

FEATURED BREEDER - HIGH WIDE AND HEAVY WHITETAILS



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t High Wide and Heavy Whitetails the monster whitetails are a passion, however, there are other things that the folks at this ranch hold more important. Those things are God, Country and Family. That's the order of the way things are done and something Cleon Almond has made certain remains a centerpiece of every endeavor that is undertaken, including the whitetail deer business. Cleon's passion and respect for God, Country, Family, his fellow man and what he calls God's special creation, the "Whitetail Deer", have directed his life to be one rewarded with an amazing family, many good friends and some mighty big deer. To be kind and respect your fellow man are qualities not just accepted but expected of those in his family, his employee's and the people he surrounds himself with. He is a Gentleman's Gentleman and has passed those traits on to all of those around him. You find yourself wanting to be a better person after spending time with the Almond family.

High Wide and Heavy Whitetails is a 600 acre ranch located 60 miles north of Dallas in Grayson County. The ranch itself has a unique history as it was part of the original land settled by Andy Thomas who was the first

settler in Grayson County back in the mid 1800's. It was a very dangerous time when Comanche's were still roaming the area. Andy had to leave his family at the Fort in Bonham and went back to visit once a month while traveling on foot and only at night to stay under the Native American radar. Andy had one of the best rifles made at the time and his friend, Davy Crockett, stopped by to visit for a few days on his way to fight the battle of the Alamo! When Davy was about to leave, Andy insisted on Davy taking his superior rifle and Andy kept Davy's. Andy's descendants kept Davy's rifle on display for years in the museum dedicated to the Alamo. It now resides back in Grayson County with one of Andy Thomas's relatives. The remains of Andy Thomas' old home site are still visible in Grayson County.

High Wide and Heavy is a partnership between Cleon Almond, Greg Almond, Bob Burlingame, and their families. The partnership started with one goal in mind; to raise beautiful superior deer. The name of their ranch reminds them daily of the never ending challenge. It all started from the hunting roots of their founders and an offhand comment by Greg's uncle during a hunt years ago. Greg said, "Uncle Clyde came

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into camp one evening and was excited beyond normal. When I asked what the excitement was all about, his simple words said it all. "Greg, I saw one that was High Wide, and Heavy." Years later we are still being blessed to be able to raise deer that are HIGH WIDE AND HEAVY."

When Greg and Cleon started their business in 2000, there were no wild deer in the surrounding area so they 'game fenced' their property and brought in deer. Because there had been no wild deer, there was no hunting in their county unless it was behind a fence. Cleon had taken Greg hunting since he was a little boy and they both especially loved to hunt deer and were thankful for every chance to be outdoors enjoying God's creation. It was exciting to have deer on their property for the first time in their lives. After having the high fence for two-three years, they realized that even with the property 'game-fenced', they still didn't get to look at the deer as much as they would have liked and that's when they decided to build a couple of deer pens. By having deer pens they could raise and watch the big deer grow! Today they have 23 deer pens, close to 350 deer, and small populations of wild deer have come back in to their area, but it still remains a bow hunting ONLY county.

Once the pens were built they started the way most breeders do, they just bought deer. Greg and Cleon thought, "Let's put some does in these pens and put a couple of bucks with them and if they're good bucks we will have great monsters too." About three and ½ years later they realized they didn't have any big bucks because genetics had not been a central part of their game plan. They made a decision and got rid of every deer. Greg said, "In the beginning, we asked ourselves "Why does every giant buck not produce giant offspring? The answer is the lack of dominant genetics". They started over and devised a plan to build a foundation.

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During the process of starting over they became friends with Dr. Bob Burlingame an eye surgeon from Sherman, Texas. Dr. Burlingame had bought a lot of deer from Dave McQuaig who owned Maxbo and luckily Dr. Burlingame had purchased many offspring before the legend of Maxbo had begun. Greg and Cleon became good friends with Dr. Burlingame and after hunting together they all decided to become partners and move his animals to High Wide and Heavy Whitetails. High Wide and Heavy Whitetails doubled its size in one night.

After years of breeding they feel they have gotten Maxbo genetics figured out, one of the hardest things to accomplish is long main beams to add to a high, wide and heavy set of antlers... But they've figured it out. "We've line bred Maxbo stuff for 10-12 years and some of our pedigrees have Maxbo in it 6 times." says Cleon. Currently they are in the process of out crossing! Looking for such an outcross led to the recent purchase of one-half interest of Sub Zero, the largest 2 year old Freeze Frame son to date, scoring over 450's in 2017. Greg stated that to be able to add so many SUPER DOES and huge producing sires in one pedigree was an unbelievable opportunity and that's what sold us on Sub Zero. That and the fact that he had an over 32" inside spread and more than 30" main beams. Some other outcrossing has recently included Dr. D does. These are producing astronomical for us Hayden added. Some of the greatest young bucks on our property are from the Dr. D does and those deer are double tough.

Another buck they raised, Don Julio, is also a prime example of long main beams. As a 3 year old, his main beams were 33" and he has over 15" G-3's. He is out of Crush who lived to be 13 and was out of a Maxbo son named Scarface. Scarface was one of the first two 200" one year old bucks in the nation. The crew at High, Wide and Heavy Whitetails understands that it's not just about growing big deer but growing big deer that will reproduce themselves. They've bought all the semen out of PA Geronimo that they could find to produce as many does as they could from it. Quannah Parker is a product of PA Geronimo and has produced many great producing doe's and a bunch of fantastic bucks on the ranch.

