

Cattle:

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Dean said her 68-year-old husband underwent surgery in June when his oxygen was cut off and left him with brain damage. Dean placed the responsibility for the cattle's welfare squarely on the shoulders of the ranch managers, B.J. and Emily Warnock.

"He was supposed to bring the cows down in October," Dean said. "They let the cows go down on their own."

The Deans also own ranches in Colorado and New Mexico. Dean said one of their wranglers from New Mexico visited the Oregon ranch to see what was happening. She said the wrangler said ranchers normally round up their cattle, take them to a pen and put them aboard a truck to ship to market.

"He said they don't do that (in Wallowa County)," Dean said. "They let (the cattle) find their own way down."

Dean emphasized that was why they hire locals wranglers to do the job.

"My husband doesn't physically do the cattle work," she said. "He pays B.J. to wrangle the cows. We're relying on people who live there that they would do the job."

Despite the Deans being the owners of the land and livestock, Dean holds the Warnocks responsible.

"They're responsible," she said. "We called him every other day to get him to bring those cattle down."

Dean added the Warnocks signed releases as property managers for the Deans.

"Those cows were his responsibility," she said.

But B.J. Warnock disagreed with Karen Dean on the nature of their business relationship.

"Mrs. Dean is not our employer and she is misinformed," Warnock said in an email. "Typically, in a situation like this, the owner blames the manager, who blames the crew, and so on. We are not going to do that. Unfortunately, I was never officially named or authorized to act as manager, which left me without decision-making authority



Calves rescued from the deep snows in the Upper Imnaha get some refreshment Sunday, Jan. 2, 2022, at the Joseph-area ranch of Mark and Anna Butterfield. They are among many rescued in the past week.

Anna Butterfield/Contributed Photo

to act in critical situations. We did have a main crew of seven people gathering Dean Oregon Ranches cattle. We are very proud of all of their hard work and the fact that they have stuck with the job despite extenuating circumstances."

Attorney involved

Chris Gramiccioni, an South Carolina-based attorney for the Deans in their ongoing lawsuits over handling of nursing home evacuations last year at the time of Hurricane Ida, said the Deans and their attorneys were just learning of the situation with the cattle.

"My client is not happy with what happened to those cattle," he said. "My client had a team of people who were supposed to bring the cattle down from the mountains."

Gramiccioni, who said the Deans have paid the cost to fly in hay and help rescue the cattle, declined to comment specifically if the Deans shared responsibility for the fate of the cows and their calves.

"I have to be cautious on

answering that because it could be the subject of litigation," he said. "Our client is taking it very seriously. It's not something he's taking lightly."

In an emailed statement, Gramiccioni said the Dean Oregon Ranches have historically entrusted livestock management to a local onsite expert familiar with the land in Wallowa County.

"Thankfully, most livestock were recovered before the snows made routes impassable. Dean crews have worked tirelessly to ensure the care and feeding of the remaining animals while ongoing efforts are undertaken to bring them back down to the ranch," he said. "The Dean family is truly grateful for the continued recovery efforts by local ranchers, state and county government officials, and volunteers. It is hoped and prayed that the continued search for the remaining cows will be successful, and we wish to ensure the community that rescue efforts will remain unwavering."

B.J. Warnock said on Jan. 2 that when they began gath-

ering the cattle in September, there were 1,613 Dean Oregon Ranches mother cows on summer range. Of those, 10 were found unrecoverable and 1,548 Dean Oregon Ranches mother cows were successfully gathered before the snows of late December. Since then, another 34 mother cows were gathered in joint efforts between the ranch crew and the community. Warnock said 26 of those were Dean Oregon Ranches cattle and the others were owned by neighboring ranches.

As of Monday, Jan. 10, no updated figures on the number of cattle lost or saved were available.

As for the Deans' troubles over the nursing homes, the Advocate of Baton Rouge reported that the Louisiana Department of Health pulled the licenses of seven of Dean's nursing homes in the wake of Hurricane Ida which ravaged Louisiana from Aug. 26 to Sept. 4. It was alleged that seven people died of the 843 residents he ordered evacuated and warehoused in the lead-up to the hurricane.

Rodeo:

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just spread more knowledge about rodeo and the western way of life, (and) to teach other young kids they can do whatever they want if they put their mind to it.

In her blood

That Wecks has reached this level of success in rodeo at such a young age really should not surprise anyone who knows her or her family. Her mother, Vixen Radford-Wecks, is a former CJD queen who judges rodeo pageants and coached Carr Ivie.

"It's definitely always been in my family, in my blood, in my heart — just growing up around it, the more and more I get to experience and create these friendships," she said.

But it's not solely because of that heritage that she is where she is at — it's her own drive and growing love for rodeo, for the Western way of life.

"It's definitely made my passion stronger, and my dream become more big and real," she said.

The passion has even extended beyond anything her mother can comprehend, even though the two have shared countless marathon drives from one rodeo to the next, horse trailer in tow. Radford-Wecks even asked her daughter about it one evening on a long drive.

"I think people think I make her do it, (but) she said, 'It's because of the family I have gained. I can be anywhere in (the) state ... and I know somebody. It's my extended family I have gained,'" Radford-Wecks said. "I have no reason to tell her not to. ... She is still very grounded in what has been her goal. It has been her goal since she was 6. It didn't change. It's gotten stronger."

The younger Wecks has benefitted from her mom being a pageant judge, as she can gain a behind-the-scenes look at what a judge

is gauging.

"She can say, 'At this pageant, she wore this outfit, (she) said this well.' I can feed off of that for my daily activities," Wecks said. "I've always said you can't ever learn too much. Everyone has something to (help) you in, even if you don't take the advice."

Opie

Wecks has spent most of her time in rodeo with one horse as her main steed — an American quarter horse named Opie.

"Technically, he's my mom's horse, but I might have accidentally stolen him," she quipped.

When the family purchased the horse at age 4 — he's now 11 — he was going to take some work.

"He was really lame in his feet. The people didn't want to spend the money and the time to make him rideable again," Wecks said. "We took him as a ranch horse in case we needed to do a lesson."

The horse did have some professional training in his background, and in time, largely with Wecks' guidance, he became her partner in the arena.

"Hours in the saddle, time on the road, time spent with him. He'd never done any rodeo queen things — packing flags (or) a parade. That was an experience with him."

Coronation

Wecks is excited to have the coronation and to share it with that extended rodeo family — including people who may not have heard of Wallowa County previously.

"You have coronation in this small remote part of Oregon that is home to me — it's amazing that I can welcome all these other Oregonians to my hometown to show them what it is to me," she said.

The event is a fundraiser for the year ahead, and Wecks said she is looking for more sponsorship help. Those who wish to be a sponsor can reach out at destinywecksrodeo@gmail.com.

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Pet of the Week

KITTEN GALORE!

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ATHLETE OF THE WEEK

DESTINY WECKS

This week we go to the rodeo arena, and Destiny Wecks. The Enterprise High School senior recently began her year-long reign as Miss Teen Rodeo Oregon, and this weekend will have a coronation ceremony at the Enterprise Elks Lodge. It's the latest in a growing list of titles for the 18-year-old, who has previously been Miss Rodeo Oregon Sweetheart, Junior Miss Rodeo Oregon and a co-queen of Chief Joseph Days.

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