

A UTOPIA DISCOVERED

Joshua Creek Ranch lays claim to industry honor

By Ralph Winingham FOR THE EXPRESS-NEWS



Photos by Ralph Winingham / For the Express-News

Joshua Creek Ranch veteran guide Eric Harrison (right) helps offer a hunter a wingshooting experience that's unlike any other.

BOERNE — Whether they are wingshooting upland game, flyfishing along the Guadalupe River or tracking down trophy axis deer, a common thread runs through hunters and anglers at Joshua Creek Ranch.

That thread, according to a leader in the outdoor industry for more than 150 years, is the outdoor enthusiasts are experiencing some of the highest quality hunting, fishing, dining and lodging services in the world.



Harrison, chosen Orvis' top wingshooting guide for 2017, gets some English Cocker Spaniels ready for an upland bird hunt.

Proving the adage that the third year is the charm, Joshua Creek Ranch, which is located 45 minutes northwest of San Antonio, was named as the Orvis Endorsed Wingshooting Lodge of the Year last week.

They earned the top spot in the international competition, announced during ceremonies April 13 at Asheville, North Carolina, after being nominated for the prestigious title each of the last three years.

In addition, for the second year in a row, the facility fielded a nominee for the title of Orvis Wingshooting Guide of the Year, with Joseph "JZ" Zinsmeyer just

missing out on the chance to follow in the footsteps of veteran guide Eric Harrison, who earned the top guide nod in 2017.

"Orvis is considered the top program for wingshooting operations worldwide — there are only 30 Orvis-endorsed lodges in the world," said Kevin Welborn, director of marketing, sales and guest services for the ranch.

Welborn noted that Joshua Creek is also one of the select few operations in the world that is both Orvis-endorsed and recognized as a Beretta Trident Lodge for Excellence in Upland Bird Hunting.

"We have only been an endorsed lodge for four years, and to be recognized like this is like the ultimate stamp of approval. We work really hard to provide the best experience to our clients," he added.

Each year Orvis recognizes lodges, guides, outfitters and dog breeders considered the best in the world based on customer feedback among other established criteria, Welborn said.

That process for being nominated as best of the best in the world involves sorting through customer reviews — Joshua Creek currently has 680 five-star reviews to its credit — and on-site inspections.

"Reading what the customers are saying about us really weighs a lot into the nomination. Orvis looks at what they say about the hunting, guides, dogs, food, lodging and about every other aspect of our operation.

"Our latest conservation effort was also a factor. We started our Kick Plastic effort last year where we eliminated plastic bottles everywhere on the ranch," Welborn said.

Concerning the recognition of the Joshua Creek guides, Welborn pointed out that having Harrison win the title last year and Zinsmeyer compete for the honor this year is unprecedented in both Texas and the entire United States.

“Our operation has grown bigger every year for the past 28 years, and a lot of that has to do with the interaction between our guides and our clients,” he said.

Harrison, who has been a guide at Joshua Creek for the last 12 seasons, said while he is very honored to have received the title, his focus will remain on providing an excellent experience for the hunters testing their wing-shooting skills at the facility.

“Joshua Creek has a great team here — I think we are the best place to hunt in Texas,” Harrison said.

“Hunting comes easy to me, and I like to help other hunters have a great time,” said the 34-year-old Texas transplant from Kentucky.

Welborn pointed out that Harrison is the most requested guide at the ranch, with thousands of repeat customers regularly expressing their appreciation of all the guides at the facility.

The ranch, purchased in 1986 by Joe and Ann Kercheville and opened to the public in 1990, was originally planned as a site to raise a herd of registered Texas Longhorn cattle. The Kerchevilles’ plans changed after they participated in driven pheasant hunts in Scotland in 1988 and 1989.

They noted the similarities between the Scottish hunting terrain and the Texas Hill Country ranch, and they picked the brains of fellow Americans who were investing time and money to travel across the Atlantic for fine pheasant hunting that was unavailable in the U.S.

With that in mind, they set about to create an operation staffed with employees dedicated to providing an up-scale wing-shooting and hunting experience for every guest on every visit.

The ranch features a combination of fertile creek and river bottom land — Joshua Creek runs through the property, and the Guadalupe River is along one border — in addition to lightly wooded grass pastures rimmed by limestone bluffs and ledges. On the hunting opportunity list are dove, quail, pheasant, mallard duck, whitetail deer, axis deer and Rio Grande turkey.

Another featured element on the property is the opportunity to bust a few clay targets at two 10-station sporting clays courses and a wobble trap set up.

The main bird-hunting season is September through April, with trophy axis deer hunting offered year-round.

“Our staff works very hard to consistently deliver an exceptional customer experience — from an amazing habitat, top-notch guides and incredible bird dogs to luxury lodging, meals and amenities,” Welborn said, “we always keep the Orvis Commitment to Partnership top-of-mind.”

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For more info

To learn more about the outdoor experiences available at Joshua Creek Ranch, go to [joshuacreek .com](http://joshuacreek.com) or call 830-537-5090.