

The Art of Service

John and Mona Loewen have served in virtually every facet of the Hereford industry with grace and style.



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— John Loewen

by **Christy Couch Lee**

When you step into the home of John and Mona Loewen, Waukomis, Okla., you immediately sense it — they’re not your typical Hereford breeders.

One-of-a-kind artwork from across the country and around the world adorns their walls. Beautiful tiling and décor have been lovingly created with Mona’s hands. And not one but two kitchens serve their needs — one for everyday and one for the cooking parties and classes John hosts in their home.

Amidst it all, Hereford artwork is showcased throughout the home. And outside the living room windows Hereford cows graze in the pasture.

No, they’re not your typical breeders. And they’re not your typical Hereford volunteers, either. Throughout their half-century of marriage and even beyond, serving the Hereford industry has been their passion. And they’ve done it with the grace and style that carries through every aspect of their lives.

Hereford heritage

The Loewens have a strong passion for the industry. One was born with it. And one has developed it through the years.

Mona’s family has a century-long history in the Hereford breed,

while John was introduced to it when they began dating.

“John was a city boy, and our first date was a blind date,” Mona says. “I say it was love at first sight — when he saw the cows.”

And 53 years ago, when they were 17 and 18, they were married.

They received their first Hereford heifer as a wedding gift and haven’t looked back since.

After John earned a bachelor’s degree in animal science from Oklahoma State University and Mona earned her degree in art history from Phillips University, they moved to Mississippi where John began fitting cattle for a Hereford operation.

Less than two years later, they returned to the family farm, where John farmed with Mona’s brother, Losco Hunter, while Mona’s dad, Harold V. Hunter, worked in state politics.

“I began working at the Oklahoma state capitol, which eventually led me to a position as a lender with Farmers Home Administration,” John says.

In 1979 John began working as a lender with a small bank in Hennessey, Okla., and within two years was promoted to president. When he retired 12 years ago at 58, he was president of a bank holding company with nine locations.

At its peak the Loewen cow herd consisted of 150 purebred cows. Today, they run about 25 purebred cows and 15-20 recipient cows for embryo calves. They live on the land that has been in Mona’s family since the early 1900s in a home just across the road from where she was raised.

John and Mona’s three children took the family involvement to the next generation.

Focus on the family

Their sons, Ron and Bob, showed at the first Polled Hereford Junior

National in 1974 in Nashville, Tenn., and they exhibited at nearly every junior national while of junior age.

Their daughter, Jennifer, was crowned the National Polled Hereford Queen in 1987.

The Loewens take great pride in their children and their children-in-law, as well as their seven grandchildren. Although their children and grandchildren are not currently active in the Hereford industry, Mona says, they still gain great enjoyment from the red and white cattle.

“When our children and grandchildren come home to visit, they always want us to bring up a heifer for them to work with,” Mona says with a smile. “They call it the ‘Cousin Camp.’”

Service to community has always come naturally for the Loewens. Both are active within their church, Emmanuel Baptist Church of Enid, Okla., where John serves as head trustee, Mona teaches English as a second

language and both teach Sunday school. They also have served as personal financial counselors for the past 10 years.

So when the opportunity arose for John and Mona to serve the Hereford industry, it only seemed natural. Service is in their blood.

Serving the Hereford industry

Mona’s father served as chairman of the American Polled Hereford Association board of directors in 1973. He also served several terms as the president of the Oklahoma Polled Hereford Association.

“Mona grew up in the Hereford industry, and everything their family did revolved around the cattle business,” John says.

Mona says the chance to serve the Hereford industry was never a question. It’s just something her family did, she says.

“I just grew up that way,” she says. “We went to every national show and sat through

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The Loewens donated the proceeds from the sale of Loewen Foundation 34X and his semen royalties to the HRF in 2011.

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every banquet, listening to those speeches. It was our family vacation and my dad's passion. And now, it's John's passion, even though he didn't grow up with it."

A few decades later, it was John's turn for service. And serve, he did. There's virtually no Hereford board on which he hasn't contributed his time and experience.

John was elected to the American Hereford Association (AHA) board of directors in 2001. And from 2002-2003, he served on the AHA executive committee. He says his greatest contribution to the AHA Board was likely his management and financial experience.

