

Heartache at Home

A Hereford family's hardship rallies support from breeders.

by Julie White

July 8 began as a typical Thursday at the 2010 Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) in Indianapolis.

Though it was their first JNHE, the Bowen family of Prosperity Acres in Sunderland, Md., fell in stride with seasoned participants. Parents Michael and Mary made it their goal for children Edward, Jacqueline and Jacob to enjoy the full experience, competing in contests and making new friends.

In the midst of another busy day at the show, the Maryland and Pennsylvania group of Hereford breeders knew something was wrong when they heard Mary Bowen scream to her husband while talking on the phone. The word would soon spread that the Bowen family had lost their home to a fire.

"What we have experienced is that Hereford breeders are very caring people," says Mary, reflecting on that Thursday. "They are very wholesome and big-hearted."

The support for the Bowen family began in the first moments following the news. A few people around saw the panic in Mary's face and instantly become concerned. "There were some who followed outside to hear what was going on," she says. "When they found out, they grabbed me because they could see I was getting hysterical."

The Bowen family immediately began packing up stalls to leave. "There were people just grabbing equipment to help us get loaded."

The Bowens pulled into their drive at 4:30 in the morning to find what was left of their two-story home. "The darkness of the night couldn't hide the devastation of the fire," Mary says. "We lost everything."

Later that morning, Mary received a phone call from the Maryland junior advisor Cyndy Howes. The Bowens had left in such a rush they had been unable to inform her of the fire directly. "She was crying herself," Mary remembers. "She said, 'We could have flown you home and someone would have driven your truck.' And then it occurred to me as she was talking. Oh my God, this is like a family."

Mary soon learned that people continued to stop by the stalls to ask about their family and that the Maryland group had items to bring back for the Bowens. People had gone out to the store and bought things to help. Others brought by checks and gift cards. A gift basket of houseware items someone had won earlier in the week was donated to the Bowen family. "And when Cyndy told us they stopped the show for a minute of prayer for our family, I just didn't know what to say."

Mary also received a phone call from Amy Cowan, American Hereford Association director of youth activities and foundation, expressing concern and sympathy from the National Junior Hereford Association. Numerous Hereford breeders were asking Amy how to contact the Bowens.

"First of all we were in shock from losing the house," Mary says. "But we



Jessica Jensen, Courtland, Kan., a member of the Kansas Junior Hereford Association, is pictured giving National Junior Hereford Association Director Andrew Albin a donation for the Bowen family. Numerous families and individuals at the 2011 JNHE donated money and goods to help the family.



Bowen family members (pictured l to r) are: Jacqueline, Mike, Mary, Jacob, Amanda and Edward.

just had no idea that people would reach out like they did.”

Different state Hereford associations contacted the Bowens within a short period of time following the fire. “They were sending us things as we rebuilt the house and moved back in,” she says. Hereford pictures were sent, and one Maryland breeder replaced a keepsake given to Jacqueline by her grandma who passed just months before. The family enjoyed a Hereford afghan sent to them, so Mary bought another and donated it to the Maryland Hereford Association’s auction to help raise money for the juniors wanting to attend the 2011 JNHE. “It was the highest bidding item,” she says. “The circle just keeps going round and round to help these juniors know how important they are to somebody.”

Though the Bowen family faced adversity, they remained positive and came out with an understanding of the type of people who are Hereford breeders.

“The support has been overwhelming in a wonderful,

wonderful way,” Mary says. “There were times when I would see my husband sitting and I would go to him and he would say, ‘Mary, I just cannot believe all these people that are helping us because they heard about the fire.’”

She said the experience helped them as parents show their children how to treat people. “You need to be willing to lend a helping hand no matter what is going on in their life,” she says. “As parents we are always talking about that, but the fire really helped us to be able to emphasize that point to our kids. Life really is about being supportive to anybody you can help. You just never know the impact you can have on their life — what it’s going to do for them.”

Michael and Mary remind their children to never expect a thank you. “You don’t know what’s going on at that moment,” she says. “They may not be able to thank you at that moment, but just to know they have unconditional support from others is what really matters.”

Mary wants to send a big thank you from the Bowen family to

the Hereford family. “We are overwhelmed by their kindness and generosity,” she says. “It means more than they could possibly know for them to help a Hereford family they don’t even know. When we do get to meet them, wherever it is, my husband and I will shake their hand and it’s going to feel as if they are our next-door neighbors. We realized we had no idea how many people had our backs during this situation, and we definitely have their back no matter who they are in the Hereford family.”

The fire helped emphasize what the Bowens already know: cattle people are caring people.

“We are very grateful for everything they did whether it was to stop to say a prayer, call us or send a package — it all meant a lot to us,” she says. “We just hope in time we get to meet everyone and thank them personally.” **HW**