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HEADLINE: Larry Robbins playing cowboy with purpose

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By JEAN GORDON Daily Courier Staff Writer FOREST CITY -- Larry Robbins wants today's children and youth to have an appreciation of the country's western heritage, its morals and integrity. And to help expedite the cause, the 65-year-old Forest City man is doing his best at "playing cowboy." Being a grown-up cowboy is right down Robbins' alley and when he was hired by *Ghost Town in the Sky* to help keep the peace in the old Wild West town in *Maggie Valley*, he was already outfitted for the part. He's been playing cowboy for years with the Gaston County-based Silver Screen Saddle *Partners* as Ranger Buck, completely attired with cowboys clothes, boots, hat, Continued from Page 1 chaps and his tie. His job at *Ghost Town* is two fold. For the past few months Robbins has been up and down the mountains pro-moting *Ghost Town* in his other role as a marketing figure. *Ghost Town* closed in 2001 and reopened Friday, May 25, with a lot of new gunfights, shows and activities. Robbins, a former employee of Truck Services, Inc. Forest City, spent most of this year as a substitute teacher for the Rutherford County Schools and also drove a school bus. But when his wife Debbie Robbins, who works at Forest City Dunbar, informed him that she'd heard *Ghost Town* was looking for employees, she suggested that he give them a call. She knows better than anyone his love and for the old west and his passion of being a cowboy. Robbins has been a part of the Silver Screen Saddle Pals for more than a decade hanging out with the other cowboys with a love of western heritage, watching movies and raising money for underprivileged children especially giving them an opportunity to go Christmas shopping. When *Ghost Town* hired Robbins he already had his western name, "Ranger Buck" and wanted to stick with that name since he'd been playing Ranger Buck for years. His name couldn't have been more fitting. "Buck Mountain is actually the top of the mountain at *Ghost Town*," Robbins said. "It goes back to the time it was built but I just always thought it was Ghost Mountain," he said. In his role as *Ghost Town*'s Ranger Buck he'll be out in the streets of the Wild West participating in some gun fights -- which he loves --but in addition to keeping peace in town, Robbins' role takes him to nearby towns and cities where he is making appearances at conventions, Welcome Centers across the state to promote *Ghost Town*. At the Biltmore Square Mall in Asheville recently he had an opportunity to rub shoulders with a lot of children, teaching them about the western heritage and *Ghost Town*. Robbins said the closing of *Ghost Town* had Top a dramatic impact on the economy of *Maggie Valley* and as he's visited merchants in the Valley and they've expressed their joy in the theme park's revival. "*Ghost Town* was the life flow of this area," he said and when it closed, a lot of people were affected. Since the theme park is open every day, Robbins is away from home quite a bit, the only downside to his new job. "I'm having a really good time but I don't like being away from home this much," he said. But as the season gets under way he hopes to be home a little more. When Larry and Debbie were married, he was a student at Western Carolina University so being back in the area is like coming back to a second home. " We wandered all over these hills looking for rocks and minerals," Robbins said. "I was teaching in the geology lab then and *Ghost Town* was here. We've come here to visit." After the couple's daughter Sherri got too "old" for the family excursions *Ghost Town* and his responsibilities at work, he didn't visit the old *Ghost Town* much. He's as glad as anyone to be back in the saddle again. His passion for the old west began as a child when his father, the late Carl Robbins "passed that light on down to me and my older brother, Joe," he said. " We were raised on the old black and white, B-western movies. They taught moral values. They taught you right from wrong and we want to try to keep that going. We want to work with the children, keeping the heritage going. We are really trying to put a lot of integrity into this (work) in duplicating the old west." Also at *Ghost Town* and *Maggie Valley*, Robbins will share the Silver Screen Saddle Pals philosophy to help children. " We'll have a program similar to that and hopefully the whole town will be a part of that," in offering light to underprivileged children. " This all has allowed me to play cowboys. And I do hope to get back in town and chase some outlaws around," he added. *Ghost Town* is open

through November, weather permitting. Visit www.ghosttownintheksy.com for more information. Contact Gordon via e-mail at jgordon@thedigitalcourier.com

Highlights: Ghost Town, in the Sky, Maggie Valley, Partners, Ghost Town