

Ranch management and wildlife experience....

A woman of many boots

BREYANA SEGURA

In a field dominated by men, East Texas native Celeste Lacy is clearing a path for women in wildlife as she takes the reins at Southern M Ranch.

She sits exhausted from a three-day training course on quail management and jokingly sparks a conversation by saying, "So yeah, if you want to know about colinus virginianus, I am your girl."

That confidence, that drive and that persistence to live a life she loves is what got Celeste to the top management position she holds today.

"You know it is a good ol' boy profession, but there are more women getting into the parks and wildlife profession," she says.

She admits the road to her success was bumpy, but adds that she never let any

obstacles stand in the way of letting her full potential be seen by others.

"I took any and every opportunity I had to volunteer," she says with a smile. "I did everything I could do to gain experience in my field, which opened doors that needed to be opened for me."

Upon high school graduation, Celeste attended Texas A&M University at College Station to become a veterinarian but her love for the outdoors influenced her decision to transfer to Texas A&M at Kingsville and earn her bachelors of science in range and wildlife management.

Growing up in the Piney Woods area of East Texas, she spent many hours with her father on the Sam Rayburn Reservoir, where he

worked as a fishing guide.

"I grew up just loving the outdoor life," she says. "Both my parents were in hospitality, so I've always been around communications and entertaining people. I cultivated all of that with my love for wildlife."

"I have to credit Mr. Rod because he gave me a chance," she adds. "I met him and remember thinking, 'Man this man is so nice and I'd love working for him.'"

Soon after her move to Kingsville, being the go-getter that she is, Celeste began a research project job at the Comanche Faith Ranch in Carrizo Springs. The next semester, she wasn't scheduled for classes so she decided to stay and get experience at the ranch.

"They didn't want me to leave, so they convinced me to apply to become the ag teacher at the high school," she laughs. "I told them okay. I mean, I never thought of myself as a teacher, but okay."

Celeste became the Carrizo Springs ag teacher.

For the next five years, she molded the minds of youths aspiring to be members of the agricultural community.

"I loved teaching ag in Carrizo Springs," she says with a smile. "My stu-



dents were amazing, but when my favorite subject to teach was wildlife I knew that my true passion lies with wildlife conservation and management and sharing my knowledge and experience in that field with others."

Through her networking with volunteer jobs and projects, Celeste was able to land a job in wildlife management in 2015 at the Southern M Ranch that sits on the south-east side of Frio County.

"The former ranch manager called me and asked if I would be a guide; he said I had the experience at scoring deer and I was personable," she says. "Shoot, I jumped in with both feet."

What began as a part-time guiding gig on a 4,200-acre ranch soon turned into an assistant ranch manager job. Two and a half months ago, Celeste earned the title of ranch manager.

"I couldn't ask for better people to work for."

Her duties are not for the



Defying odds and not letting self-imposed obstacles stand in her way, Celeste is now living the dream as the ranch manager for Southern M Ranch.

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