

Women's work: Foley Peak Angus

By **GAIL OBERST**
For the Capital Press

GARIBALDI, Ore. — Karen Kuntz, owner of Foley Peak Angus, admitted some men don't take her seriously in the cattle ranching business.

"They think I don't know anything about it," she shrugged. Most men she works with know her lifetime reputation in the business, but some can't see past her wavy blonde hair and girlish good looks, despite her 66 years.

"No matter what, this is my passion. I'll do it as long as I can," she said.

Karen almost single-handedly manages 100 head or more of angus-cross cattle, 25 game birds, 40 laying hens, two horses, three hives of honeybees, and a variety of apples, pears and plums that occupy her 160 acres along the Miami River and Foley Creek.

Her husband, Leo, who owns a tide gate engineering business, helps when he can, but the ranch is her baby. She's also gets help from her three dogs: Cassie, a Newfoundland; Elsa, a Leonberger; and Joey, an Australian cattle dog. When she discusses the ranch with them, it's unclear

who owns whom.

If she were mean, which she is not, Karen could thumb her nose at those who suggest a woman can't run a cattle ranch. Her operation won her the Tillamook Soil and Water Conservation District's Cooperator of the Year Award in 2018.

The year before, the Oregon Cattlemen's Association and the Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife awarded her the Riley Freeman Award. Both awards and the USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service mentioned Karen's grazing and waste management plans that aim to protect soil and water quality on her land while improving the health of her herd and her business.

Karen's love of ranching began with her birth in Tillamook, near where her father managed Judge Beltz's dairy. The dairy closed in 1973, but 357 acres of the property is now Sitka Sedge State Natural Area, about 5 miles north of Pacific City.

Karen and her brothers helped with the dairy until the Beltz family sold the cows and closed the dairy. She spent the 1970s working at the Mt. Hebo Air Force Base, and then as a secretary in the



Karen Kuntz manages 100 head of angus-cross cattle and other critters on 160 acres along the Miami River and Foley Creek near Giribaldi, Ore.

Gail Oberst/For the Capital Press

Forest Service's engineering department. In 1986, Karen met and married Leo, a commercial fisherman who has since established Nehalem Marine, designing tide gates on agricultural property all over the Northwest.

Foley Peak Angus is just a few miles from the five acres where Karen and Leo first settled in the narrow Miami River Valley, surrounded by ridges that block the coastal winds. While some couples bring pets into their union, Karen brought her two red Angus cows, and quickly began collecting more to build a herd.

"Those five acres didn't last very long," she said. The couple leased and purchased land in the watershed, expanding the herd to 300 head in the 1990s.

By 1999, Karen was work-

ing as a livestock inspector for the USDA and Leo's tide gate business was taking him all over the Northwest. The couple sold 100 head, shearing the herd to a size manageable for Karen. In 2006, Karen left

the USDA job to work full-time on her ranch.

Located smack in the middle of Oregon's Tillamook County dairy country, Karen's beef operation is almost an anomaly — there's just one other large beef ranch in the vicinity. She was born in dairy country. Why not dairy?

"Dairies take at least two people," Karen said, but then admitted: "I'd had enough of milking cows when I was young."

Foley Peak Angus sells grass-fed locker beef wholesale to the public by the half or whole. The company also sells breeding heifers to other cattle ranchers.

Information about the operation is at FoleyBeef.com. Visitors to the ranch are welcome, Karen said. Call 503-322-0265 to make an appointment.



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