

Research/Situation Analysis

While Florida may be known for its beaches and theme parks, its ranching heritage dates back to the 16th Century, earlier than any other state. This heritage is very much alive today in the lives of ranching families who carry forward five centuries of tradition, caring for cattle and maintaining their expansive land. According to the Florida Folklife Program, a component of the Florida Dept. of State's Division of Historical Resources, informal annual surveys in 2007/2008 showed that a majority of the state's residents are unaware of Florida's rich cattle ranching history, the industry's annual economic impact of \$4 billion and the environmental importance of ranches comprising a sixth of the state's land. In an effort to promote greater understanding of Florida's ranchlands and their relationships to conservation efforts, the annual Florida Ranches Calendar serves as an unconventional educational tool - combining informative articles about cutting-edge planning efforts with breathtaking photography. Since 2005, the Firefly Group - a public relations, marketing and community outreach firm with a sustainable focus - has spearheaded the calendar's production with the goal of paying tribute to ranches with innovative, sustainable best management practices and to generate greater public awareness about the rich history and culture of ranching. One of the calendar's most meaningful accomplishments is the diverse collaboration of partners and sponsors that support its production. The theme of the 2013 calendar is the Northern Everglades Headwaters National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area. In 2012, renowned photographer for the Calendar, Carlton Ward, Jr., led a small team on a 1,000 mile, 100-day trek throughout the Florida peninsula, from the Everglades to Okefenokee as part of the Florida Wildlife Corridor Expedition. Images captured during this journey serve as the focal point of the 2013 calendar. The target audiences are citizens throughout Florida, cattle ranchers, environmental advocates, political and business leaders and media.

Objectives

The objectives for the 2013 Florida Ranches Calendar were to 1) create a visually appealing and content-rich publication with key message points about the importance of Florida's ranchlands in terms of environmental, cultural and historical perspectives; 2) increase calendar sales by 10 percent; 3) cover the approximate \$19,000 cost of publishing the calendar through sponsorships and in-kind donation of services; 4) maintain sponsorship levels and secure sponsorships from at least 6 of the featured ranches 5) increase calendar distribution by 10 percent - with a focus on getting the calendar into the hands of decision makers on a state and national level.

Implementation

A timeline and plan of action was prepared identifying key tasks: 1) securing sponsorships; 2) securing photography; 3) creating informative articles from five authors: renowned photographer Carlton Ward, Jr., land conservation expert Ernie Cox of Family Lands Remembered, Jim Handley, President of the Florida Cattlemen's Association; Rick Dantzler, a long-serving member of the State Senate and House of Representatives.; and Shelley Lakley of the Nature Conservancy. 4) completing the design, layout and printing phases of the calendar; 5) distribution of the calendars to sponsors; 6) promotion of the calendar. Solicitation letters were distributed to past and prospective sponsors with personal follow up to secure underwriting commitments. Additionally, featured ranches were contacted and encouraged to support the calendar through sponsorship. Stunning photos of 13 Florida ranches in the Northern Everglades from Osceola to Collier Counties were included in the calendar along with informative captions and smaller photos to further highlight the featured ranch. In keeping with the environmental stewardship theme, the calendar was printed in Florida using Stuart-based Southeastern Printing's sustainable printing process, which includes using Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) Certified paper and vegetable inks. Press releases were distributed to regional/statewide media outlets. A sales promotion e-communication campaign was conducted and distributed to 2,600 people. Calendars were prominently featured through Family Lands Remembered and Firefly Group websites, as well as Facebook and Twitter. Ranches were distributed to sponsors, mailed to dignitaries and community leaders, provided at ranching conferences, and sold online.

Evaluation

All objectives were met or exceeded. 1) A visually appealing and content rich publication was produced containing key messages about the importance of Florida's ranchlands; 2) The 2013 Florida Ranch Calendar was the most successful in its 8-year history with 1,336 calendars sold—a 360% increase compared to 290 calendars sold in 2012. For the first time ever, a reprint of the calendar was needed. 3) Costs were 100% offset through sponsorships and in-kind donations of services from 30 organizations. 4) Sponsorship participation was received from 10 of 13 featured ranches, 66% higher than the goal and sponsorship amount was maintained from previous year; 5) Distribution was increased by 35 percent, with the calendar provided to dignitaries in the Treasure Coast region, District 18 U.S. Congressman Patrick Murphy and was personally handed to Governor Rick Scott at the Florida State Fair.

Budget

Expenses: graphic design - \$1,000; copywriting, production, shipping and postage - \$10,775 printing - \$7,245; online promotion and PayPal – \$150.