

OZONA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE & VISITOR CENTER PARK

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CHAMBER DIALOGUE

Volume 16

Number 8

August 2019

The Chamber of Commerce would like to recognize 7 Oaks Ranch as our Business of the Month



7 Oaks Ranch (known to many previously as The Jack Ward Ranch) is a hunting, livestock and recreational property primarily focused on wildlife conservation and responsible land stewardship. Kelly Walker owns the ranch and manages the property with his sons Wayne, Philip & Caton and has had a connection to the land since the late 1940's. The ranch focus changed dramatically about 15 years ago: de-prioritizing livestock in favor of practices to achieve long-term range restoration and wildlife goals.

"The boys were concerned about the overall health of the rangeland due to overstocking and poor land management and wanted to take a much more proactive approach using science-based changes. I was reluctant to embrace this at first, but after deciding to give my blessing we have achieved dramatic results," says landowner Kelly Walker. "What we have found over the past few years is that these changes have produced better financial results for the ranch in addition to the ecological and wildlife conservation benefits that have been realized."

"Like many ranches in the area, ours was overgrazed for generations and prescribed fire was removed from the landscape. This resulted in massive encroachment of red berry cedar and the disappearance of grass," states Wayne Walker. The negative practices began to change when Wayne used the family ranch for his Thesis project while working on his Master's Degree in 2000. Shortly thereafter, the focus on how to manage the land started to change swiftly, especially when prescribed fire was reintroduced in 2009 with assistance from Dr. Charles Taylor of the Sonora A&M Research Station.

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“We were told a while back from a good friend that just because you are fortunate enough to have land doesn’t necessarily mean you know exactly how to manage it,” states Ranch Operations Manager Philip Walker. “That spoke volumes to us and we realized that we needed help, and that was something the ranch hadn’t done up to that point. We decided to open our gates and build a team of biologists and other partners (including Mary Humphrey of Texas Parks & Wildlife Department) who educated us and pointed us in the right direction, starting with a Wildlife Management Plan. We converted our Ag Exemption to Wildlife Valuation since our main focus was wildlife and land stewardship. Even though the main focus became land restoration and wildlife, we decided to run a limited amount of cattle because they simply are a ‘tool’ in reaching range goals and providing supplemental income.”

The cattle tenant is Ben Forehand, a native from Ozona. Ben is a great fit because he saw himself as “being in the grass commodity business just as much as the cattle business” and works very closely with the family to monitor the land and keep things in check. Ben Forehand also has an understanding of prescribed fire as well as experience managing hunters, which are added bonuses.

The family overhauled the under-performing hunting model that had been used for decades and hired professional hunting managers: Wildlife Systems out of San Angelo, operated by Greg Simons & Ruben Cantu. We wanted a professionally managed hunting program with folks that had a proven track record in the ranch, hunting and wildlife categories. Wildlife Systems helped get the ranch on the right track with helicopter surveys, the Texas Parks & Wildlife “Managed Lands Deer Permit” program and a completely restructured hunting program. “We want hunters that have similar philosophies as ours while enjoying their time here, but if they’re not comfortable having a relationship with Game Wardens for example, then they’re probably not the kind of people we want,” states Philip Walker.

7 Oaks Ranch focuses on many criteria supporting the wildlife approach with the main component being prescribed fire. “We are huge proponents of prescribed fire and have burned close to 1300 acres this year (2019) through a collaborative effort with the Texas Parks & Wildlife Foundation & Quail Forever. Dollar-for-dollar it’s the best way to control the invasive brush, renew the grasslands and other native plant species, as well as restore the soil. I love to watch the wildlife come to the areas when the land begins to recover and ‘green up’. The wildlife just flock to the regrowth in burned areas. You could almost say our motto is ‘Fire & Water’ because we focus a lot of our time on and understand the importance of both,” says Philip Walker.

Other practices the ranch focuses on include pond creation, native seed planting, bird/bat box installation, feral hog control, supplemental feeding, pollinator habitat and Milkweed planting for Monarch butterflies.

One of the most important assets is the ranch’s volunteers and friends. For example, a close & dedicated family friend, Rusty Garvin, who knew Jack and Ellen Ward, helps by dedicating time communicating with the lease hunters and keeping them ‘organized’. Philip reached out to area universities to recruit students studying in the conservation field. “I wish I had thought of creating a student volunteer Conservation and Fire Team 10 years ago because they have been a tremendous ‘shot in the arm’ for our fire program. We have students from Sul Ross University, Angelo State University as well as Texas State University, and they have been an absolute blessing. The students have been well-mannered and fun to work with. It’s such a ‘win-win’ because they are getting hands-on training as well as accruing volunteer hours while spending time outdoors. I enjoy working with the students, and I believe they love being here because they keep coming back. We wouldn’t be where we are without our volunteers, family friends and hunters.”

