

COVEY RISE[®]



A man, Carl Allen, is shown from the chest up, looking off to the side. He is wearing a tan baseball cap, sunglasses, and a green short-sleeved shirt with an orange and red safety vest over it. The vest has the 'Columbia PFG' logo on the left chest. He is holding a wooden and metal shotgun with both hands. He is also wearing a black watch with a leather strap on his left wrist. The background is a clear blue sky with some light, wispy clouds.

TODAY IS THE DAY

Carl Allen embraces every moment possible to enhance conservation and the outdoors across the world.

STORY BY PETE DELKUS AND DAVE MUSCARI
PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRIAN GROSSENBACHER



“Sold to the guy in the back of the room for \$140,000,” barked the evening’s auctioneer. A stunned crowd of about 1,000 people swiveled in their seats to see who the mysterious bidder was, asking in near-collective fashion, “Who is that guy?” It was the moment, eight years ago, that the members of the Park Cities Quail Coalition were introduced to Carl Allen, an unassuming man at the back of the room willing to bid well into six figures for the opportunity to hunt quail with the organization’s most admired member, legendary oil tycoon T. Boone Pickens at his celebrated Mesa Vista Ranch in the Texas panhandle.

Carl Allen is the rarest of sportsmen. He is a successful entrepreneur, passionate hunter, dedicated angler, treasure hunter, conservationist, and philanthropist all wrapped into one. He made his fortune with Heritage Bag Company, the leading institutional plastic bag company in North America, which he sold four years ago. Carl’s entrepreneurial successes aside, it may be that his most enduring mark will be left not in the

boardroom, but through his historic dedication to the outdoors and his adventurous lifestyle.

In the sporting community, many recognize Carl among the world’s most accomplished big-game hunters with numerous expeditions in far-flung locales, including the Arctic Circle, South America, Africa, and across North America. He’s just as proficient on the water, having caught prizes such as a 750-pound blue marlin off Mustique Island in the Grenadines, a 100-pound white marlin in the southern Bahamas, and even a 12-pound bonefish at Grand Cay.

Gigi Allen, his wife of 35 years, says her husband’s fascination with nature, hunting, and fishing began as a boy. “His stepfather [Charles “Cork” Walgreen, III, the grandson of the founder of Walgreens pharmacy stores] took him on a fishing trip when Carl was about 12 years old,” she said. From there, the nature of the family excursions only intensified. Preston Paine, chief investment officer at Allen Explorations, added, “Cork would take Carl on African safaris and to exotic fishing locations.”

It was during this time that young Carl launched his life-

long relationship with the outdoors, developing a taste for hunting in particular. For Carl, a distinctive series of events helped sharpen his passion. Paine said that on one of the family fishing trips, Carl was introduced to the world-renowned sport fishing paradise, Walker’s Cay, located 100 miles from Florida at the northernmost island in the Bahamas, part of the North Abaco District. “He told himself if he could ever afford it, he was going to buy it,” added Paine.

Then, while in his early 20s, Carl met storied treasure hunter Mel Fisher, best remembered as the man who, in 1985, uncovered the Nuestra Señora de Atocha and the Spanish galleon’s cargo of gold and artifacts. “I met Mel Fisher and got ‘the disease’ at a very young age,” Carl recounted, explaining the origins of his deep penchant for hunting buried treasure.

On March 5, 2020, Carl was honored with the prestigious Park Cities Quail Coalition’s (PCQC) T. Boone Pickens Lifetime Sportsman Award during the organization’s annual dinner. Over 1,200 people gathered at Southern Methodist University’s Armstrong Fieldhouse in Dallas, Texas, to celebrate his commitment to quail conservation and his many other

wildlife accomplishments while raising over \$2 million during the evening’s event. Since the formative years of PCQC, Carl has been a leading donor, pledging over \$2 million in contributions. He set a new benchmark for their auctions, including hunts at his sprawling Tennessee farm where he raises fallow elk, Sitka deer, and Russian boars, as well as exotic deep-sea fishing excursions, cruises on his yachts, and a fantasy trip aboard his watercraft fleet.

Carl’s generous donations, along with his record-breaking purchases of the T. Boone Pickens Mesa Vista hunt, have helped make it possible for the group to fulfill its overarching mission of quail research and preservation. “Park Cities Quail Coalition has raised over \$10.5 million in our 14-year history,” said Joe Crafton, the organization’s founder and president.

CARES FOR CONSERVATION

Carl Allen worked his way up the ladder to become the owner of Heritage Bag Company and now gives back to improve education, health, veterans affairs, and upland conservation.



PCQC member and the group’s “spiritual advisor,” Bubba Wood, agreed, saying, “Carl made sure that people knew that they could pay more than auction items were worth, and that their money was going to a good cause.” Crafton added, “I can say without any hesitation, it would not have happened without Carl Allen.”

