

# Stock sale draws buyers from all over

By SAMANTHA O'CONNOR  
Baker City Herald

BAKER VALLEY — With sunshine bringing a bit of late winter warmth to Baker Valley on Monday morning, March 7, it was a perfect day for the 43rd annual Harrell Hereford Ranch sale.

The lowing of cattle and the braying of horses was joined by the eager chatter of ranchers from all over the country as they mingled together, examining the animals that would go on the auction block.

The sale includes bulls, heifers and, for the 24th straight year, Harrell-Mackenzie quarterhorses.

The aromas of fresh hay and wood chips mingled with the smoky scent of barbecued tri-tip greeted the Harrells' visitors. Laughter and comments of "such a nice day" drifted among the gates and barns as a couple hundred people enjoyed a lunch prior to the sale.

Mingling among the distinctively colored red-and-white Herefords, Dan Forsea, a rancher from Richland, was looking for a bull or two.

"They've got good quality cattle. Keep getting better all the time," Forsea said of the Harrells' offerings.

He has attended the Harrells' annual spring auctions since they started, saying he and his dad, Walt, used to come together. Dan said his father, who died on Jan. 16, 2020, always enjoyed going to the auction.

"This is a good family, too," Dan said of the Harrells. "We've known them for years and they're just a really good family. It's always great to come out here."

Edna and Bob Harrell started the Harrell Hereford Ranch along Salmon Creek, northwest of Baker City, in 1970. The family's 80-acre home ranch has expanded to include several ranches and a herd of 400



The snowy Elkhorn Mountains provided a scenic backdrop for the Harrell Hereford Ranch's 43rd annual spring sale on Monday, March 7, 2022.



Ranchers have a look at some of the Herefords to go on the sale block Monday, March 7, 2022, at the Harrell Hereford Ranch near Baker City.

registered Hereford cows, 400 black baldy commercial cows, a 1,000-head feedlot and 25 quarterhorse broodmares.

The Harrells' cattle run on 8,000 acres of native range.

Edna Harrell continues to help at the ranch along with her son, Bob Harrell Jr., his wife, Becky, and their daughter, Lexie.

Bob Harrell Jr. was inducted into the Hereford Hall of Fame in Kansas City, Missouri, in October 2021.

### A nationwide attraction

John Rusher from Westcliffe, Colorado, was one of the many ranchers who traveled a long distance to partake in the auction of what he called "good, high-quality

Hereford bulls" and quarterhorses.

Landen Doyle traveled from Dallas, Texas, where his family owns the Doyle Hereford Ranch. This was his first year visiting the Harrell Hereford Ranch.

"Always wanted to come up here and look at this ranch. Finally got the opportunity, came up here with my dad on his birthday," Doyle said.

Dan Cook, who traveled from Idaho, attended last year's auction as well, which included both in-person and online bidders.

Jerry and Inesse Parks of Aiden, California, have been traveling to the Harrell auction for a dozen years to buy horses and bulls.

After mingling with the cattle and fellow ranchers, exchanging stories and laughing, everyone made their way into the auction barn. Food and beverages were available as country music filled the air.

Then the fun began with Bob Harrell Jr.'s words of thanks to those joining and those who helped with the auction.

The auctioneer went off, words flying, and the first bulls were bought

by ranchers from Nebraska, then Virginia and North Dakota.

### Assessing the beef industry

The beef business has had its ups and downs over the years, and recently, prices haven't helped much, according to some ranchers attending the Harrell sale.

"It's pretty expensive right now because of the hay. It's pretty tough to make a buck," said Cook, from Idaho.

Jerry Parks, from California, said the cattle market has gone up a bit, but it's unpredictable.

"It's up and down all the time," he said. "It seems like we never get hardly enough out of our product compared to what it gets after it leaves us. We just keep plugging along."

Forsea said inflation, which has significantly increased production costs for ranchers who depend on diesel and other petroleum products, is making it tough for producers.

And like many ranchers, Forsea is bothered by the dominance in the meatpacking industry by four large corporations. Building more small, regional packing plants would give ranchers more options for selling their cattle, and potentially boost prices.

The Biden administration this winter announced a campaign to encourage the construction of regional packing facilities.

"It's affecting everybody," Forsea said of inflation. "As far as the prices in the supermarkets, the cattle/calf man is seeing that difference. And it's packers and retailers and getting it from one place to another, fuel, and everything. But anyway, that's why we're in it for the long haul because eventually we might see a good year. So it's getting better. It's a good way of life."

# Lawmaker offers to buy Vale newspaper

Malheur Enterprise has been critical of Rep. Greg Smith

By ANTONIO SIERRA  
East Oregonian

VALE — Greg Smith's offer to buy the Malheur Enterprise came in a postscript.

An email exchange between Smith and Les Zaitz, the publisher and editor of the small weekly newspaper in Vale, over an editorial led to an offer to take the Enterprise off the market.