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In addition to overseeing the day-to-day operations of the ranch, Philip focuses a large amount of time on attending land management seminars, pursuing grant opportunities, exploring other avenues of income and visiting other ranches. “You have to learn to be flexible and creative in order to get things done. We operate on a tight budget with aggressive land management goals, particularly prescribed fire, so I spend a considerable amount of time pursuing relationships to advance our land goals. Just like any business, it’s all about relationships whether you’re talking about building a strong team of consultants, looking for grant opportunities, recruiting volunteers, locating needed equipment, etc. It’s a never-ending job that I take very seriously. I want folks to know exactly where our values lie as soon as they enter the gates.

“Like many ranches, 7 Oaks has looked into other “hybrid” land uses such as educational field workshops, eco-tourism and even star-gazing to name a few. Since we have limited streams of income and lofty goals combined with the general hardships that come along with a ranch operation, we must look at other potential sources of income and adapt. Our focus is continuing with land restoration, the prescribed fire program, cattle and hunting, but we’re open to looking at other income streams similar to award-winning ranches that we model ourselves after, like Bamberger Ranch Preserve.”

7 Oaks Ranch has partnered with various organizations including Natural Resources Conservation Service, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension, Texan By Nature, Monarch Watch, Borderlands Research Institute (Alpine), Texas Wildlife Association, the Shumla Foundation (Comstock) and the “Pecos Trail” portion of the Texas Historical Association’s Heritage Trails Program.

The Ozona Chamber of Commerce would like to recognize 7 Oaks Ranch for their dedication to the ranch operation, and for their commitment to local land preservation and diversification.

For more information you may call Philip Walker at 325/392-9407 or 512/964-0655, e-mail PhilipW1972@gmail.com, or follow ranch activities at Facebook: 7oaksranch.

Chamber members recognized

The Ozona Chamber of Commerce would like to wish the following members a **HAPPY ANNIVERSARY**, and **THANK** them for their support of the Chamber organization, its programs and services, and their community. We would like to recognize and express our **SINCERE** appreciation to the following members who joined during the month of August.



Ozona Environmental– 1998
Esperanza Ranch-2005
Close to our Hearts Country Store-2010
Kenny Blane’s Village Café & Catering-2012
Hampton Inn-2016
Twistflower Ranch Nature Retreat-2017

Are you taking advantage of your member services

If you take a moment to browse around OZONA.COM, on the home page click on Job Postings and you will find fellow Chamber members who have posted available jobs at their place of business.

Click on Hot Deals and you will see a number of local businesses who are communicating a variety of messages to our 171 Chamber members and other subscribers to our Hot Deal e-Newsletter. Chamber members who are hosting events can also post on our web site.

Each month you receive this newsletter. Enclosed are a number of member flyers informing you about services available in Ozona provided by fellow members.

Moved your offices? Having a sale? Offering a holiday discount? Have old inventory you would like to move? Do you have a new product to introduce? Hiring? Just need visibility? As an added Chamber member benefit, the Chamber Dialogue is an ideal vehicle to gain additional exposure with businesses and individuals. Simply drop off or e-mail your flyer to the Chamber office by the first of each month. We will mail your flyer along with the newsletter to all Chamber members at no additional cost to you.

Help us to help you keep the community informed about your business activities. Fellow Chambers members are your customers!



Who walked into the Chamber of Commerce in July

Visitor Center

- Walk-in traffic into the Visitor Center in July was 1,011 people.
- Where were they from? Texas visitors-691, Out of State-277, Local-32, Foreign-11
- Year-to-date walk-in traffic is 6,471
- Traveling in July: East-568, West-287, North-30 and South-11
- Top visiting states for the month were-CA, NM, AZ, FL, LA
- Top visiting cities for the month were-El Paso, San Antonio, Houston, Austin, Midland,
- Weekdays in order of the busiest in July were Monday, Friday, Tuesday, Saturday, Wednesday, Thursday
- Year-to-date Chamber related inquiries 11%, and Tourism related inquiries 89%
- Top requested items or services for the month were: restaurants, directions, maps, Interpretive Trail

Advertising

- Year-to-date the Chamber has filled 7,557 requests for information on Ozona. An additional 1,547 brochures were handed out to walk-in visitors and mailed to statewide Travel Centers or inquirers.



What services are sought at www.Ozona.com

For the month of July at www.Ozona.com, there were 3,508 business directory searches, and 1,818 actual *member page hits*! **These are people searching for YOUR services. Following are the members that received 10 or more page hits this month:**