His life as a hunter includes a commitment to conservation and a dedication to a variety of awareness causes. Over his lifetime, Carl has supported Ducks Unlimited and hunting ranches in Africa while overseeing the care and replenishment of over a dozen hunting leases in West Texas. And for his part, his dedication to PCQC is a byproduct of a meaningful personal relationship with the man whose name is on the award: T. Boone Pickens.

Carl credits his wife with his initial involvement and for facilitating meeting Pickens in the first place. “Back in the 1990s, Gigi went to this auction,” said Carl. “She said, ‘Hey, I bought you a quail hunt...for \$23,000!’ I was just about to freak out [over the price] when she added, ‘Wait a minute, it’s with T. Boone Pickens at his Mesa Vista Ranch.’” The event touched off an unlikely friendship between the two men. “My first time at Mesa Vista, I was a Chicago Yankee in King Pickens’s Court,” said Carl. “But we hit it off right away. I’ve been there seven times in my life. And I remember and cherish every moment.”

“Carl’s been so generous over the years with PCQC, in particular, because of his relationship with Boone,” said Gigi. “He believes in these conservation efforts. It’s his way of giving back.” Carl added, “Boone was one of my favorite people in the world, and the reason I am involved in this event. It’s exciting to be recognized [with the Sportsman of the Year Award]. It’s also humbling but energizing to think we can carry this into the future and build on the strong foundation Boone left us. It’s a new beginning.”

Today, Carl remains among the group’s most ardent supporters. Members enthusiastically tout the new Rolling Plains Quail Research Ranch near Roby, Texas, as a prime example and one that could not have been built without his generosity. This state-of-the-art facility uses the latest and best technology in its research. Carl’s donations enabled the purchase of cutting-edge thermal drone capabilities that can locate coveys on the ground and in nests. “The quail ecosystem is fragile, and if we aren’t concerned about it, we’re going to lose a resource in this state—and in a state this big, that’s quite a massive loss,” he said.

In the field or the lab where he works directly with scientists and wildlife experts, Carl is focused on elevating quail

A LIFETIME SPORTSMAN

The Park Cities Quail Coalition honored Carl Allen with the 2020 T. Boone Pickens Lifetime Sportsman Award for his steadfast support for future quail populations and habitat.





research to an entirely new level. His benevolence has also funded thousands of hours of research resulting in more than 50 published papers in many of the most respected journals in the scientific and wildlife communities. “It was a real eye-opener to me on how much we’ve done, what our money does, and how it’s going to work there. I was very impressed,” said Carl. And in true Carl Allen fashion, if it’s worth doing, it’s worth doing it right. “They are this close to solving some big problems.”

As further example of their generosity, Carl and Gigi Allen have been supporting the islands of the Bahamas and their people for many years, and in 2018—true to Carl’s childhood dream—they purchased Walker’s Cay, the iconic sporting paradise that Carl had visited so many years ago. But how could they have known what would happen next?

The following year, the islands were ravaged by the most powerful hurricane to ever roll through the Bahamas: Category 5 Dorian. “The hurricane was the worst storm known to man to hit that region,” said a somber Carl. “Afterward, I knew we’d have to drop everything and turn to relief.” Since then, fortified with a team of dozens of professionals, the

Allens have been working to utilize their resources for emergency relief, including rescue, relocation, and infrastructure throughout the Bahamas, as well as restoring Walker’s Cay and making the international fishing mecca larger and more accessible than ever. “It’s 70 acres with a little runway on it,” Carl told the attendees at the PCQC Annual Dinner and Auction in March, describing his island. “It’s got a little custom shop, and it’s only 100 miles from Florida. It’s absolutely a gem. And we plan on bringing it back.”

The couple has remained vigilant in the storm’s aftermath, committed to returning Walker’s Cay to a state exceeding its previous glory—a conservation-focused oasis. They are philanthropically working hand in hand with the Bahamian government on the development of plans for everything from desalination plants to liquefied natural-gas usage and other important initiatives—all designed to improve the quality of life all over the islands. “We were set back a little by the hurricane, but we’re still rebuilding full-blast down there,” Carl said.

To help provide aid to the islands, the Allens deploy a series of impressive equipment and leading-edge technology with a fleet that includes yachts, various aircraft, and even a

state-of-the-art Triton submarine operating above and below the surface. Said Carl, “My fleet took 15 trips back and forth bringing everything that you could imagine.” The fleet carried generators, building supplies, power poles, water towers, food, water, and other supplies to Little Grand, Freeport, and other Bahamian islands.

