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Significant Women in Oklahoma Agriculture Highlight: Vikki Schumacher

By: Jack Carson

KENTON—The past and present are both easily found where Vikki Schumacher lives.

In the farthest corner of the Oklahoma Panhandle, an area once known as “No Man’s Land,” the work of cattle ranchers remains remarkably similar to the way it was four generations ago. Computers and cellular phones are part of everyday life but the really important work is done from the back of a horse.

For Schumacher, ranching on land her family has owned since the 1870s has been not only a satisfying life but nearly ideal to raise her family. With no nearby stores or restaurants and the nearest neighbors many miles away, she admits not many people would agree with her.

“It takes a very special person to want to live and work out here,” Schumacher said. “I think a person has to be born to it. If I weren’t from here I would think it was too dry and windy to want to be here.”

Growing up near the shadow of the Black Mesa, some 25 miles from the county seat of Boise City, Schumacher spent summers on horseback moving cattle, looking for better grazing or water. It was hard work, but to a young girl growing up in the saddle, it didn’t seem out of the ordinary.

“It was a hard life but it was also a very good life,” Schumacher said. “I guess I just thought that’s what we were supposed to do and that it wasn’t any different than what anyone else did.”

The work she and her sisters did on the ranch helped her parents, Wesley and Ruby Labrier, to grow the ranch into the successful legacy it became. She said it was their hard work that eventually allowed her and her family to succeed in later years.

“They deserve credit for putting the ranch together and helping us have what we have here today,” Schumacher said.

She also credits her parents for fostering her appreciation for education, sports and an active church life.

“The closest school was at Kenton when I first started but it closed after I had been going three years,” Schumacher said. “The next closest school was in Boise City and to me it was just a huge school. There were 25 kids in my class and I was scared to death. I had never known anything like it.”

With encouragement, she eventually grew to like school and participating in sports such as basketball. After graduating, she attended college at West Texas State where she majored in secondary education and met her husband, John.

“After we graduated we moved to Abilene, Texas, and I taught school and coached girls’ basketball and track for a few years,” Schumacher said. “I liked teaching but the ranch was calling me and we came home and haven’t looked back.”

She and her husband, John, are continuing her parent’s work by building the ranch, making it more efficient and improving the genetics of their cattle through selective breeding practices like artificial insemination.

Schumacher said little has changed in terms of their ranch practices, but technology has made life easier.

“In some ways my job is so much easier due to technology,” Schumacher said. “Years ago, we fed cattle by handfuls out of bags. Today we can back under the cake bin, load the feed and select the setting to feed eight pounds per head or whatever we need to feed.”

Communication is another area that has improved life for the Schumacher family and their neighbors.

“When I was growing up all we had out here were party line telephones so if you wanted to make a private phone call you had to drive to Kenton to the phone company office,” she said. “Today we have our cell phones and can go online and communicate whenever we need to. Progress is good.”

Two daughters and three granddaughters are now helping out on the ranch and Schumacher said she is thankful they are getting to experience the same life she grew up with.

“We’re blessed to get to do what we do, working in agriculture and tending the land,” she said. “We get to do the Lord’s work and that’s what it’s all about. We get to use His land and play in it.”

Will her granddaughters follow in her footsteps?

“You want them to do that but all we can do is help them get their feet wet learning what this is about and seeing if this is what they want to do,” Schumacher said. “Who knows, one of them may want to be president of the United States someday.”

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Editor’s note: This is part of a continuing series of stories on Significant Women in Oklahoma Agriculture. The project is a collaborative program between the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food & Forestry and Oklahoma State University to recognize and honor the impact of countless women across all 77 counties of the state, from all aspects and areas of the agricultural industry. The honorees were nominated by their peers and selected by a committee of industry professionals.



Photo Caption: Vikki Schumacher, pictured with husband John, is a fourth generation rancher in Cimarron County. She is being recognized as a Significant Woman in Oklahoma Agriculture.