

# JON MEANS' GOLDEN SPUR

Near Horsehead Crossing on the Pecos River nearly a 150 years ago, Jon Mean's great-grandfather along with his wife and child in a covered wagon were surrounded by Comanche. Horsehead Crossing was the first source of water for about 75 miles, and one of the few fordable areas on the Pecos. On this day, the Comanche offered him his life for his cattle.

"That was the easiest decision he ever made," said Jon, while recalling the family story.

After returning to San Saba, Texas, for another herd, Jon's great-grandfather tried ranching again with a little help from family. Jon's great-grandfather, John Z. Means was known to say there were too many folks for him in San Saba, so he decided to move back West. This time he made it to the Davis Mountains in West Texas, where he started his ranch in 1884.

Jon is now the fourth generation of his family to ranch in the Davis Mountains. Cousins and other family members ranch in New Mexico and West Texas, but Jon and his wife, Jackie call the Moon Ranch in Van Horn, Texas, home.

"I made little pens and pushed rocks into the pen," Jon said, "and I just always loved the cattle business, ever since I was three."

During his graduation from Texas Christian University in 1973, his father fell ill. By the age of 23, Mean's father passed away and he was running the family ranch.

Like his great grandfather, Jon knew that he must adjust, attempt to survive, and move forward. He often recalls a story involving a good friend and his father, when they were weaning calves off of cows. Jon still remembers the friend's dad's words, "you can do it, but it won't be easy."

"I have often thought of that," Jon said. "I think a lot of what we do, ranching, we can do it, but sometimes it's not real easy."

In fact, Jon said ranching in the Davis Mountains has never been easy.

"It is pretty unforgiving, but it is a wonderful country when it rains," Jon said. "It is pretty fragile when it doesn't rain, you have got to be nimble, and be able to change, and do things differently."

Through all the adversity, the Means Ranch continued to adjust, survive and move forward.



"We use to deliver our calves on a contract to one guy, on one day," Jon said. "Now we are involved with U.S. Premium Beef, and we got competitors."

Jon has been actively practicing conservation, to help the ranch adapt to new weather tendencies and better produce cattle, while keeping in mind local native species. Water distribution was a big first step. Providing cattle with increased and accessible water makes the cattle's life easier and keeps the grass from getting trampled. However, some of the conservation efforts Jon is most proud of are the falcon and antelope restoration programs that have taken place on his land.

"It is very gratifying to see where you have made a difference on some part of the land," Jon said, "but nature has to help you."

Jon has been a part of numerous associations in the industry over the years. From serving on the boards at National Cattleman's Beef Association and Texas Livestock Marketing, Jon and his wife, have found the associations work very gratifying. Jon was president of the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association from 2007 to 2009. While Jon was president of this association he remembers Hurricane Ike slamming the gulf coast of Texas.

"During Hurricane Ike we were able to help cattle people," Jon said, "and it wasn't through my efforts alone, but everybody jumped in and went to work."

Whether it is helping establish beef export programs to foreign countries or assisting in opening the Mexican border to cattle, Jon has tried to help. He even considers Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association part of the family.

Jon is humble when it comes to the work he has done in the industry.

"It is not just having your name on the leader board," Jon said, "it is a lot of work and travel, but the associations have definitely made a difference in our industry. We all can't go to town and go to meetings, somebody has to stay and take care of things."

Jon and Jackie's children, two daughters and a son, have interest in the ranch. Jon sees the ranch remaining in the family, but sees many things in the industry and on the Moon Ranch changing.

"They will probably ranch in a different way, they might not live here, and they might not do the day to day things that I have always done," Jon said. "But with technology, I think this younger generation is a lot better equipped to handle things better than we did, because of education."

Despite the never-ending challenges, Jon remains positive about the future of the ranching industry.

"In the drought and these hard times, eventually they will create an opportunity," Jon said. "We got to be able to take advantage of that, and I am hopeful that we will be able to do that in our industry."



Jon is the 2013 winner of the Golden Spur Award. The award recognizes the lifetime achievements of the nation's top rancher. It recognizes outstanding contributions to the ranching and livestock industries.

Matt Brockman, director of the National Ranching Heritage Center, believes Jon ranks high among past winners of this award.

"He has stepped up into leadership positions and served, but as soon as he has finished, he goes right back to the ranch," Brockman said. "Jon is most comfortable out there punching cows on the ranch and taking care of the ranch, and boy he does take care of it. He is natural resource conservationist, a cowman, a horseman, and you will not meet a more humble man."

"It is a great honor to me, to the ranch, and to everybody, my great-grandparents, my grandparents, my parents and our children," Jon said. "Jackie has made a huge contribution in my life and to the ranch."

Though Jon might not think he matches up with past winners, and is not as deserving, many in the industry disagree.

"When you see a man, like Jon, win an award like this," Brockman said, "that makes this award just that much more special just because he is so humble." 🐾

Brett Gay  
Keller, Texas



## PAST GOLDEN SPUR AWARD WINNERS

The Golden Spur Award is given by the Ranching Heritage Association with the support and coordination of various groups. The National Cattlemen's Beef Association and Foundation, along with the American Quarter Horse Association, Texas Cattle Feeders Association, Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association, Texas Farm Bureau and the Ranching Heritage Association pick a winner every year through a competitive process.

The Golden Spur Award was first awarded in 1978. The first recipient was Albert Knell Mitchell. Since then, many outstanding people have become recipients of the Golden Spur Award.

Watt Matthews won the award in 1981. Matthews was the last surviving member of a prominent West Texas Cattle dynasty. His death was recorded on the front page of major newspapers across the state when he died at age ninety eight.

In 1983 John B. Armstrong, former CEO of the King Ranch, took home the award.

R.A "Rob" Brown, Texas Tech alumni and past president of National Quarter Horse Association won the award in 1999.

Anne W. Marion, the owner of the 6666 ranch, received the award in 2001, due to her commitment to the ranching industry and conservation methods taken on the 6666 ranch.

Nolan Ryan won the award in 2011. The baseball hall of famer won it for his dedication to the beef industry. Ryan depicts this achievement through his Nolan Ryan Beef brand.

Buster Welch won the award last year, in 2012. Welch is well known in the cutting horse circles, as a world champion trainer and rider.