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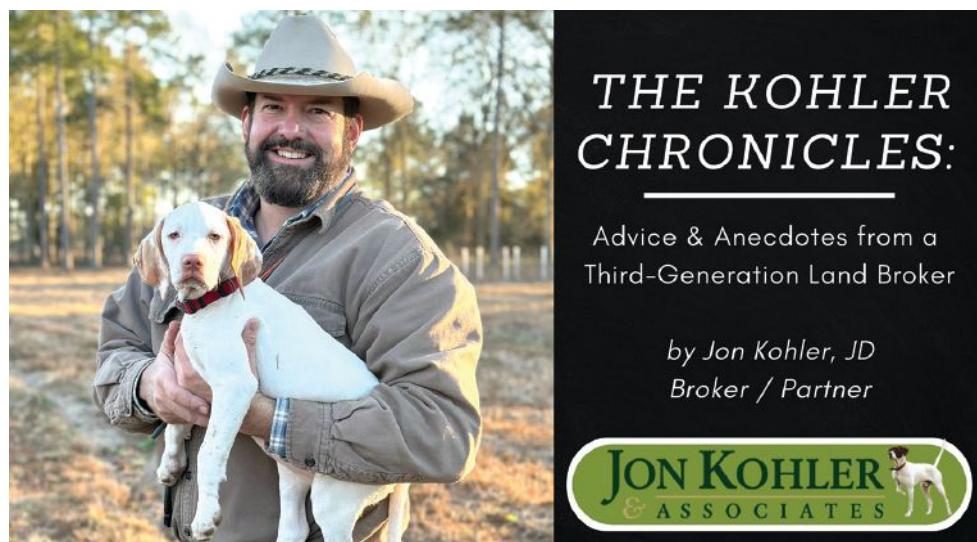
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# Purveyors of the sporting lifestyle

by Christiana Roussel

With more than 45 years as purveyors serving hunting and sporting enthusiasts, Kevin and Kathleen Kelly take immense pride in sharing the lifestyle they have long endeavored to cultivate in this region.

Whether you live in this part of the country or are just visiting, there is something so very special about the Red Hills Region. No matter if you are a lifelong hunter or new to the sport, it is something you can just feel.

That surge of pride for the land and what grows here.

The lift in your spirit when you see a covey rise of quail.

The smile that forms on your lips when you pass a plantation doing a controlled burn.

This is the lifestyle of the region and one that Kevin and Kathleen Kelly embody in all they do.

## Passion for the Lifestyle

What started as a general sporting goods store – selling guns and gear to avid outdoorsmen – has grown into something of an empire for the Kelly family. Kevin always had a passion for hunting and fishing and wanted to provide the best gear for his customers.

He knows them.

He is them.

They share the same values.

Longtime friend and prominent land broker Jon Kohler is one of those very customers who shares these values and appreciates the way in which the Kellys embody this lifestyle.

Jon says, “People don’t really realize that quail hunting is synonymous with a lifestyle, land management, habitat management, habitat improvement all year. From landowners to plantation managers and guests – there are so many people with a vested interest in sustaining and supporting this lifestyle. Kevin and Kathleen get that.”

## The Goods

What started as a Tallahassee outpost has since grown to include their flagship location in downtown Thomasville and a wildly successful catalog and online business, spearheaded by Kevin’s wife, Kathleen. They still offer the finest hunting clothes and equipment but expanded their offerings to encompass the whole lifestyle that this region embraces.

Just off the bricks of Thomasville’s Broad Street, step inside the store to find sumptuous table settings and home decor that give a nod to all things quail and the outdoor life here. From placemats to candlesticks, linens and flatware, Spode dinnerware and metal serving pieces emblazoned with hallmarks of the Hills – your affection for the region no longer has to be contained to brush pants and waxed jackets.

Kathleen shares, “We have Ital-

ian handbags and footwear, a hat maker in Austria, vendors in Poland, Spain, Canada, Central America – all over the world.”

