

From clarinet to lariat

The Stayton Mail, Town & Country, Aug. 10, 1988 by Ron Oberg, Staff Writer



RIDING TALL -Elmer and Shirley Etzel round up cattle on family farm. The Etzels raise Polled Herefords and will soon be honored by their industry peers.

STAYTON - Elmer and Shirley Etzel will be standing tall at the Portland International Livestock Show October 7.

That's the day they will receive the Standard Of Perfection award for 1988 from the Oregon Polled Hereford Association. It is an honor that reflects on the couple's success as cattlemen and contributions to the beef industry.

The Etzels raise Polled Herefords, hay and timber on their 230 acres near Fern Ridge Road. The farm was originally purchased by Elmer Etzel's grandfather and has been in the family ever since. The land has also been used to raise strawberries, grass seed and grain but, according to Etzel (the ground is best suited to timber, livestock and forage production).

"When you cultivate the ground on the hills around here, it tends to erode," he says. "I don't want that so we changed the program to satisfy that need. Besides that," he adds, "I like cattle."

While the Etzels are considered by their peers to be successful "small-scale" cattlemen, there is more to this couple than generally meets the eye. Both, for instance, are trained as classical musicians. Shirley is a pianist and Elmer's forte is the clarinet.

The Etzels met at music school in Portland. They were married in 1947 and had made plans for musical careers. Elmer, whose interests were in jazz and classical clarinet, even played with the Portland Symphony for a while. Their goals were clear, but not set in concrete.

In 1950, the musicians became farmers. They moved to the ranch where Elmer had been born and took over its operations. His father had purchased Paris Woolen Mills and moved to Stayton to be close to the business.

For Shirley, the move to the farm was something of a culture shock. "It was strange at first, being from the city and all," remembers Shirley. "But after a while we realized, there was an interest in music in the canyon area and I, could combine my love of the piano with the farm, I began to teach the piano and now I have 30 students a week." !

After the move to the farm the clarinet was slowly replaced with a lariat. Today, the woodwind spends most of its time in a case. "It needs a little work," says Etzel, "but I'm pretty busy with all my other activities to spend much time playing it."

All the other activities include writing for three cattle-related magazines and taking part in many of the industry's activities. He is past president of the Western Oregon Polled Hereford Association, (Western now removed from name) and was a director in the organization for about 13 years. The couple also published Oregon Polled Hereford newspaper for several years before it was acquired by the Klamath Falls Herald and News.

"One of the reasons for being honored with this SOP award is because of our efforts to promote the breed," he says. "We helped with the OPHA newsletter for years and have always been very active in the industry. That, coupled with our efforts to increase the quality of our breeding stock, has prompted the award. We are very proud."

Over the years, the Etzels have seen the rise and fall of the industry and now are seeing a distinct recovery. "The pendulum is beginning to swing back after years of a downward turn," Elmer says. "People are seeing the benefits to having beef in their diets and beginning to consume more. Couple that with industry's desire to produce a leaner, more healthful product and I think we will continue to see a strong industry."



Sitting outside their home, the Etzels share a quiet moment. His grandfather purchased the farm which has since stayed in the family.



IMPROVISATION TIME - Shirley and Elmer Etzel play a few tunes together. Both were trained in classical music and Elmer even played with the Portland Symphony before moving to the ranch.

See 1994 photo next page (not from this article)

OREGON STATE FAIR 1994



Elmer T. Etzel

November 29, 1920 - January 28, 2013



STAYTON - Elmer Etzel, 92, died January 28 in Stayton, Oregon. He was born in Stayton and lived there all his life except for his time in the United States Navy, when he served as a radioman during the Second World War. After he completed his service, Elmer used the GI bill to earn his degree in music from Portland School of Music. While in music school, he also played clarinet in the Portland Symphony. Elmer worked as the superintendent of Paris Woolen Mill in Stayton for twenty two years. He also was a rancher raising registered polled Herefords and Appaloosa horses. Elmer was a lifetime member and past president for the Polled Hereford Association. In addition to his family, Elmer's faith was central to his life. He was a member of Immaculate Conception Catholic Church and was a 4th Degree Knights of Columbus. He also loved music and played the clarinet, accordion and piano. Elmer played in many bands during his teenage years and led a band that played in local grange halls and on the Salem radio station. Later in life he played in the Salem Concert Band. On June 21, 1947, Elmer married the love of his life, Shirley Anne Cowell. She preceded him in death in 1996. Elmer is survived by children: Greg (Cindy) Etzel of Stayton and Roslyn (Rich) Owen of Portland; sisters: Rose Lucas and Bernice Etzel both of Stayton and Betty Champange of Sweet Home; grandsons: Grant (Brandi) Etzel of Stayton, Shane Lady of Portland and Ashley Lady of Stayton; and great-grandson: Ashton Lady of Stayton. Mass of Christian Burial will be Wednesday, February 6, 2013 at 11:00 am at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Stayton. A celebration of life will be held after the services at Anthony Hall in Sublimity. Private interment will be in St. Mary Cemetery in Stayton. Contributions may be made to St. Mary or Regis Schools. Serving the family North Santiam Funeral Service, Stayton.