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Rotary Club of Trenton learns about Florida cattle



Visiting Rotarians Ken and Lynetta Griner sit at the head table of the Rotary Club of Trenton on Monday afternoon (July 24).

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By Jeff M. Hardison © July 25, 2017 at 9:47 p.m.

TRENTON -- Members and guests at the regular weekly meeting on Monday afternoon (July 24) of the Rotary Club of Trenton were treated to an informative session regarding cattle presented by Florida Cattlemen's Association (FCA) President Ken Griner.



Theresa Sapp introduces Ken Griner

Theresa Sapp, who was the club president in Rotary Year 2013-2014, brought Griner as the speaker of the day. Griner was joined by his wife Lynetta Griner. They are both Rotarians as well.

About half of the club's 36 members were present

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at the meeting held in the Trenton Woman's Club building, 819 S.W. Gilchrist County Road 339. Lunch included pork chops, rice, vegetables, a salad, miniature cherry turnovers and iced tea.

The Griners are owners at Usher Land & Timber Co. of Chiefland and they have belonged to the FCA for in excess of 50 years, Sapp said as she introduced them.



Ken Griner speaks about Florida cattle.

FCA President Griner helped listeners feel comfortable with advances in agricultural science helping humanity to meet the needs of the growing population of people on the planet.

He spoke about the safety precautions in the industry to help consumers of American beef to know antibiotics, hormones and the like are not something to fret about.

He also shared interesting facts about Florida cattle.

"The cattle industry started right here in Florida," he said. "It's been here since 1521 when Ponce de León made his second landing here, and he unloaded in what is present day Fort Myers."

Juan Ponce de León died in Cuba in 1521, after being wounded by Calusa Indians soon after bringing those cattle and Andalusian horses to Florida.

The cattle industry in America, Griner said, therefore originated in Florida rather than in Texas as some people may believe.

Those wild cattle and horses thrived in Florida, he said, and by the mid-1800s,

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(Florida became a state in 1845), there were in excess of 700,000 semi-wild cattle in the state. This compares with a human population of 135,000 at that time in Florida.

Back then, most of the cattle were in southern Florida and most of the people were north of what is now Orlando, he said.

With all of those wild cattle, people like Jacob “King of the Cracker Cow Hunters” Summerlin (Feb. 20, 1820 – Nov. 4, 1893) established trade with Cuba and other countries back before the Civil War, Griner said.

Before he was 40 years old, Summerlin was an extremely wealthy man thanks to the wild cattle industry in Florida.

Another illustrious character from Florida cattle history was Morgan Bonaparte “Bone” Mizell (1863-1921), Griner said.

“He was a hard-working, hard-living, hard-drinking, hard-laughing, kind of a cowboy,” Griner said. “He never owned a piece of property. He never married. And he never really worried himself if he wasn’t gainfully employed.”

He also did not bother with minor details such as who actually owned the cattle he was selling, Griner said.

(Ruby Leach Carson of Florida penned the “Ballad of Bone Mizell,” which was later set to music by Jim Bob Tinsley and his wife, Dottie.)

Florida has a long history with cattle and cowboys.

Florida has the 12th largest inventory of “mamma cows” in the country right now, Griner said. There are 13.5 million total mamma cows and Florida has more than one million of them, he said.

Florida is home to seven of the 15 largest ranches in the country, and to the very largest ranch of any in the United States, Griner said.

Griner said some people have a perception of hormone treatment to beef that is distorted. The amount of hormones, if any, in beef is a nanogram. That is about the weight of one-billionth of one gram. A paperclip weighs about one gram, he mentioned.

To put it in an even more visible point of reference, he showed that a three-ounce serving of beef would have one-sixth of one piece of M&M candy. This compares with a three-ounce serving of potatoes where the amount of the hormone estrogen would be equal to a small jar being about 1-16th full of M&M candy.

Cabbage is another type of food with more of that hormone in it than beef.

Three ounces of tofu has 16 million times as much of that hormone than three ounces of beef, Griner said.

Griner said if a consumer wants non-hormone treated beef, it can be provided for a higher price. As a consumer, though, he added, there is no reason to buy the more expensive beef.

Beef ranchers are held to requirements of withdrawal time from hormones and antibiotic treatments, Griner said. The industry adheres to the requirements, he said.

The keynote speaker on Monday afternoon shared some jokes during his presentation.

It is the passion of the cattle ranchers that makes a difference, he said. Ninety-seven percent of the cattle ranches in the United States are small and family-owned he said. The average rancher owns 48 cows, he said.

Part of that passion comes from when children were growing up. They wanted to be a doctor, lawyer, policeman...

He mentioned, in speaking about other livestock producers of protein sources, which

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as children boys think about becoming cowboys, but they don't think about becoming chickenboys or pigboys.

He mentioned his friend Andy Lott is a banker in Chiefland, but he is also a cattleman.

"We all have our day jobs," Griner said, "to help us support our cow habit, because we love it. Passion is what drives the beef industry."

Griner shared a lot of information from a more global perspective too. He said that while the human population increases, the amount of real estate for houses and agriculture is not increasing.

He reminded people that agricultural interests, including planted pine forests, watermelon fields, hayfields, corn fields and other farming interests are environmentally better than many other forms of development that take away from the natural resources.

The cattlemen's association president reminded people, too, than advancement in agricultural science has helped humans to be able to feed more people from less land. Included in these scientific improvements is the use of genetically modified organisms.

Sometimes those GMOs do not produce the results that were sought, but often a GMO has resulted in better crops and livestock.

Applying best management practices and technology has helped farmers feed more people.

Griner thanked the Rotary Club of Trenton for inviting him to speak and he answered all questions posed to him from the audience.