

## NJHA Reflections

Reflecting over the past three years is like flipping through a scrapbook of time. On one page there is a young, excited and, to be honest, somewhat naïve girl giving speeches, debating at roundtable discussions, meeting new people and helping out wherever she can as she runs for a position on the National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) board of directors.

The next page has pictures filled with excitement, friends, family, a few tears and the article announcing that she was indeed elected to be a NJHA director.

I distinctly remember the fear, anxiety, excitement and passion as I ran for the board wondering, hoping, thinking that I could affect the people around me in such a way that it would leave a mark not only in the Hereford industry, but the world around us as well.

During the past three years, my name hasn't been written in history books, I haven't set any world records and I've yet to be thanked for changing the world. However, I've learned the joy of putting my agenda aside to serve others. I've witnessed the power of love — love for the Lord, this breed and the people around me. I've experienced the commitment it takes to lead with excellence and found that even though walking in integrity and standing on truth may cost you much, it's more than worth it, as it will make you a leader worth following.

Because of this, I have been able to taste the excitement of encouraging, challenging and influencing others and, even more so, I've been blessed to be continually stretched and affected by you, my Hereford friends and family. Perhaps one of the greatest lessons I've learned is that though they may not get their names carved in stone, real-world changers are those who are crazy enough to see the potential in the world around them, naïve enough to believe in that potential even when it looks impossible and diligent enough to make that potential a reality by investing in one life at a time. I ran for the board wanting to change the world, but what I didn't realize was just how much my world would be changed in the process.

As I retire, I move on to new things knowing this: there are stories yet to be told, lives (including my own) yet to be influenced and a world that still needs much more changing.

— **Heather Thomas**, NJHA president

After sitting through dozens of “end of the year” speeches, I found a common thread in all of them — how we all needed to “find our place” in this world. No matter what you are interested in or how old you are, now is the time to find your place in the world.

After hearing the “find your place” speech hundreds of times

I began thinking about how the NJHA and serving on the board has helped me “find my place.” I was curious if serving as board members from 2003-06 had helped Heather, Wade, Matt or myself find our place, and just what those beginning and ending dates really meant. Did they mean that this summer my place in the American Hereford Association (AHA) was over? No way! I then realized that it wasn't about the beginning and the end, but rather it was about the dash.

The dash, being the years between the beginning and end, are what really mattered. It didn't matter that we were the first group elected at the Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE). Rather, what mattered is that we were the group who helped revamp PRIDE Convention, the group who was faced with tough decisions on combining shows and the group who got the honor of representing the breed at the 100th anniversary of the National Western Stock Show. Thus, I realized that finding your place isn't something that must be done right now. No, finding your place is something that happens slowly. It happens during the dash.

No one will remember how many times you failed or how many times you conquered small victories; instead, people will remember you when you find your place in the world. As I reflect back on my journey as an NJHA board member I realize that I have found my place. And, no one can take away this place. Those memories, those friends and all those crazy van rides will be a part of my place in the NJHA forever.

Hereford members: make sure you're doing all that you want to do right now, try something new, do something out of the ordinary, make sure you're finding your place. I did and you can too. The NJHA board helped show me my place in this world and for that I am ever grateful.

— **Ashley Middleswarth**, NJHA director

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