

Commitment

Cheryl Thomas stays involved in the Hereford industry through volunteering.

by Sara Gugelmeyer



Cheryl Thomas is no stranger to hard work. Growing up as one of two girls on a commercial Hereford operation in eastern Oregon, Cheryl and her sister, Lynda, learned quickly how to make themselves useful.

Now a retired teacher, Cheryl speaks fondly of the time she spent helping out on the ranch as a child. Besides the cow herd, Cheryl says her family also had milk cows and irrigated hayland. “For sure, my sister and I were never bored,” she says.

In eastern Oregon, much of the land is government-owned. Cheryl explains, “We had Bureau of Land Management (BLM) permits for cows and calves in the spring. Then those cattle were gathered at the same time each year, which was called the ‘June Ride.’”

There were many people who had permits, and all the cattle were gathered at the same time. “What an endeavor it was, as there were always cows without calves and calves without cows,” she says. “There were no ear tags back then.”

She continues, “We also had Forest Service permits for the summer. As fall arrived and the snow started falling in the mountains, most of the cattle would drift toward home. But there would be a weekly gathering we called ‘riding the lanes’ where the cattle would be gathered, cut out and driven home by their owners. This was much tamer than in the spring as there were no little calves to get lost in the herd.

“Our steers were pastured on a ranch that belonged to my mom’s parents,” Cheryl says. “Way back then steers were sold as 2-year-olds. I still remember the year we sold both the 2-year-olds and yearlings. Times were changing.”

Cheryl has seen the cattle industry undergo many changes since she was a child. Although she moved to Hood River, Ore., to live on an orchard, Cheryl has stayed involved with Hereford cattle. Her sister, Lynda, married, and she and her husband run Bird Herefords, which is a seedstock operation in eastern Oregon.

Because it’s difficult for Cheryl to have her own cattle in Hood River — “it’s not cattle country,” Cheryl explains — the cattle she

owns are looked after by the Birds. She does have a flock of Columbia sheep, which are better suited to the area.

It was Lynda who got Cheryl involved with purebred Herefords. “At that time I was going all over the country to shows and sales with my sister and brother-in-law and figured I might as well have some cattle if I was going to be that involved,” Cheryl says.

“I do go to Halfway, Ore., which is five hours (in good weather) from where I live to help with spring and fall working, vaccinating, etc.,” she says. “In



Cheryl Thomas got her start in the Hereford business after traveling to cattle shows with her sister and brother-in-law. She is pictured here at the Baker County Fair in Halfway, Ore.

earlier years I would spend one week of my Christmas vacation there helping with night checks on the calving cows. During the summer months, I make monthly trips to the ranch in eastern Oregon.”

Another way Cheryl stays involved in the Hereford business is through donating her time to organizations. She is involved in the Oregon, Washington, Northern Idaho (OWNI) Hereford Association and the Western States Hereford Association (WSHA) and is a member of the American Hereford Women (AHW).

Not only has she been a longtime member of these organizations, but she has also been involved in many leadership positions. Nevertheless, Cheryl stresses that she doesn't consider herself a leader; she is simply happy to donate her time to these worthy organizations.

The WSHA is an organization that represents six western states in organizing the Western Nugget National Hereford Show and Sale in Reno, Nev., each December. In 1996 Cheryl was selected by the WSHA directors to be treasurer of the organization. Cheryl explains that over the years the position has evolved so that she has more responsibilities and has gained valuable experience. “I have ended up being the coordinator, in that the information comes to me and I disseminate it to the proper person, as well as dealing with contracts and other things,” she says. “I've become acquainted with a lot of Hereford people through this job as well as business people we deal with to make the show happen.”

Cheryl has also been active in OWNI for many years, including serving as president in 2004 and 2005. “When I was president of OWNI, I was responsible



Cheryl enjoys going to see her cattle that are kept at her sister's place in eastern Oregon.

for putting together a tour in conjunction with an American Hereford Association (AHA) 101 conference,” she says. “We supported other activities, but that was the highlight of my tenure as it was fun and informative and people were very complimentary. However, anyone could have done it as it just takes time and persistence

Finally, for a number of years, Cheryl has also been the voting delegate representing Oregon at the AHA Annual Meeting to elect new national directors.

In 1999 Cheryl retired from being a schoolteacher. Her retirement allows her more time for her Hereford interests. But despite all these volunteer positions, Cheryl

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to pull off things of that nature. Plus I had plenty of committed people willing to help.”

Cheryl has also donated her time to AHW. She was on the AHW board from 2001 to 2004, and throughout that time, she was parliamentarian for one year and served on various committees, as well.

still shrinks away from being dubbed a leader.

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