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Featured Article:

Today's Queens of Quail Country



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By Anna Van Nostrand

I was talking with Jon Kohler of Jon Kohler & Associates who told me that based on the history and trends they've been collecting on quail plantations in the Southeast, I was surprised at the prominent role women have played in regard to their hands-on property management and organizers of the gracious lifestyle synonymous with the continuing legacy of these properties.

The Southern sporting plantation has a heart and soul. The men in the family feature prominently and we associate them with the heartbeat: the bobwhite quail hunts, upkeep and firearms that celebrate the sportsmanship and Southern hunting traditions. But all these places have a soul as well, and its keeper is often the woman.

In the famed quail hunting Red Hills Region, we can look back in time to the archetypical modern women quail plantation managers and conservationists, Kate Hanna Ireland Harvey and her daughter Elisabeth Ireland Poe (Miss Pansy) of Pebble Hill Plantation in Thomasville, Georgia.

Kate was the daughter of Howard Melville Hanna of Cleveland, Ohio who bought the sprawling property in 1896. She went on to become Vice Chairman, Chairman and Chairman Emeritus of the Tall Timbers Research Center Board of Directors for 21 years and served as chief fundraiser and public relations advocate to the Red Hills plantations. Tall Timbers, based in Tallahassee, Florida, focuses its conservation efforts in the Red Hills Region that spans Tallahassee and Thomasville. The organization has pioneered the fire ecology of controlled burns for game bird management.

During her tenure with Tall Timbers, Kate negotiated deals that shepherded the conservation and research programs of Tall Timbers to long-lasting success. She led by example, becoming the first to donate perpetual conservation easements on her own land, and later recruiting other land owners to join the movement. Thanks to her efforts Tall Timbers has emerged as the most influential and far-reaching land trust in the Southeast.

Today, there are many great women "carrying the torch" of their predecessors.



Ginger & JK Whetherell at Oak Hill Plantation



Kathleen Kelly



Anna Van Nostrand

In the quail hunting and conservation communities of the Southeast Plantation Belt and elsewhere, these ladies not only hunt and enjoy the land for its own sake – they share it generously with others. They bring other ladies outdoors. They teach them and support them. They organize outings and socials, and the sense of community is as natural to them as anything else in their indoor or in-town worlds.

Erica Kohler, Partner at Jon Kohler and Associates, has focused her entire career on representing Southern plantations, high-quality recreational properties and ranches. But for Erica money alone doesn't automatically qualify someone to buy a property in the portfolio. She has strong opinions that the buyer should share the values and sentiments of the region regarding land stewardship, and quail and conservation.

She embodies the style and strength of women who come to the quail plantation lifestyle. She and her husband, Jon, not only represent these great properties but live the lifestyle and own Lick Skillet plantation, on the Aucilla River east of Tallahassee which has a Tall Timbers conservation easement, that they share with their two young sons, Greyson and Ashton. And as a landowner who specializes in these properties she understands the connection between the sporting life, land stewardship, and conservation.

In 2017, Kathleen and Kevin started Kevin's Southern Game Fair at Greenwood Plantation in Thomasville. The one-day event features Purdey shotguns, Kevin's Plantation Series of upland guns and bird dog demonstrations, among other events. Most important, though, the Kelly's donate all of the proceeds to the National Rifle Association Youth Initiative, Navy SEAL Foundation and Tall Timbers Research Center.

Deborah McKown is the editor of the online magazine Shotgun Life (www.shotgunlife.com). Deborah came to the quail life later than most women. A dedicated city-dweller, she lived in New York City, San Francisco, Boston and Miami. But after moving to Baltimore, which has a surprising amount of great clays shooting, she and her husband Irwin Greenstein started Shotgun Life in 2007 to share their passion for the sport with others. She made sure that Shotgun Life included plenty of information to help women get started in wing and clays shooting. Now living in Thomasville, she recently launched the Red Hills chapter of the national organization, The G.R.I.T.S. (Girls Really into Shooting). It's an informal group that meets once a month for some clays shooting and fun. Women with any interest in wing and clays shooting can participate regardless of their experience level.

