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Program companion website:
www.pbs.org/independentlens/lastcowboy/

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THE LAST COWBOY FILMMAKER JON ALPERT FOLLOWS A REAL AMERICAN COWBOY FOR MORE THAN 20 YEARS

Film to Air On PBS's *"Independent Lens,"*
the Emmy Award-Winning Series
Hosted by Edie Falco
Tuesday, October 25 At 10 PM (Check Local Listings)

(San Francisco)—Every week in the United States, 250 farms and ranches go out of business. Will the Sager family ranch be next? Twenty-three years in the making, Jon Alpert's **THE LAST COWBOY** follows Vern Sager, a real American cowboy, through his hardscrabble life in one of the most isolated places in America. Out on the range with temperatures so extreme your herd can freeze overnight, Vern faces an army of adversaries: cattle rustlers, international agribusiness, old age, the weather and the wanderlust of his own family. **THE LAST COWBOY** will be broadcast on *Independent Lens*, hosted by Edie Falco, on Tuesday, October 25 at 10 PM (check local listings).

The Sager family owns a ranch in Porcupine, South Dakota, in the middle of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, located in Shannon County, the poorest county in America. Unemployment (around 80 percent), disease and lack of education produce a discouraging statistical profile that resembles data from Third World countries.

Shannon County, the historic and current site of "Cowboy versus Indian" tension, contains the sites of the Wounded Knee Massacre and the AIM occupation of Porcupine Butte, all just a horse ride from Vern Sager's home. In recent years, the "big city" of Gordon, Nebraska (population 2,175), has lured most of Porcupine's youth away from ranch life with the promise of jobs, minimarts and paved streets.





Jon Alpert has been following Sager's life for more than two decades, hoping to show the raw reality of a rugged lifestyle romanticized by generations of film and television producers. The camera catches Sager up at three AM on a February morning when the temperature is 20 below zero, as he tries to keep the new calves from freezing to death. "Somehow, they all want to have their babies on the coldest day of the year," he says.

Alpert follows Sager as he toils under the August heat, a merciless drought squeezing the life out of his crops and cattle, and battles with the commodity brokers who fix the prices and somehow every year walk off with most of the cowboy's "profits." It is a hard, hard life and if Sager weren't such a hard worker, he'd have been forced into town a long time ago. A generation ago, 90 percent of the Sager clan earned their living off the land. Only five percent farm or ranch today.

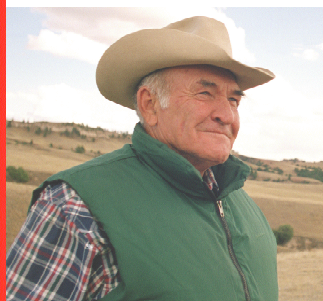
All of Sager's kids have moved to town except for Mark, a former rodeo champion who fell in love with a Native American woman and married her (and her four kids), transforming the Sagers into a "Cowboy/Indian" family.

THE LAST COWBOY documents the Sager family's battle to maintain its dawn to dark "Git Along Little Dogies," cowboy way of life. It captures the inner landscape of the last cowboy's character, courage, strength and stubbornness, and the outer landscape of his South Dakota home.

THE LAST COWBOY interactive companion website (www.pbs.org/independentlens/lastcowboy/) features detailed information on the film and an interview with the filmmaker as well as links and resources pertaining to the film's subject matter. The site also features a Talkback section for viewers to share their ideas and opinions, preview clips of the film and more.

CREDITS

Director	Jon Alpert
Editor	John Custodio
Camera/Audio	Jon Alpert
Additional Editing	Dani Froelich
	John J. Godfrey
	Craig Renaud
	Jon Alpert
Associate Producers	Tami Alpert
	Duncan Cameron
	Maryann Deleo
	Mariya Greenfield
	Keiko Tsuno



ABOUT THE FILMMAKER



JON ALPERT (Director/Camera/Audio)

Alpert has won 11 Emmy Awards for News and Documentary Programs and one National Emmy for Sports Documentary. Over the past 30 years, he has consistently gained access to behind-the-scenes events of historical significance and interviewed world leaders when other reporters were not allowed. After the Vietnam War, he was part of the first American TV crew to film in Vietnam. When Fidel Castro came to address the UN in 1979, Alpert and his team were the only non-Cubans allowed access to Castro. After the Gulf War, he was the only reporter to have interviewed Saddam Hussein. More than a hundred of his reports from Vietnam, Cuba, the former Soviet Union, China, Nicaragua, Korea, Afghanistan, Iraq and all parts of the U.S. have been widely broadcast on NBC, ABC, CBS, HBO, PBS, ESPN, Canadian and Japanese major networks. Alpert is the co-founder and co-director of the Downtown Community Television Center, America's largest and most honored non-profit community media center.

Alpert's films include *Cuba: The People* (1974), *Chinatown: Immigrants in America* (1976), *Vietnam: Picking Up the Pieces* (1977), *Third Avenue* (1980), *One Year in a Life of Crime* (1987), *Rape—Cries from the Heartland* (1992), *Lock-up: The Prisoners of Rikers Island* (1995), *Life of Crime—Part 2* (1998), *A Cinderella Season—The Lady Vols Fight Back* (1998), *From Ground Zero to Ground Zero* (2002), *Papa* (2002) and *Latin Kings: A Street Gang Story* (2003).

ABOUT INDEPENDENT LENS

A film festival in your living room, *Independent Lens*, is an Emmy Award-winning weekly series airing Tuesday nights at 10 PM on PBS. Hosted by Edie Falco, the acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement and unflinching visions of independent producers, which has prompted *Television Week* to call it "Entertaining as hell and better than any other documentary series around."

Presented by ITVS, the series is supported by interactive companion websites and community engagement campaigns. Further information about the series is available at www.pbs.org/independentlens. *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS, and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts.

ABOUT ITVS

Independent Television Service (ITVS) funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web and the Emmy Award-winning weekly series *Independent Lens* on Tuesday nights at 10 PM on PBS. ITVS is a miracle of public policy created by media activists, citizens and politicians seeking to foster plurality and diversity in public television. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences. Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have revitalized the relationship between the public and public television, bringing TV audiences face-to-face with the lives and concerns of their fellow Americans. More information about ITVS can be obtained by visiting itvs.org. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a pri-

ABOUT PBS



PBS, headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia, is a private, nonprofit media enterprise owned and operated by the nation's 349 public television stations. Serving nearly 90 million people each week, PBS enriches the lives of all Americans through quality programs and education services on noncommercial television, the Internet and other media. More information about PBS is available at www.pbs.org, the leading dot-org Web site on the Internet.

The images found in this
release and more are
available to the press
as high resolution
downloadable photos
with captions and credits at
www.itvs.org/pressroom/photos/

PAGE 1:

Left: Vern Sager on the ranch.
Photo: Mariya Greenfield / ITVS
Center: Vern Sager with his grandson.
Photo: Kathy Landham / ITVS
Right: Vern Sager
Photo: Kathy Landham / ITVS

PAGE 2:

Left: Vern Sager, the last cowboy.
Photo: Kathy Landham / ITVS
Center: Vern Sager with his son Mark.
Photo: Kathy Landham / ITVS
Right: Jon Alpert (Producer/Director) of THE LAST COWBOY.
Photo: Daniel Cashin / ITVS



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