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Florida's Top Cattlewoman Is Back!

"It's exciting!" That's how Jennie Lee Zipperer of Fort Myers enthusiastically sums up her return to the cattle business after a hiatus of nearly fifteen years. Though health issues took her out of the industry for a while, this pioneering, award-winning cattlewoman can find no reason now not to jump back in.

At Devil's Garden, the 7,000 acre ranch and bird sanctuary outside of Fort Myers owned by the Zipperer family, the focus is on superior Beefmaster cows, as well as commercial cattle. "The cow family is what's important to me," says Zipperer. "The bulls are important, but the cows are the backbone of the herds. Building genetic blocks is difficult and time-consuming. You've got to stack the traits in the best way possible." And this focus is already paying off: "We took eight commercial Beefmaster cross heifers to the recent Florida Association Annual Replacement Sale in Arcadia and tied for highest average prices."

Zipperer's study of genetics goes back to her student days at the University of Florida, where she also met her husband, whom she wed in 1953. She married into agriculture – her father-in-law had established Zipperer Farms in Fort Myers, which specialized in growing and supplying gladiolas. Jennie Lee began cross-breeding the strongest, disease resistant



Pictured above: Gerald Bowie, Jennie Lee Zipperer, and Clark Jones at the SEBBA Hall of Fame.

Florida field grown gladiolas. They grew from seedlings to bulbets to flowering plants. Then the flowers were selected for color, growth characteristics and shipping ability. When all criteria were passed, a new variety was born.

Soon her interests expanded to cattle. In 1960 she purchased a small herd of Florida cattle and began studying cattle genetics and breeding. Eventually she bred Black Baldie cows with Beefmaster bulls and began making a name for herself by producing stock of considerably improved weight and beef quality.

Zipperer's commitment, organizational skills, and natural leadership abilities took her to the forefront of the industry and earned her impressive recognitions. She held several offices and sat on the boards of the Southeastern Beefmaster Breeders Association (SEBBA) and Beefmaster Breeders United (BBU). In 1991 she was named SEBBA Member of the Year,

Jennie Lee Zipperer with her grandson, Will Jones with herd bull Bonanza in background.



and in 1992 she was elected the first female president of the Association. In 1995 she was selected BBU Breeder of the Year.

Zipperer was instrumental in promoting the Florida cattle industry around the world, especially in Central and South America and Australia, and has chaired an international conference. She maintains that south Florida is the perfect area from which to conduct her business because of the easy access

to shipping by water and by air. In 2003 she was named Woman of the Year in Agriculture in Florida, an award sponsored by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the Florida State Fair Authority.

Zipperer is interested in and supports everyone in the business, no matter what the breed. She mentions a good neighbor across the road who breeds Brangus cattle. But it's no surprise that this second time around, Zipperer is breeding Beefmaster cattle again. She's a believer in the concentration on the Six Essentials used in developing this breed, and she cites her longevity in the Association and the wonderful people who run it. She says that members "have access to home office directors right at the top. It's a wonderful system; not all organizations are like this."

Zipperer says that she aims to "do just as well or even better" this time, and she recognizes changes, positive ones, that have transpired during her absence from the business. "The competition is bigger, better, and smarter." Her main goal is consistency in the quality of her calves.

Last year, Zipperer attended her first Beefmasters convention in a long time. She laughs while describing a young man there who approached her with admiration and went on to say that his father had told him all

(Continued on page 95)



Sunrise at the farm.

about her. "I felt like a movie star who is now just a has-been!" she jokes.

She is grateful for how her involvement in Beefmaster breeding has impacted "just about every facet of what I am today. It goes back to the people – smart people who broadened me all the way around. Every time I go somewhere I learn. You can't help but learn." She says it's hard to pick a top moment in her career, but relates that two of her most cherished moments were becoming president at the biggest, most impressive convention to date in San Antonio, and being named to the SEBBA Hall of Fame.

Though she won't be seeking any more leadership positions, Zipperer says that she is "completely happy with my cows." She's also happy with her new herd sires, Bonanza and N'Sync. She loves sitting on her porch swing and watching the birds fly around, and she enjoys the people who come from all around to bird watch. Her large family (four children, numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren) is certainly a source of joy. All of her children have been involved in her business endeavors; son Douglas is a full partner in Zipperer Beefmaster. Mrs. Zipperer has been a great role model for the younger generations by showing how a woman can balance international career success with causes closer to home – she has been involved in church work, Scouting, community planning, political campaigns, PTA, and garden clubs. Her energy and dedication to the people and

things she loves have always been remarkable.

Jennie Lee and John recently celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. She chuckles about how John kept her in anticipation of her gift, insisting that she open it in front of everyone at a family dinner. He presented her with "a flat piece of nothing," and she opened the envelope to find a picture of a red bush-hog. And to make the occasion complete,

he had bought himself an orange tractor. Sounds perfect for this colorful ranching couple. □



Zipperer Herd Sire Bonanza

Ned Waters Gallery to be presented December 14th at FCA Showroom

Kenton's Cowboy Classics is pleased to present the art gallery and collection of cowboy artist Ned Waters at their semi-annual open house at the Florida Cattlemen's Association home offices on Saturday, December 14th, from 4 pm to 7 pm.

Well known for his service in the cattle industry, Ned is also an accomplished artist and a visionary among his fellow artists. His acrylic landscape paintings capture the essence of old Florida and is among the finest in the state. Self-taught over the years in the old traditions of the masters, Ned continues to strive for excellence in the visual arts. He is a craftsman and whip maker as well and his cow whips are an integral part of his art collection.

Ned has served throughout his adult life in various capacities with local and state agricultural associations and he is recognized today as a Vice President of the Florida Cattlemen's association. At home in his gallery with his wife and family at the head waters of the Peace River in rural Polk County, Ned is a member of the prominent Waters family, pioneers of old Hillsborough and Polk counties and his heritage and traditions are reflected in his artistic style.

His painting "Nearing Savannah" depicts cowhunters of 1864 as they attempt to cross the



Altamaha River with Florida scrub cattle in an effort to feed the Southern soldiers of the Army of Northern Virginia during the War for Southern Independence. The painting dramatizes the Southern cause and brings to life the trying times of a short but colorful period in Florida history.

The open house on December 14, will be hosted by Rose Marie Kenton Anderson, daughter of the late cowboy artist Ernest "Buster" Kenton and Tom Bass, National Cowboy for the state of Florida. Appearing also will be Nashville recording artist Kenyon Lockry to sing your favorite country and western tunes. For further information, contact Patty Yates 407-446-8920. □