

# Ranching for Children



**"Preserving the western heritage for generations to come."**

— *Rocker b Ranch motto*



## ***This West Texas spread helps fund children's medical care.***

by **Sara Gugelmeyer**

**I**t's one of the largest contiguous ranches in the world. At 173,000 acres of rolling hills and river country in West Texas, the Rocker b Ranch in Barnhart is unique in its own right. It's not the cattle. The ultra-productive Hereford-Angus cross cow reigns supreme here just as it does on many ranches. It's not the horses, although they are some of the best cow-bred American Quarter Horse bloodlines.

It's that the Rocker b Ranch is owned by the Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Children that sets this operation apart. And all of the ranch's revenue goes to fund pediatric orthopedic medical care, which is provided regardless of a family's ability to pay.

### **Cowboy history**

The ranch has a long history, even before it was called the Rocker b. The ranchland was originally put together from 1871 to 1910 as the Bar S. Then in 1954 William Blakley, a lawyer-banker-businessman, later elected U.S. Senator, purchased the massive spread and changed the name to Rocker b Ranch.

In 1958 Blakley purchased the Windsor Place herd of Herefords, which were of Anxiety 4th bloodlines. That became the basis for his quality cow herd. The ranch still uses a Hereford-Angus cross cow herd today.

Blakley operated the ranch for about a decade before he gifted it in its entirety to the Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Children. With the



Senator Blakley, pictured horseback here, purchased the ranch in 1954 and stocked it with Anxiety 4th-bred Herefords shortly after.

ranch's large annual income from cattle, horses and minerals, Blakley's generous gift has helped fund the hospital for more than 50 years.

"Preserving the western heritage for generations to come," is the ranch's motto and it accomplishes that by using traditional cowboy methods to handle cattle and horses. Director of ranch operations, Dennis Webb, along with his son Cody and Cody's wife, Sarah, oversees the day-to-day operations.

The ranch sprawls across a large portion of Irion and Reagan

Counties. The gently rolling mesquite- and cactus-covered hills are home to an abundance of cows. The Middle Concho River and Centralia Draw provide lush grazing, but most of the ranch is a harsh, arid environment.

### **Hereford-influenced**

Because of that, the ranch management strives to maintain a 50-50 cross of Hereford and Angus.

"It's what works best for us on this type of country," Sarah Webb

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The ranch likes a Hereford-Angus cross, so Hereford bulls are bred to the solid black cows to produce baldies.



The ranch is striving to produce the best replacements and beef, so a black baldie calf like this one is ideal.

explains. “It is the most efficient cow with putting the best product back into the food chain on the plate. We generally don’t get a lot of rain; these cows have to work for a living.”

To accomplish this, solid black cows are bred to Hereford bulls and red or black baldie cows are bred to Angus bulls. In the last few years, the heifers have been retained to grow the cow herd after drought-forced reduction. The remainder of the calves are sold at weaning as source- and age-verified.

It is a cowboy operation. Like many large historical Texas ranches, the Rocker b is divided into “camps.” The seven camps each house a full-time camp man. He is in charge of the cows in his camp. Cattle are handled horseback, and during spring branding, the wagons are rolled out, and the cowboys work together to rope, drag and brand all of the calves produced each year.

Besides being “caked” or given a range cube supplement in the winter,

## About the Hospital

Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Children (TSRHC) is a world leader in the treatment of pediatric orthopedic conditions. It strives to improve the care of children worldwide through innovative research and teaching programs, training physicians from around the world.

TSRHC treats children with orthopedic conditions, such as scoliosis, clubfoot, hand disorders, hip disorders and limb length differences, as well as sports injuries and certain related neurological disorders and learning disorders, such as dyslexia.

The hospital was established in 1921 when a group of Texas Masons approached Dallas’ first orthopedic surgeon Dr. W. B. Carrell about caring for children with polio regardless of a family’s ability to pay. With the introduction of the Salk and Sabin vaccines in the mid-1950s, which virtually eradicated polio in the Western Hemisphere, TSRHC broadened its focus to other orthopedic conditions.

As a leading pediatric orthopedic center, the hospital has treated more than 250,000 children from birth up to 18 years of age with financial assistance available. TSRHC is the only Scottish Rite hospital in the world.

— Courtesy of Texas Scottish Rite Hospital for Children



A black baldie is the product of choice on the ranch — in order to produce a cow that will do well in the harsh environment and produce the best beef on the plate.



The ranch has a long Hereford history and still uses Hereford bulls today.

**Recently Cody has been in charge of putting together a small herd of registered cows from which to raise some bulls for use on the ranch.**



the cows must perform on what nature provides, Sarah explains.

Although the ranch experimented with a tigerstripe-composite cow for a while, for about the past 15 years, the black baldie has been the cow of choice at the Rocker b. Sarah says everyone appreciates the docility Hereford adds to the mix. It takes a large bull battery to service all of the ranch's cows, and Sarah says the ranch's Herefords bulls are often easier to handle.

The Rocker b has purchased Hereford bulls from Dudley Bros., Comanche, Texas, for nearly 50 years.

Just recently, though, Cody has been in charge of putting together a small herd of registered cows from which to raise some bulls for use on the ranch.

"We plan to supplement our bull battery with some that we raise," Sarah says. "We've played with raising bulls a little in the past but we've never done anything registered until now."

The Rocker b management isn't necessarily planning to sell seedstock, but isn't ruling that option out. Either way, Hereford genetics have been and will continue to be an integral part of generating revenue for children's medical care. **HW**