"I know a little about managing an organization, budgeting and finance through my career in the banking industry," he says.

In 2004 John served as president of the Certified Hereford Beef (CHB) board of directors.

Shortly afterward, John helped to develop the Hereford Youth Foundation of America (HYFA), which was established to provide scholarship and leadership benefits for National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) members.

"The NJHA is a slam dunk for the industry," John says. "It teaches leadership skills and overall skill development — not to mention that Hereford cattle's docility is great for a junior program. HYFA serves to enhance the opportunities available to NJHA members."

Today, John serves on the Hereford Research Foundation (HRF) committee, which is a division of HYFA that supports breed improvement projects outside the scope of the AHA budget.

John's service doesn't end with time. It extends to great financial dividends, too. He and Mona donated Loewen Foundation 34X



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to the HRF in 2011. Leased to ABS Global, the proceeds from the sale of the bull and semen royalties are donated to the HRF.

And Mona's art background has also served the AHA in great ways, as well.

The art of the Hereford

John has always been fascinated with the numerous oil-on-canvas paintings that adorn the walls of the AHA building. John and Mona both believed there should be a way to share this artwork with Hereford enthusiasts across the country, and perhaps around the world, while also benefiting the Association in some way, too.

While attending an art show, Mona discovered just the ticket — a relatively new process for scanning and recreating artwork called giclee, which is a process by which high-quality artistic reproductions are placed on canvas.

Several of the Hereford art pieces were scanned. And during the 2011 HYFA “The Harvest,” held at the Kunde Family Estate in Sonoma, Calif., the first two prints were auctioned for the fund.

“Only 20 prints of each were created and offered in limited edition,” she says. “One was Anxiety 4, which is credited as being the father of American Herefords, imported from England in the early 1800s. And the other was Silver, the first registered Hereford cow in England from 1742. We had no idea how much they would bring, but they generated nearly \$25,000 for HYFA.”

Now, 11x14 prints on high-quality paper are available for purchase through HYFA to further benefit the fund. Mona envisions the possibilities of cleaning and repairing many AHA paintings — many of which were created in



The Loewens helped to facilitate the recreation of prints of Anxiety 4 and Silver for the HYFA "The Harvest" auction, which generated nearly \$25,000 for HYFA.

the 1700s and 1800s — as well as potential additional print, notecard and coffee table book creations.

John says serving the Association is a way to help ensure positive change.

"It's pretty evident that you can sit back and complain and gripe about things, and not accomplish anything, or you can be a part of the process and help drive things in a positive direction," he says.

And, the Loewens say, the benefits they've received from their time of service is also great.

Reaping rewards

John says he has gained the greatest satisfaction from learning from and working with breeders from diverse backgrounds.

"Everyone has their own backgrounds and viewpoints — from commercial bull breeders to those with registered cattle customers to those who support the youth program," he says. "Working with these diverse groups has been challenging and interesting, and I've built a lot of friendships throughout the years."

Mona says these friendships with people of the Hereford industry have created a family-like bond.

"All around the world, we can visit a Hereford breeder — it's like they're family," she says. "When

Jennifer was queen, she could stay at friends' houses across the country, and I didn't have to worry."

And, John says, seeing improvements in the industry has been a great reward, as well.

"We have a sense of pride in seeing the advancements we've made in the breed — from watching the junior nationals grow to the largest in the country, to seeing the EPDs (expected progeny

differences) improve," he says.

The Loewens' service hasn't only benefited the Hereford breed. It's also led to improvements in their herd, as well.

"During one of my first AHA board meetings, large ranchers were talking to the Board about

how they would never use a Hereford bull again if we didn't get the calving ease fixed," he recalls. "I thought it was only perception. But with that discussion, I realized it was an issue that needed to be changed."

And during his term on the CHB board, while touring processing plants, he realized even more the importance of carcass quality. Shortly afterward, he made adjustments to the Loewen breeding program to address both calving ease and carcass merit.

Throughout the years, the Loewens have served the industry well. And, no doubt, their service will continue for years to come. For this family, service is most definitely an art. And they are skilled artists, without a doubt. **HW**



Mona and John Loewen have served the Hereford industry throughout their half-century of marriage and beyond.