Carl said that his exposure to Mel Fisher fueled his curiosity about what lies below the surface, so much so that, today, it’s become a significant part of his adventurous life. While Walker’s Cay rebuilding efforts continue, he also spends a significant amount of time and energy treasure-hunting in the Bahamas. Much of Carl’s staff inventively double as master divers, assembling regularly on the deck of his yacht to map out strategies for the day’s work, as he deploys the aforementioned fleet to assist their efforts. They routinely scour the ocean floor for spoils from another Spanish vessel, Nuestra Señora de las Maravillas (“Our Lady of Miracles”) that sunk in 1656 in only about 40 feet of water.

After much searching, only three days before Dorian hit, “We found 178 silver coins [from the Maravillas],” explained Carl. Then, the day before the hurricane’s landfall, he said,

“We found a cannon, brought it up on deck, and a cannonball fell out of it. It was incredible!” Later in 2020, he plans to be back in the treasure zone. “You’ll definitely hear when we find the motherlode... stay tuned,” he said.

Carl’s ardent love of the outdoors, his demonstrative gusto for the sporting life, and significant generosity is apparent to everyone he meets. “He’s the youngest person ever to receive the T. Boone Pickens Sportsman of the Year Award,” said Craf-ton. “Think about all that Carl has done the past 10 years and the potential impact he can make over the next 20 years.”

He is correct: Carl is far from finished. He’s still exploring, rolling up his sleeves, digging in deeper, and doing all he can to enjoy the many adventures that remain in front of him—on land, in the air, and underwater—all while making things better for future generations of wildlife enthusiasts. 🦋

THE LITTLE GRAND

Carl and Gigi Allen have been supporting this island and others in the Bahamas for many years by the way of helping the economy, education, and general way of life for the people.



HISTORY OF CHARITY

The team of Gigi and Carl Allen is a formidable one. The couple's philanthropic efforts are far-reaching and making significant impact in ventures such as healthcare delivery and research, veterans' affairs, education, and conservation projects. Here is a list of some of the Allen's most dedicated charitable causes:

Envision: One of America's largest employers of people with vision loss was founded in 1933 with a longstanding mission to improve the quality of life and provide inspiration for the blind and visually impaired through employment, outreach, rehabilitation, education, and research.

Dallas Lighthouse: The nonprofit organization creates jobs and promotes quality of life and independence for the people who are blind and visually impaired in North Texas.

Children's of Mississippi's Batson Children's Hospital: As the only medical facility in the state devoted exclusively to the care and treatment of sick and injured children and adolescents, the hospital averages 9,000 admissions a year, while 80,000 children are treated in its clinics and emergency room annually.

The Sentry: This team of policy analysts, regional experts, and financial forensic investigators work to create consequences for those funding or profiting from genocide or other mass atrocities in Africa.

Dana-Farber Institute: This prestigious organization specializes in fighting a variety of cancers with leading-edge technology.

The Aurora Trust: This organization advances the world's understanding of the ocean environment and the marine cultural heritage and works to educate the public on the historic role the oceans have played in connecting cultures.

Children's Medical Center Foundation: This fundraising arm for Children's Health System of Texas partners with donors, corporations, and organizations to help the team of physicians, scientists, and medical professionals fulfill its mission to make life better for children.

Special Forces Charitable Trust: Dedicated to providing meaningful and sustainable support to the families of Green Berets, this nonprofit supports timely, innovative, and comprehensive programs and services designed to enhance the well-being and health of Special Forces members and their families.

FOR THE PEOPLE

Gigi and Carl Allen truly care for the future prosperity of the Bahamas and share a real and special connection with its people each time they visit.





TODAY IS THE DAY

In June 2018, Carl Allen took me deep-sea fishing near Walker’s Cay in the breathtakingly beautiful Bahamas. After catching some decent-sized fish, a prized specimen, at least for a novice saltwater fisherman like me, I was hooked. Carl was so excited as he strapped me into the chair. After a grueling 30 minutes of reeling, I landed a large 45-pound amberjack. Then, less than 15 minutes later, we got an even bigger strike.

As Carl watched the blue marlin rise out of the water, he yelled, “Pete, get back in the chair, you’re in for an immense fight.” Carl couldn’t contain his excitement. He loved sharing this once-in-a-lifetime fishing experience with a friend. Standing right next to me, cheering me on, he was completely in sync with my every move. When I leaned forward in the fighting chair, he leaned forward, and when I pulled back, he pulled back.

We repeated this dance for almost an hour before I finally brought the 250-pound marlin against the boat. Carl literally pulled my hand over for me to touch the fish as a sign of victory before releasing him back into the water for him to live another day. Carl proudly hoisted the marlin flag, upside down, as a signal of my entry into the Blue Marlin Catch-and-Release Club. As we returned to his yacht, we were greeted by cheering crew members and a celebratory shot of tequila!

His motto is: “Today is the day.” And that is who Carl is: a man who lives life to the fullest...today and every day. —*Pete Delkus*