Family Health Center of Ozona-55	Epic Permian Operating, LLC-50
Venegas Construction, LLC-38	Ozona Cable & Broadband-36
Pon Seahorn Real Estate-29	Will M. Black Real Estate-29
Aries Residence Suites-28	Wool Growers Central Storage-27
Pandale Crossing River Resort-26	Eldorado Animal Clinic-25
Hillcrest Inn & Suites-25	The General Store-25
Angelo Inflatables, L.L.C.-21	Bill Black Ranch-21
Encino RV Park-21	HW Car Wash-21
Clayton-Hill Ranches-20	Sunoco Energy Services, LLC-20
Top O' The Town RV Park-20	Holiday Express Ozona-19
Ozona Insurance-19	CCWC&ID#1-18
John Stokes, CPA-18	Hampton Inn-17
Natgas, Inc.-17	The Café Next Door-17
Crockett County Abstract Company-16	Crockett National Bank-16
DCP Midstream Partners, LP-16	KYXX Ozona 94.3 FM-16
OverWatch Enterprises, LLC-16	Quality Inn-16
Sutton County Steakhouse-16	Triple C Hardware Lumber & Rental Inc.-16
Dust Devil Books-15	L & B Automotive-15
Lowe's Market-15	Escondido Draw Recreational Area-14
Fesco, LTD-14	Daun Williams Construction-13
Discovery Natural Resources, LLC-13	Pepe's Café-13
West Texas Rehabilitation Center-13	7 Oaks Ranch/Kelly W. Walker-12
Allen Ranch- 12	Approach Resources, Inc.-12
Bunger Real Estate Company, LLC-12	I-10 & 163 The Corner Store/Valero-12
Ozona Country Club-12	The Ozona Stockman-12
Western Poster Service, Inc.-12	Barnhart Shaw's General Repair-11
Ben Forehand Ranch-11	DJH Oil & Gas, LLC-11
Dairy Queen of Ozona Inc.-11	Fred H. Chandler Ranching-11
JJ Marley Ranch-11	Jody K. Upham, Attorney at Law-11
Southwest Texas Electric Coop-11	Super 8 Motel & RV Park-11
Total Office Solution of West Texas-11	Twistflower Ranch Nature Retreat-11
Americas Best Value Inn-10	Crockett Taxidermy & Processing-10
Dublin Hunters Group-10	J. Cleo Thompson-10
Mediajaw-10	Mi Familia Restaurant-10
Mills Divide Ranch-10	Shannon AirMed1-10
VIP Ranch Co.-10	White, Mr. & Mrs. Mark-10
X-Bar Ranch Nature Retreat & RV-10	

What is Ozona.com doing for our members and the community?

For **July 2019**, Ozona.com had 4,716 sessions: 3,743 new users 501 returning users

Of these 4,716 sessions, there were 8,434 page views – of these 6,957 were unique (1st time views)

The 4,716 sessions were from 54 countries and 3,748 sessions were from US.

Bounce Rate: 73.28% Avg. Session Duration: 00:01:19 Pages/Session: 1.79 Avg. Sessions/Month: 4,615

Devices Used to Access: Mobile: 68.12% Desktop: 26.68% Tablet: 5.2%

Top 5 States:

Texas	3,037
California	110
Florida	52
Oklahoma	46
Louisiana	44

Top 5 Texas Cities:

Austin	656
Dallas	656
Houston	351
San Antonio	189
Ozona	117

Top 20 Content Searches

1. Homepage	1,524	11. Area Attractions	163
2. Hunting	1,027	12. Business of the Month	161
3. County Officials	629	13. History	151
4. Travel Itineraries	577	14. Job Postings	149
5. Location	387	15. Public Services	134
6. Photo Gallery	264	16. Visitor Guide	125
7. Lodging	260	17. Public Parks	125
8. Pandale Crossing	198	18. Local Attractions	118
9. Restaurants/Dining	181	19. Interesting Facts	112
10. Events Calendar	166	20. Contact	78

Chamber Master (Membership Directory Data Base)

Business Directory Searches	3,508	Hot Deal Hits	289
Hot Deal Searches	79	Member Page Hits	1,818
Job Searches	298	Job Posting Hits	44

Top Searched Chamber Master Service Categories:

Hunting	24	Feed Store	16	Livestock Production	15
Roadside Assistance	18	Dry Cleaning	15	Oil & Gas Services	15
RV Parks	17	Land Clearing	15	Ranching	15
Utilities	17	Livestock	15	Roustabout	15

Social Media Pages / Internet

Facebook Tourism

8,678	Beginning Fans (6-30-19)
8,805	Ending Fans (7-31-19)
127	Net Likes
54,086	Total Paid Reach
16,004	Total Organic Reach
5,906	People Engaged
12,503	Daily Viral Reach
1,308	Daily Logged-in Page Views
82,431	Total Impressions of All Posts

Texas Outside

3,362	Impressions
39	Clicks
1.2%	Click-Through Rate

Facebook Business

463	Beginning Fans (6-30-19)
502	Ending Fans (7-31-19)
39	Net Likes
10,243	Total Paid Reach
5,740	Total Organic Reach
1,076	People Engaged
4,291	Daily Viral Reach
296	Daily Logged-in Page Views
22,465	Total Impressions of All Posts

Twitter

94	Total Followers
3,807	Impressions

Google

1,780	Search (approx.)
7,532	Total Google Business
	Page Views
7,375	Listings on Map
157	Listings on Search
1,236	Photo Views
49	Clicks to Website
43	Clicks for Driving
	Directions
11	Clicks for Phone Calls