MEDIA RELEASE (photo attached)

From Doug Laing

December 22, 2017

Big shear helps bereaved family after farm deaths

A Taranaki family living through a pre-Christmas tragedy of the loss of two has been able to get some sort of smile back on the face after over 100 people chipped-in to shear their 3400 sheep, for free.

But it wasn’t the cost-saving that mattered, it was a case of having to get the job done as soon as possible at the peak of the season before Christmas, with bereaved parents and Whangamomona Valley farmers Dan and Kathy Murphy having wondered how they were ever going to get the sheep shorn amid the trauma since son Craig “Yopp” Murphy, 31, and Stratford mate Jason Payne, 34, died on December 9.

Mr Murphy said the shearing of the ewes and lambs was to have been done within a few days of when the two young men died as their all-terrain vehicle crashed about 100 metres down a hillside after the edge of a track gave way on a nearby farm.

With Saturday’s funeral barely out of the way, cousin and fellow farmer Ken Lobb got to work making sure it was done before Christmas, calculating afterwards about 40 shearers, aged from about 20 to about 60, took part, with a support crew of even younger and even older woolhandlers, pressers, sheep-draggers, musterers and cooks at in three woolsheds, those of Mr and Mrs Murphy, brother and Steve and wife Charmaine (who is also Kathy Murphy’s sister), and Duke and Shona Gower..

Those that weren’t feeling occupied in the sheds grabbed a few chainsaws and headed into the trees to cut firewood which later restocked the Murphy family woodsheds, including that of mother Fay Murphy.

Among the shearers was former World and Golden Shears champion, Scotland shearing international and local farmer Gavin Mutch.

He wasn’t the only champion on hand, Dan Murphy having won three New Zealand sheep dog trial championships and he and brother Steve each having won multiple North Island or South Island titles and turning their skills the day before the big shear to mustering the sheep.

But to the Murphy family they were all champions, including the usual woolshed crew who effectively passed-up a day’s employment and a potential total of over $6000 in wages to help the cause instead.

Gavin Mutch – “just another shearer helping out” - said: “It was amazing to see the willingness of everyone to help a family through such a hard time. Just such a big number of people, I don’t think I’ve ever seen anything like that.”

“It’s been a bloody hard time for them, so just to see them put a smile on the face meant everything,” he said.

From a start about 7.30am, the atmosphere was at its peak as all the teams eventually gathered in Steve Murphy’s five-stand shed, flung up another five portable machines and gave a 10-stand blast to see the flock cut-out by 2pm.

He said he’d thought a few were going to turn-up to help with the shearing. “Next thing,” he said, “they were going to use three sheds. We asked what about the cooks, but they said don’t worry, don’t worry about a thing. There was food for Africa.”

Mr Lobb said he was also “just another shearer helping out.”

“I did do a few,” he said. “But I didn’t want to hold them up.”

Dan Murphy described the turnout and effort as “mind-blowing” and “very humbling”. “We want to thank everyone so much,” he said. “I just can’t thank everyone enough”

Craig Murphy, the elder of two brothers, hadn’t been thinking of going into farming, but was a handy fencer, and was thought to be heading up to see one of his recently-built fence lines when the tragedy happened. He was also a “natural mechanic” who had fixed a few wrecks, while Jason Payne was a roofer by trade.

ENDS

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