

# The Pastor in the Pasture

*Reverend Mark and Deb Schoen combine ministry and Herefords.*

by *Sara Gugelmeyer*

Outside of his family, Reverend Mark Schoen has two passions in life — pastoring and raising Hereford cattle. And he takes both very seriously.

Raised on a farm in Minnesota, Mark comes from a family that had Jersey dairy cows, but he showed Herefords in 4-H. Mark went to college and studied animal science for two years, planning to become a veterinarian. But he always remembered something a pastor had told him at his high school graduation.

“A pastor from a neighboring town, who heard me speak at my high school graduation, told me, “With a voice like yours you should be a pastor,” Mark says.

He didn't really consider the ministry at the time because he wanted to be involved in agriculture, but his strong Christian faith grew during his college years.

“It was 1979, I was only married for about one month but one night I felt convicted that maybe I should go on and be a pastor. I gave up the farming and the cattle to go to seminary,” Mark explains.

To be ordained in the Lutheran faith, one has to attend eight years of school, so Mark traded his animal science textbooks to learn more about religion, including Greek and Hebrew. He and his



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new wife, Deb, moved to Ft. Wayne, Ind., where he attended Concordia Theological Seminary.

In 1985 Mark was ordained, and he started as a parish pastor in Michigan. Then the couple moved to a church in Minnesota before settling in St. Croix Falls, Wis., in 1991.

After 10 years of living in town, Mark says, “I couldn’t take it anymore, I wanted to get out to the country and have a farm again.”

With their two daughters, Rachel and Emily, already off at college and son, Nate, finishing up high school, Mark and Deb were nearly empty nesters. “I wish I would have done it earlier but we have to wait until God provides,” Mark explains.

They purchased land along Big Creek and wasted no time setting up Christ the Rock Herefords. “We built this thing from the ground up,” Mark says. “We built all new

buildings and facilities and we're still building on it."

Mark and Deb purchased their first Herefords from Fred Larson, Spring Valley, Wis., and their herd now consists of 21 cows. They focus on producing top-quality seedstock, using the latest in artificial insemination and embryo transfer technology. Mark says they regularly purchase embryos from the top names in the Hereford seedstock business to keep their genetics on the cutting edge.

Their calves are marketed through private treaty and the local Indianhead and Wisconsin Hereford Association consignment sales.

"We really pride ourselves on quality," Deb says. "We want to be the best."

Their goals, though, are not all about cattle. "Our motto is promoting Christ the Rock and rock-solid seedstock," Mark says. "We are trying to witness through Jesus Christ and the Bible as God's Word."

"Cattle on a thousand hills are mine," Psalms 50:10 is a Bible verse that can be found on their website and is always on their minds.

Mark says, "All the cattle come from God anyway, he just lets us use them and breed them and, of course, Herefords are his favorite.

Mark uses the Hereford business to reach out to people spiritually. His business card has this on the back:

"For God so loved \_\_\_\_\_, that He gave His only-begotten Son to suffer and die on the cross for \_\_\_\_\_ that if \_\_\_\_\_ believes in Jesus as His Savior from sin, \_\_\_\_\_ shall not perish but \_\_\_\_\_ shall have everlasting life.' John 3:16 (paraphrased)."

Every time Mark gives a business card to a potential



Mark is an ordained reverend in the Lutheran church.

customer, he fills in that customer's name in the blanks.

"I try not to be too pushy," Mark says. "I just tell people that the good news, gospel means good news, is that Jesus Christ has come to be our savior. We don't have to fear death because He is the rock of our salvation."

Mark says their Hereford business provides him and Deb, who is also a part-time dental

hygienist, with a type of therapy. "For me, as a pastor I have to deal with marriage problems, family problems, people that are struggling. Cattle are a way for me and my wife to get away from it all, because cattle don't have those problems. They don't have to deal with sin and failures like we do."

He is also an ambassador for the breed and the entire cattle industry. His church, with about 200 members, is familiar with his second job, and he's even sold some Hereford beef to friends. He's also helped a young parishioner get into the Hereford business.

"I am very busy with the church, but this is my way of getting out and promoting Herefords, but the same time, Christianity," Mark says.

He stresses that he's not trying to make people Lutheran; he's just spreading God's word. In fact, he says he's met many good Christian people through the American Hereford Association.

Now at 55 years young, Mark is thankful to God for all that He has provided. "I get the best of both worlds," he says. I've come full circle. Now I get to do the cattle and preaching and teaching." **HW**



Mark says he enjoys the cattle because it's a way to get away from the stress involved with being a pastor.