

Red Jacket

Celeste Settrini says no matter where life takes her, it's her experiences as an AJHA board member that made her the woman she is today.

by **Christy Couch Lee**



SIt's been more than two decades since Celeste Settrini, Salinas, Calif., donned the red jacket signifying her status as an American Junior Hereford Association (AJHA) board member, and a sash proclaiming her as California Hereford Queen.

However, according to friend and colleague Trent Loos, Loup City, Neb., the title and esteem of being an AJHA member carries with her to this day.

"She might be the oldest junior Hereford association member in the country," Loos says with a laugh. "She fondly remembers the people. Her days in the Hereford world shaped her in youth and made a lasting impression on her life."

Today, Settrini lives a fast-paced life as a produce broker, agricultural advocate and California Women for Agriculture (CWA) president. But, as she'll tell you, nothing has affected her life quite like donning the red jacket and the sash during her junior Hereford days.

Always a rancher

Settrini was raised on her family's commercial cow-calf Red Angus operation in the Salinas Valley of California, where she still lives today.

Ranching is a family affair, with parents Gus and Anita; brother, John; sister-in-law, Julie; and nearly 2-year-old niece, Paige, involved in the daily activities of the ranch.

A fourth-generation cattle rancher, Settrini was anxious to begin showing cattle at a young age. When she was 9, Settrini purchased

her first heifer — a Hereford — for \$200 from Layout Bros. Hereford Ranch in King City, Calif.

"I raised her and showed her for the first time at the local county fair," she says. "She was in heat and was tugging me all around the ring. But, I stuck with it and won grand champion. I got the bug."

The Hereford bug stuck with Settrini through her junior showing career. She raised and exhibited Hereford cattle throughout California and attended every state junior Hereford field day through the years.

With the encouragement of many California Hereford breeders, Settrini ran for the AJHA board and was elected to a three-year term in 1986.

"During my term, I traveled to many national shows and field days and had the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Hereford industry and beef, in general, throughout the United States," she says. "I have tremendous memories of all the people I met, the places I visited and the homes I stayed in. It pushed me into the right direction for where I am now in



life. I attest my success in life to my experiences on the Hereford junior board.”

Settrini received her bachelor’s degree in agribusiness marketing from California Polytechnic State University (Cal Poly) in 1991. While at Cal Poly, she was active in the Agribusiness Marketing Club and Agricultural Ambassadors.

All the while, Settrini says, her true loves were showing and fitting cattle and traveling as part of her Hereford junior board activities. Although she envisioned her career after college to be centered on cattle, fate had something different in store.

The fast-paced life of a produce broker

A career in the produce industry was always an option for Settrini, but it wasn’t something she strongly considered. However, when Settrini graduated from Cal Poly, she accepted a job as a produce broker, where she remains today.

“I always envisioned I’d work for a feed company or a livestock magazine — something with cattle,” she says. “The Salinas Valley is the ‘salad bowl of [the] world’ — so many commodities come from this area. I told myself I’d give it a try and see what it’s like to work as a produce broker. And, 19 years later, here I am.”

Each day, Settrini arrives at her office at 5:30 a.m., and purchases vegetables and some fruits from farmers and markets their products to foodservice clients, primarily in the Midwest and on the East Coast. In addition, she coordinates company marketing, including newsletters and media interviews.

When 3 p.m. arrives, she leaves the office to take on her second career as a partner in the family ranch. Settrini is involved in the day-to-day responsibilities of the ranch, including feeding, weaning, branding and marketing.

In addition to a strenuous career and responsibilities on the ranch, Settrini also finds time to volunteer her talents for the advancement of the agricultural industry.

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Spreading the word

In January Settrini was elected to a two-year term as president of the CWA.

“I was blessed to be elected as CWA president,” she says. “The CWA is a group of all that’s agriculture — farmers, ranchers, consumers and production agriculture. A cattle person hasn’t been at the lead for quite some time. It’s exciting for me and for the cattle people in California.”

In 2008 Settrini was honored as Ag Woman of the Year for San Benito, Santa Cruz and Monterey counties. Among the many reasons she received this award were her agricultural advocacy efforts, according to a CWA press release.