“The Women’s Segment Is The **FASTEST** Growing Group In The Outdoor Industry.”

Erica's entire professional career has focused on advising, sales, and marketing of high quality land and plantations and also the valuation of these properties. In 2014 she became a Partner of Jon Kohler & Associates, the same year the company became a founding partner of LandLeader, the largest land marketing company in America, of which she has an ownership interest. She contributed to the success of Jon Kohler & Associates selling more than 215,000 acres and \$442,000,000 in sales since 2010 – making it far and away the leading plantation and high quality land brokerage covering all seven Southern plantation belts.

Kathleen Kelly, co-owner of Kevin's, a sporting goods and outdoor apparel store in Thomasville, is the most significant fashion influencer for women shooters and outdoor enthusiasts. In the past quarter century since Kathleen and her husband, Kevin Kelly opened Kevin's Fine Outdoor Gear & Apparel in historic downtown Thomasville, she has emerged as a leading designer for women's upland hunting apparel and gear. Kathleen has managed to synthesize comfort, function and style into their women's selections made available through their widely distributed catalog, web site and very popular store. She's an avid quail hunter, setting the fashion tone in the field. “The women's segment is the fastest growing group in the outdoors industry,” says Kelly.

Not all women involved in the quail plantation lifestyle are hunters. Ginger Wetherell, former head of Florida's Department of Environmental Protection, now dedicates herself to one of the area's conservation treasures, the Tall Timbers Research Station and Land Conservancy in the Red Hills of South Georgia and North Florida. Ginger sits on the board of directors for the organization, whose mission is Exemplary Land Stewardship. This means, among other things, sustainable consumption compatible with natural diversity, management that mimics natural processes, and the positive interrelation of economic, social, and ecological factors.

Ginger joins other women leading the land conservation programs spearheaded by Tall timbers including Cornelia Corbett, Rosamond Davis, Daphne Wood and Rozzie Davis.

Nancy Anisfield is a Vermont Yankee who exerts a strong influence on the Southern quail culture. She is a full-time outdoor writer and photographer specializing in bird dogs and wingshooting. A frequent contributor to Covey Rise magazine as well as numerous hunting and conservation publications, Nancy also serves as the creative director for the Ugly Dog Hunting Company. As a member of the Board of Directors for Pheasants

Forever/Quail Forever, Nancy often gets raised eyebrows when people realize she comes from a region with neither pheasants or quail. She explains that because she hunts in many parts of the country including trips to the Southeast each year to quail hunt, she feels an obligation to give more than her license fees and lodging dollars. She sees herself as a “consumer” of bird hunting resources – the game and the habitat -- and feels compelled to support conservation to maintain and replenish those resources. Along with promoting quail conservation through her writings and media outreach, Nancy was the first to step up as a Gold Patron for both Quail Forever and Pheasants Forever.

I’ve become a conservation advocate and hunter from my hometown of Clermont, Georgia. Our lifestyle has served as a popular social media advocate (with over 7,500 friends and followers) that promotes the outdoor life of quail hunting, shooting sporting clays, riding horses and teaching my daughters to follow in mom’s footsteps. As a shotgun instructor and dog handler, I have committed my career to sharing knowledge to make others successful in the field.

I want my family to serve as an inspiration for women in the quail plantation lifestyle. Jaci, my oldest, has been appointed to the National Youth Leadership Council with Quail Forever and Pheasants Forever. And at the three years old, Hallie Jo got her first bird dog and started traveling with me to trials.

The women of the quail life love this world. They exude the life. They add uniquely feminine character to the experiences and they demand that the experiences are authentically theirs and feminine. They lead the way for friends, daughters, mothers, and sisters in the world outdoors, and that should be celebrated. Which they often do...with their gracious hospitality, day-to-day involvement, shotguns and bird dogs.

