily leveraged loans to buy large parcels of land in Davie, Pembroke Pines, and other parts of unincorporated Broward County.

The risk paid off. The property escalated in value. Bergeron sold some of the land, developed some himself, and continues to own an undisclosed amount of property in Broward County.

Though he says he didn't have money in the bank until 1986, Bergeron is today, by any standards, a rich man.

His land development company has successfully bid on major development and road projects. His older brother, Lonnie, assists him with the company and also operates a sanitary nursery business.

When Bergeron isn't busy at work, he's busy at play.

"When I leave this office, nothing interferes with my personal life," Bergeron says.

That personal life includes frequent Everglades outings on one of his three airboats, team rope practice with his son, Ronnie Jr.; watching his daughter, Debbie Harris, in a barrel racing competition; flying his private plane out of Perry Airport; and more recently, helping his fiancée, Cindy Lou Brumbaugh, plan their Nov. 19 wedding. He also spends time with his other three children, and his mother, Dorothy.

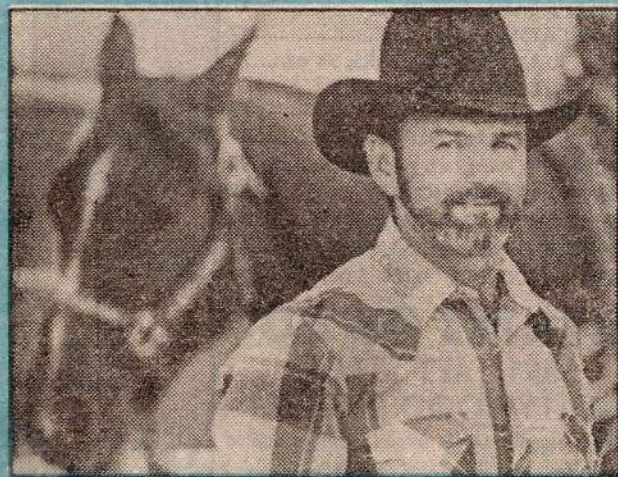
Bergeron knows he has adversaries who perceive him as a major factor in the fast-paced development that has enveloped Davie.

"We never asked for development. We never invited everyone to move to Davie. I was intending orange groves," he says.

"It wasn't my desire for everybody to want to move to Davie. It wasn't my decision for that to happen. No question that I've benefited financially from it."

But Bergeron wishes those people who

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Davie's Ron Bergeron says he's still a country boy at heart.

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criticize him could experience what he's experienced.

They'd realize, he says, that the most important things in life aren't material rewards, but are, instead, health, happiness, family and friends. Of course, a little extra money doesn't hurt, he says.

"I take more pride in my success as a business man than I do in material things I've created. One of the things that upsets me is that people envy you when you've become successful. But you have the same problems. Life is no different."

"You may have a nicer house."

"But if you think it's hard to make money, let me tell you, once you get it, it's hard to keep it. I'm not so sure it's worth it," Bergeron

says.

Wearing snakeskin boots, a rabbit's foot around his neck, and a wide silver belt buckle that he won in a rodeo competition, Bergeron says success hasn't changed him.

His close friends are still his former buddies at Stranahan High School. And he has a pony but no race horse; an airboat but no yacht, he points out.