

Stockgrowers honor Bob and Terri Morse

OBITUARY

Wayne Johnson
April 13, 1929 – Aug. 20, 2015

By Kathleen Ellyn
Wallowa County Chieftain

Bob and Terri Morse of Lost Prairie were named Stockgrowers Honorary Members this year.

Bob was unable to attend the awards banquet, Aug. 15, but he gave an abbreviated version of his "life as a rancher in Wallowa County" story to the Chieftain.

Longtime residents will enjoy the history of this account and recognize many of the old names. New Wallowa Countians will enjoy learning about how much work outside the ranch goes into being a rancher.

These days, Bob and Terri Morse live in Lost Prairie north of Flora where they still run a few cows in their "retirement."

They came to the area in 1981 from Pomeroy, Wash., where Bob met Terri. Both come from long lines of ranchers, Terri from a fifth generation farm family and Bob as a grandson and nephew of ranchers in Montana.

Bob graduated from Washington State University veterinary school in 1969 and went to work in Hermiston, moved to Lewiston, Idaho, from 1970-74 and then went to Pomeroy. There, he and Terri (Teresa Ann) combined their families and set about raising three kids and living out their collective dream.

"For me living in Lost Prairie was a lifelong dream," Bob said. "I'd made the decision to be a rancher when I was 5 years old. When the opportunity came up in 1981 we just went for it."

They bought the Max Roberts place and leased and farmed the George Botts place and the Nedrow place and ran a few cattle (200). They began building up their cowherd (400 cow-calf pairs) and had to add some land to run those.

"Our summer grass was across the Grande Ronde where we leased the Nelson Howard Estate place on Grouse Flats," Bob said.

Along the way they picked up a few cows belonging to neighbors who retired. When Chet and Harve Hafer retired, the Morses bought their cows and started running them on the Eden Bench. They kept up that allotment on the bench from 1986 to 2009.

"We always had something to do," Bob laughed.

Bob recalls that when they bought the Hafer cows they also rented the Irvin Hafer place.

"It was just an oral agreement and we leased that place for years and years," he recalled. "It was important to both of us that this was just on a handshake."

Ranching kept him plenty busy, but as most ranchers know, being involved in the political workings is also essential if one wants to continue ranching.

During those years Bob served on many boards and committees, driving an hour out of Lost Prairie to get to Enterprise, and several hours to meetings in LaGrande or Pendleton.

"Sometimes it was a challenge," he said. "It meant a little sacrifice. If I left, then Teresa Ann was doing the work."

Bob served as past president of the Stockgrowers Association in 1992 and 1993, troublesome years as he recalls.

"That was a time when the Wallowa-Whitman injunction threatening logging and grazing came along, and it required a lot of meetings and time. It was quite a thing to go through," he said. "The environmental groups had a saying at the time, 'Cow-free in '93,' meaning they intended to halt all grazing on Forest Service land."

In 1996 local ranching or-



Courtesy photo

Bob and Teresa Morse, Stockgrowers Honorary Members for 2015

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ganizations raised the funds to allow Bob to go to Washington, D.C., for the "Fly-in For Freedom" to lobby against the Wallowa-Whitman injunction.

He was then asked to be on the Access and Habitat Board with ODFW and after that the Snake River Resource Advisory Council. And the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project. "I was there as a permittee (grazing permit holder). It came along when there was going to be a lot of cuts to the Forest Service budget."

His final nomination was for the district vice president of Oregon Cattlemen's Association but poor vision made that difficult and he let it go to another man.

Terri also served, representing agricultural interests on the Environmental Justice Advisory Board in Salem and serving on the Commission for Children and Families. "She took that to heart," said Bob. "She made a lot of new friends on that commission."

"Serving became almost a full-time job," Bob said, but his cattle-raising job saw some great moments as well.

"In the late '90s we were fortunate enough to be part of Oregon Country Beef," Bob said. "At that time it expanded from 14 to 28 ranches and we marketed our own beef and pulled ourselves up by our own bootstraps, financially."

All during that time they raised those three kids. "They were a good baling team even when they were little," Bob said.

The Morses sold their cows in 2009 and the Anchor Ranch (Burns Ranch) took over the Eden Bench permit.

Bob and Terri were sort of relaxing into "ranchers' retirement," still running a few cows and were astonished to be honored by the Stockgrowers.

"I'm surprised I got this award," Bob said. "I don't think I'm quite that old yet. I still think there are people who've been here a lot longer than me that should have got this."

He's only half joking. There are, indeed, ranchers of advanced age, still ranching.

Joking aside, Bob is touched by the award. But, like a lot of guys used to big country and plenty of hard work, he keeps it simple

when he expresses himself. "I appreciate it," he said. "I appreciate it."

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