

## MEET YOUR NEW EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT



We are thrilled to welcome aboard your new Executive Vice President, Ashley House. Take this chance and get to know her in this interview with the editor.

Dillon: Well, welcome aboard Ashley, you came through quite a competitive process to get here and we're really excited. How did you ever get started in this business and what made you want to work for the WCA?

Ashley: I guess you could say I was born into the cattle business. My grandfather started our south Texas ranch in the 1950s. We're a cow-calf operation, and my particular interest is in heifer selection and development. Since I could never rope and drag very well, I knew I was going to have to give back to the ranch in other capacities. My Dad wanted me to become an ag lawyer, but I started working in ag policy, advocacy, and outreach. I loved it, and I've always maintained there's no better group of folks to go fight for. I also wanted to represent the industry I was of and from, and luckily some great organizations (Texas Ag Land Trust and Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association) gave me the opportunity to do that. Fast forward to 2020, and my husband, Micah, accepted a teaching position at SPU in May. Almost simultaneously, I was delighted to learn from a fellow TCU Ranch Management alum, Tyler Cox, that WCA was accepting applications.

I knew from the moment I interviewed that there is an unparalleled depth of passion within the WCA leadership, and I'm excited about all that we will do together for our members and our industry. I'm truly humbled to have the opportunity to take the next step in my career with WCA.

D: Well, that's great Ashley, thanks for sharing that. Seems like Texas's loss is our gain. In your experience, what do you feel are some of the biggest challenges facing a membership organization?

A: I think staying connected is a huge challenge for any membership organization, especially during a global pandemic! Farmers and ranchers are great neighbors, and that

neighborly attitude permeates the culture around production agriculture: We meet at the coffee shop and ask about family, we share helpful technical advice, we celebrate each other's victories, we lease bulls, we help each other with harvests and branding. None of that stops, but our civic and membership organizations provide the touchstone and are like a rainwater catchment our members can look to for many of those things. WCA has to remain the touchstone for Washington Cattlemen, and cattlemen. I'm excited about conversations I've had internally about webinars, programming, and the creative and traditional ways we can gather to share industry news, technical expertise, resources, camaraderie and more—so stay tuned!



Ashley with her parents Kurt and Susie at the family ranch in Live Oak County, Texas. Circa 1995

D: I can see you've given that some thought. Much appreciated. As you've probably noticed, Washington looks much different from the East side of the State to the West --- We have members on both sides. What do you think might be a good way to encourage and facilitate participation by members separated by hundreds of miles?

A: I think the district structure of WCA and the district representatives therein are fantastic! I want to capitalize on the structure we already have in place, and then work with the



*Ashley on the family ranch in the early 1990s*

Board to build out some even more robust ways of keeping tethered to our members, no matter where they're located within the state. Several years ago in Texas, a number of ag groups got together to put on an annual "West Texas Summit", because they felt like there were some unique issues to that area of the state that needed bolder assertion and/or celebration. That event has been a huge success and brings in congressional district leaders, allied industry, rancher panels, etc. Very important, I want to meet as many of you as possible and learn what challenges you face in your particular geographic context so we can remain inclusive to all our members of diverse backgrounds. Educate me! I have an open door, phone, and email policy so I would love to hear from you, WCA members.

D: In recruiting the younger generation of ranchers to the WCA, what do you think is the greatest value for their membership dollar that we can show them?

A: Access to mentorship. I think that's a unique and precious benefit of the WCA. We have an infinitely rich array of experiences contained in the "brain trust" of our membership. I think the goal should be to celebrate that breadth

of experience and provide younger generations access to it...all while making it fun for everyone involved. If you do it right, the return on investment of their membership dollars is priceless. Again, stay tuned for those opportunities!

D: Switching gears here on you a little bit – Somebody told me you mentioned in your interview that your heroes were your grandparents. I think we're kindred spirits on that and I'd love to hear more about what you shared.

A: My grandparents are my heroes! My grandmother, Mildred House, taught 3rd grade in our rural town of Three Rivers (population 1,800) for 45 years. Folks still come up to me today and tell me stories of how kind/funny she was, how she paid for their prom dress, wrote them letters while they were in dental school to encourage them, or practiced reading with them after hours. She saved, she sacrificed, and summoned strength unlike anyone I have ever known. Her husband and my grandfather, H.D. House, was a scout for the U.S. Army and drove an armored car during WWII. He survived the Battle of the Bulge and when he returned to Texas, bought our home place to run his own cows. He was a man of unwavering integrity and resolution. He also spoke four languages, and was deeply intentional and forward thinking. They've both passed away, but I'm grateful to have their example of a life in service to their community, faith, family, and industry. I love when I have dreams where we're all just playing dominoes together again, ha!

D: That is awesome, Ashley. In closing, is there anything else you'd like to share?

A: I want to thank you, Dillon, for including me in the Ketch Pen! I'm so excited to start with WCA and work with such incredible leadership, staff, supporters, and membership! **Let's get after it!**



*Ashley and husband, Micah, at a Spanish mission in South Texas*