

Western Nugget Sale Turns 50



The Western Nugget will host its 50th national Hereford sale in December.

by *Bridget Beran*

With the raise of a curtain, one of the fanciest shows in America has been starting with a bang for decades. The 50th Western Nugget National Hereford Sale will take place on Dec. 5, 2015, in Reno, Nev., and it just keeps getting better.

According to Willard Wolf, a former fieldman for the American Hereford Association (AHA), the sale has evolved a great deal since the first sale. And since he's been at every sale since it started, he'd know that better than most.

"When we first got it started, Tom McCord, who was the

fieldman for California, used to select bulls from different breeders across the country, predominantly the West Coast region," Wolf says. "They would usually accept a bull from Oregon and the other states. It used to be more of a bull sale, but now it's a little bit of everything."

Since its humble beginnings at the fairgrounds, where it was hosted by the California/Nevada Hereford Association (CNHA), it has increased in excitement and size. When the sale moved into the Western Nugget hotel, Wolf says, he remembers when cattle used to

be taken into the elevator to get them into the sale. That was before the sale moved onto the iconic main stage.

"The size of things have increased by 650%. It started out being eight or 10 head of bulls. It's evolved into 40 or 50 cattle selling," Wolf says. "One of the biggest changes was bringing the junior show in. Our cattle numbers have always been in the area of 300 and it has always been one of the largest shows in the area."

The addition of the show helped to pump up interest for an already exciting event. Gary Kendall, who

managed the sale for many years, says that he thinks the addition of the show helped attract people and made the Western Nugget into a bigger event.

“The people enjoyed going there. It was a great break from their ranching activities,” Wolf says. “It’s been self-sustaining and it’s a breeders’ show. It’s a tradition that speaks volumes for the breed of cattle.”

The sale and show were operated by the CNHA until 1995, when the CNHA joined with several of its neighboring associations to create the Western States Hereford Association, which has operated the sale and show since.

“It’s one of the only senior stand-alone events in the United States,” said Loren Mrnak, who has been the chairman of the sale since 1991. “The only thing here is Hereford cattle and it’s not connected with any other breed.”

The sale moved from the spring to the fall in 1988, according to Kendall. He managed the sale beginning in 1987 and started managing the barns once the show started and remained in these roles until 2006.

“It’s got a long tradition. It’s one of the longest running consignment sales there is in the nation and it has stayed that way by the people who are involved in it,” Kendall says. “They have a good group of people who keep it in the forefront.”

Good people are vital to the success of any event, and according to Kendall, Mrnak and Wolf, the Western Nugget has no shortage of them.

“It’s the commitment of the volunteers that have worked their tails off to make it successful,” Mrnak says. “We’ve just got such a great group of people who are committed to Hereford cattle and breed.”

Mrnak reflected on his many years with Western Nugget and remembers the kindness of the people over everything else. A part of the kindness himself, Mrnak would often hand out candy canes



Willard Wolf, a former AHA fieldman, says that the addition of a junior show added to the excitement of the Western Nugget.



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to children attending the show, as it took place near Christmastime.

“It’s been a tremendous event to involve Hereford people at all levels in,” Wolf says. “To get them involved and have something they can really enjoy. Over the 50 years, it’s created a real stage for people along with cattle to be involved.”

Still the memory that sticks out for all three men is watching the curtain go up in the Celebrity Show Room and the thrill that comes with it.

“If that doesn’t excite you about the cattle business, I don’t know what would,” Mrnak says. **HW**



Though self-sustaining, the Western Nugget National Hereford Sale also gets help from AHA fieldman Mark Holt.