According to the email chain obtained by the East Oregonian, Zaitz wrote to inform Smith, the state representative for District 57 and the Malheur County economic development director, that he intended to publish an editorial critical of Smith and asked him for comment.

"I'm preparing an editorial for next week about the Malheur County Court's management of your company's contract," he wrote. "You will, in part, get a pass because you can't be blamed by taxpayers for getting what you can as easily as you can. But the issue of your truth telling is another matter. You lie. By that, I mean you declare as fact something you know to be false."

Smith responded by saying he wouldn't respond to "negative suppositions," but also added Malheur County residents were "begging" Zaitz to sell his newspaper and that it had no support.

"P.S. ... if you need a buyer for the paper, I'll pay \$35,000 cash," he wrote at the end of the email. "No employees included."

Later in the chain, Zaitz told Smith he would share



Les Zaitz works in 2018 at his newspaper, the Malheur Enterprise in Vale. He put the paper up for sale in early 2022, and Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner, a frequent subject of the Enterprise's investigative work, sent Zaitz an email offering to buy the paper. Zaitz, however, is not selling to Smith.

Smith's offer with the public.

"Let's see what the community — and the state — thinks of your idea of buying a paper to shut it down," he said. "Thanks for the offer. We'll be in touch."

Smith followed-up by clarifying he would not shut the Enterprise down if he bought it.

"I already have staff in place that would run the paper quite well," he wrote. "I never said it would be shut down."

In a response to a request for comment, Smith provided a written statement.

"The Malheur Enterprise, a privately owned company, publicly announced it was for sale," he said. "Gregory Smith and Company, also a privately owned company, made an offer to purchase the Malheur Enterprise. Other than being publicly 'mocked' by the seller, no reply to our offer has been received. Moreover, Gregory Smith and Company has

not publicly stated its reason for purchasing the paper. It is unfortunate, some speculate to the negative."

### Smith's history with the Enterprise

A two-time Pulitzer Prize finalist with The Oregonian, Zaitz, along with his family, bought the Malheur Enterprise in 2015.

Zaitz eventually took over the paper's editorial operations and worked toward growing the weekly's presence. Zaitz expanded the newsroom and started collaborations with national news organizations as the Enterprise collected new accolades and awards.

Today, Zaitz said the Enterprise is profitable and growing. As he neared his 50th year in the journalism business, Zaitz said he decided to sell the paper because he felt it was the right time to hand over the Enterprise to a new generation.

"We're not going to sell

to anyone that shows up with a check or a suitcase full of \$20 bills," he said. "The Malheur Enterprise is an essential source of local news and is a role model for local journalism. So its import goes beyond just reporting on Malheur County. Its import is also helping show newsrooms large and small how to do effective local journalism that generates business success."

When Smith made an offer to buy the Enterprise, Zaitz said he took it seriously.

Elected in 2000, Smith is the longest-serving legislator in the Oregon House of Representatives. Although his district's lines have shifted significantly over the years, Smith always has represented a chunk of Northeastern Oregon from his home in Heppner.

But being a legislator is only a part-time position. His full-time work involves him serving a number of eco-

omic development positions throughout Oregon, both within and outside his legislative district. Some of his titles include being the project manager for the Columbia Development Authority in Boardman, the director of the Eastern Oregon University Small Business Development Center in La Grande and the economic development director in Malheur County.

His status as an influential lawmaker who also is in charge of raising money for local projects and institutions around the state has earned him scrutiny in the media. Willamette Week referred to Smith as the "best compensated lawmaker in Salem" while also noting his actions were "perfectly legal."

The Enterprise also has done reporting on the connections between Smith's personal business and his work in the Legislature, in addition to focusing on his work in Malheur County, publishing stories on his contracts with the county and his handling of local economic development projects.

Zaitz declined to provide further details on the editorial that prompted the exchange with Smith before it was published, but later summarized the Enterprise's various dealings with Smith over the years.

"He complained that our

reporting on him represented criminal conduct," he said. "The sheriff looked into that and essentially laughed him out of Malheur County on that allegation. He has publicly ridiculed the Enterprise and has made representations that raise questions about whether the Enterprise is paying its taxes. This is a man who has a pattern of taking aggressive actions against the newspaper that is doing no more than reporting on matters of public importance."

After Smith made his offer, Zaitz followed through on his promise and shared excerpts from the exchange on the Enterprise's Facebook page and asked readers what they thought. As of the evening of Thursday, March 10, nearly 70 people have commented on the post. Almost all the comments either opposed Smith buying the paper, expressed support for the Enterprise's current ownership or both. Many questioned Smith's motivations.

Even if Smith doesn't get involved in the Vale media business, he'll continue to be a prominent figure in Eastern Oregon for the foreseeable future. No one filed to contest Smith in either the Republican primary or the general election, all but assuring him a 12th term in Salem.

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