Greg feels the measure of a buck rests in his ability to not only produce well in his own genetic pool, but also as an outcross. At High Wide and Heavy White-tails, they have a strategic system in place to determine the best breeding combinations, whether it be natural breeding or artificial insemination. From a genetic standpoint, they look for dominant genetics in a

number of ways. When evaluating a potential buck, they not only look at antler size and offspring, but also pedigree and the ability to produce across a wide array of bloodlines. Greg says, "It is very hard to justify getting excited about the new "buck of the day" because these bucks generally do not have a proven track record." Without observing offspring, it is impossible to evaluate the level of dominance that a buck possesses in his genetics. Sometimes with enough super doe's and dominant sires in a buck's pedigree and background you have a pretty good idea that he will pass on his traits. Picking through dominant genetics can be a difficult task, which is why High Wide and Heavy has selectively chosen from bucks that are established as dominant producers. Cleon says, "We have found that by integrating these genetics into our breeding program, we are able to produce long main beams and the HIGH WIDE, and HEAVY look that is our namesake." This methodology will prevent the disappointment many breeders have experienced when they breed to a large buck with few dominant traits.

Greg and Cleon's business experience comes from selling commodities. They learned through that experience that your competitors generally have basically the same quality product and sometimes maybe even a bit better. Therefore, customer service is the difference maker. Cleon says "I keep waiting for someone to challenge me, but customer service is not a department, it's an attitude." Because of this valuable experience, the crew at High Wide and Heavy Whitetails focuses on 'good customer service'. They know that new breeders are going to have a lot of questions and can make a lot of mistakes quick, so they make themselves available to answer any questions their customers may have.

Cleon seems to get a lot of opportunities to talk with potential new breeders and he always gives them the advice he wishes he'd been given, "Buy less deer and buy better deer... Start out small with really good animals because there's so much to learn and it's easier to learn while taking care of a few". Accidents can happen while caring for these animals so less is more. The ranch crew knows that when something bad happens, it's just an opportunity to exceed the customers' expectations.

To say that this is a family business for the High Wide and Heavy crew is an understatement. Cleon and wife Suzanne's two children and their families live on the ranch. If you turn right out of Cleon's driveway, you will be in Greg and wife Johnna's front yard. Diana Wyrick, Cleon's daughter and her husband Jimmy, live on other side. Cleon has six grandkids who all do their part in High Wide and Heavy's deer breeding

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operation. Sarah Dusenberry, Administrative Assistant and her 2 year old son Hunter, work on the ranch daily. Greg runs the 'family owned' furniture business and while he may be on the other side of the globe working, his heart longs for the deer pens. When he is gone, he calls the ranch daily asking, "How are the deer doing today?" Hayden Wyrick, Cleon's grandson, works in the pens full time. His humble attitude and love for the deer industry makes learning the ins and outs of deer breeding fun. Hayden told us, "I want to learn the business aspect of the industry, better techniques to keep the deer healthy, and the secrets locked in pedigrees. There's just so much to learn and I know I will never know it all, but I want to learn as much as I possibly can."

Dr. Burlingame put it in simple terms when he said becoming partners with the Almonds made being a deer breeder more fun and easy. They are the best friends and partners anyone could be blessed to have. Since retirement Dr. Burlingame spends his time doing eye surgeries on ships parked off the coasts of third world countries passing on blessings to others through his gift of being a talented surgeon. To quote Dr. Burlingame, "You can't imagine the feeling one gets from giving sight to those who have never seen clearly or maybe even never seen before! It makes me feel like I receive more from them than what I have given." Dr. Burlingame and his wife Lisa have two children, Drew and Rachel. The entire family loves hunting and the Whitetail Deer business. Bob also owns and operates a high fence hunting ranch in the mountains of northeastern Oklahoma where the solitude and remoteness allow him to unwind from the stresses of the world.

The partnership that the High Wide and Heavy White-tails family has is the American Dream. The deer breeding industry has given a lot of families this opportunity. Cleon says, "What else could I be doing that would cause everyone in my family to be so connected?" Every morning the first thing I do is go to the deer pens and feel blessed. Blessed that God let me live in this great country, gave me a fantastic family and at 78 years old I wake up every morning with an enthusiasm that can only be understood by other folks in the deer breeding industry." Greg says, "Sometimes I have to pinch myself while loading the Polaris with feed. It's hard to believe that I get to share this dream, this passion with my dad and the people I love the most....my family. I want other families to be able to share the same things with their loved ones as well. That's why we strive to help our customers be successful and go the extra mile, we want the dream to come alive for them as well.

High Wide and Heavy Whitetails philosophy is one that is simple.

'If you treat people right, and deliver a great product, you will gain friendships and a loyal customer base. Our partnership has flourished because we love deer and have a discerning eye when it comes to genetics. Each year we strive to produce animals that have survivability, are genetically sound, and visually stunning. When you make a purchase from us you receive the added benefit of owning a piece of our passion and our dream for you.'