These additions are a marked evolution of the gear that the store originally sold, more than four decades ago. Kevin Kelly remembers Jon coming into the store when he was just a boy of about 6 or 7 years old. They’ve had a bond ever since.

Jon laughs as he recalls those childhood visits to the store with his mother. “I learned pretty quickly that if there was something I wanted, I’d be smart to let Kevin do all the talking. I was astute enough to know that when Kevin’s around, just shut up and let him do the talking. That was my first memory of Kevin: if I can just get him in the area, he’ll talk my mom into buying stuff.”

The nature of that “stuff” that Kevin’s sells in their stores and catalog has come a long way since the days of simply being field shirts and brush pants. Kevin’s upstairs gun room boasts an impressive collection of highly sought-after firearms, including Kevin’s own line of guns that are hand-crafted in Italy, to his specifications.

Wildlife art and antique European mounts adorn the walls while a just-for-friends bar and rich leather sofas complete the space. Downstairs, Kathleen’s deft hand can be seen in the rich textiles

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# It's a beautiful relationship

(Continued from previous page)

and fabrics she selects for customers.

"We travel the world looking for the best-quality unique things to offer our customers," she says. "We go to New York, Atlanta, Chicago, London, Italy – you name it."

The items that make the cut at Kevin's must be of excellent quality – to stand up to the lifestyle in this region – while still being stylish and ready for any adventure.

"Kevin Kelly understands that the soul of this region is the Bob White quail, that there is an immense community that surrounds all aspects – from the landowners to plantation managers to dog trainers – Kevin's serves them all," Jon says.

## Beyond the goods

Beyond developing a brand that resonates with customers embracing the sporting lifestyle, Kevin and Kathleen – like Jon and Erica Kohler – recognize the year-round hard work that goes into keeping this way of life alive here.

Both the Kellys and Kohlers are big supporters of Tall Timbers whose sole mission is "to foster exemplary land stewardship through research, conservation and education." Both families are but two that recognize the invaluable work this non-profit organization does in

preserving the heritage of this region. At Kevin's annual Game Fair each fall, Tall Timbers has the opportunity to share their mission with guests who come from all over the country.

"We have customers come from places outside the region – South Carolina, Texas, California – to experience what we do here," Kathleen shares. "And, it is no coincidence that Tall Timbers Research is doing important land conservation work in many of these places as well. It is a beautiful relationship and one we are very proud of."

Last year alone, the game fair raised more than \$70,000 and, to date the event has raised more than \$400,000 to preserve the Bob White quail woods.

Each year, John Kohler & Associates sponsors the annual Quail Bash party the night before the game fair. This is an epic fete that features a robust bar, hors d'oeuvres with plenty of local game ingredients, and a spectacular auction led by Thomasville's own, Charlie Whitney (another customer, often featured in the Kevin's Catalog.) It is fun to look around the room, at all the guests, and seeing many of them outfitted by Kevin's. Everyone present wants to possess a piece of this lifestyle that is synonymous with this region.

"Erica and I both look forward to



the party – it is an opportunity to connect with like-minded friends, meet new ones, and celebrate the opening of the quail season," Jon notes. "I know firsthand the year-round work that goes into making this such a special place. No matter the size of the region, we are a community of folks, devoted to this lifestyle. I wouldn't have it any other way."

For more information on Kevin's visit, [www.kevincatalog.com](http://www.kevincatalog.com).

Christiana Roussel is a Birming-

ham-based award-winning food + travel + lifestyle writer whose work has appeared in *Garden & Gun*, *Covey Rise*, *Good Grit*, *Sporting Classics*, *Bourbon+* as well as a number of regional publications.

She is a proud member of the Birmingham chapter of *Les Dames d'Escoffier* as well as the Industry Advisory Board of Auburn University's Horst Schulze School of Hospitality Management.

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