Advocacy for agriculture has been a primary goal for Settrini — both through CWA and personally.

“I’ve made an attempt to put myself out to traditional media and social media, telling agriculture’s story,” Settrini says. “Not only for CWA, but for American agriculture, in general.”

Just a few months ago, Settrini and friend Lynn Figone, Petaluma, Calif., created Ag 4 You — sharing agricultural information and sparking discussions on the Ag 4 You Facebook page.

“We wanted to start a Facebook page where we can talk about everything,” Settrini says. “It’s not necessarily our opinions, but we share ideas and hopefully can learn something. We post stories and get the conversations going on different topics.”

Once her CWA term ends, Settrini hopes the Ag 4 You page and her industry contacts can help her launch her public speaking career even further.

“I certainly have a passion for the industry, and I love what I do,” Settrini says. “I speak from the heart.”



Because she speaks from the heart, she is often called upon by area cattle producers to speak on their behalf.

“The greatest thing I can do is represent farmers and cattlemen in our area,” Settrini says. “It’s exciting, and it feels good.”

Although some people might be intimidated by speaking to legislators, Settrini finds it exciting.

“I love talking to legislators,” she says. “The people voted them into office, and we can vote them out, too.”

Settrini also enjoys promoting “I Love Farmers,” a farm-advocacy group founded by Cal Poly students; serving on the Monterey County Farm Bureau board of directors; and being involved in the California CattleWomen organization.

How does she keep going throughout her many commitments? Settrini says she finds inspiration in others she admires and calls friends.

Finding inspiration

In order to continually improve and advance in her advocacy efforts, Settrini says she relies on many colleagues and friends for advice and encouragement. Topping the list of supporters, Settrini says, is Trent Loos.

Loos hosts and produces the radio program “Loos Tales,” which is heard by 3 million listeners on nearly 100 radio stations in 19 states. “Loos Tales” is one of six radio shows he produces, in addition to giving nearly 200 presentations on rural America throughout the U.S. yearly.

“He’s been an inspiration for me to be my best self,” she says. “I love public speaking and talking to people. But, he’s given me that push and told me, ‘You can do this.’ We have things in

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the works that we're doing together. It's been fun, and I'm very lucky."

Loos says Settrini may not fully understand how much she's already impacted the agricultural industry, and society, as a whole.

"She talks about wanting to be an advocate for agriculture," Loos says. "She has no clue that every day of her life, because of her passion for agriculture, she is an advocate. For leading by example, she's the poster child. She is always upbeat and always seeing the good side of what's happening in ag, and she conveys that through her actions and words."

Settrini has been featured on Loos' radio show Rural Route Radio three times, she says.

"It's crazy — the people I've met through social media who first heard me on Rural Route Radio," she says. "I get so excited. I have a whole group of friends on Facebook that I don't know personally — they're my friends through the radio shows."

The friends Settrini has met through her Hereford experiences also provide great inspiration. Throughout the years, her memories of serving on the Hereford junior board are among the sweetest of her life, she says.

"The people I met along the way made such an influence on who I am today," she says. "Being with all of the people around the United States who supported me — the great notes they sent, the phone calls. I'll never forget that. You can ask anybody. I love those people."

Empowering others

Settrini hopes that by speaking from the heart and making people feel special, she can empower them to reach their goals and to dare to try new things.

"If not for Trent [Loos], I would not be where I am now, doing what I do," Settrini says. "He has empowered me. Now, I find myself doing that with other people."

She hopes to empower cattle producers to speak up and tell their stories.

"You've lived your experiences, and you're an expert on your experiences," she says. "There are many people who will try to tell it for you. And, if they don't have an ag influence telling their story, that person is not going to know the truth."

Loos says Settrini is the perfect example of living life to its fullest.

"Never say I wish I would have," he says. "Follow your passion in life every day. Follow your heart — turn it loose and let it guide you. Anyone that speaks from their heart gains instant credibility, and people want to hear more of what you have to say."

Chances are, the agricultural industry has only begun to hear from Settrini. And to think, it all began with a red jacket and a queen's sash. **HW**