

2006 Advisor of the Year

Touching Lives One Generation at a Time

Sue Rowland stretches the meaning of the word "advisor."

by **Teresa Oe**



Sue Rowland has been helping Hereford youth for more than 30 years. **Left:** Sue accepts a donation for the Kansas Junior Polled Hereford Association (KJPHA). Also pictured are former KJPHA members Fred Wingert and Joni (Snapp) Schmitz. **Below:** Sue and Katie Jo Parks study one of Sue's video clips. Sue tapes Kansas juniors at the JNHE and makes a short movie to show at the Kansas junior Hereford show the following year.



Most people consider themselves lucky to have touched a life in a lifetime. And then there's Sue Rowland, the 2006 National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) Advisor of the Year. You'd have to use both hands, and feet, and then start over again to begin to count the lives that Sue has touched.

Then again, touched is probably not the right word. It isn't Sue's style to touch and move on, but rather to hold on tight and truly make a difference. Accordingly, generations of Hereford youth, foremost the members of the Kansas Junior Polled Hereford Association (KJPHA), have experienced the cattle industry in a meaningful, life-shaping way through Sue's guidance.

Take James Preuss, for example. James is a senior at Kansas State University (K-State) but grew up only a half mile down the road from Sue and her husband, Jim, near Marysville, Kan. James is an experienced showman and secretary of the KJPHA.

When James was little, another neighbor would walk to the Rowland residence and back again for exercise, and James liked to tag along. After a number of these treks, he developed an interest in the cattle that resided at Sue and Jim's ranch, G&R Polled Herefords. Not about to let James'

interest and potential go to the wayside, Sue and Jim gave him little odd jobs around the ranch, knowing that he didn't live on a ranch and hadn't another way to become involved.

When James was 9 years old, Sue and Jim gave him a steer to work with and show. "That was 12 years ago and James is still showing cattle and working on the farm," says Nancy Preuss, James' mother. "Because of this experience, he has chosen an agricultural degree."

That agricultural degree from K-State happens to be in animal science with a livestock production option, a surprising choice for a young man who didn't grow up on a ranch. Not a surprising choice for a young man who grew up near Sue. "He is not the only neighborhood child with which Sue has worked with and given that opportunity," Nancy says.

James adds, "I'll probably come back (after college) to Marysville and help Sue and Jim until they decide not to raise cattle anymore."

James has built a small Hereford herd of his own, which he keeps at the Rowlands, and he has begun to

purchase land for both pasture and crops. Sue and Jim assist in this aspect of James' business as well, allowing him to use their farm machinery.

The Rowlands have been giving of themselves in this and other ways for more years than they care to calculate. Doug Parks, also of Marysville, Kan., lived with and worked for Sue and Jim in the 1970s and '80s. His daughter, Katie Jo, used to keep her cattle at the G&R ranch until her interest grew great enough to justify building a barn at home.

It looks like a trend

This generational continuance in the Hereford business is a common trend among many of Sue's juniors. Brady and Brooke Jensen, Courtland, Kan., are two more of Sue's second-generation Hereford kids. They live about an hour from the G&R ranch. Their father, Kevin, remembers when Brady would ask to stay overnight at Sue and Jim's house, despite the fact that he hadn't yet stayed away from home except at Grandma's. Over the years, the kids became so comfortable with the Rowlands that when their parents traveled to Australia for a week, Sue's place is where they stayed.

Sue has been this trusted second mom for many junior members. Kevin says that she wasn't the official advisor when he first started showing, but rather the official organizer. "In the late '70s and early '80s, we traveled as a band," Kevin says. "Sue was the 'mother hen' so to speak. Us older boys didn't think we needed her supervision, but we'd all say now it was a good thing."

Truth be known, many kids wouldn't have been able to attend the cattle shows they did, especially the junior national, if it wasn't for Sue and Jim, who have hauled a good many kids down the road when



Sue and Jim Rowland manage about 80 polled Hereford females. Through the years their focus has been producing junior show prospects for 4-H, FFA and Hereford youth.

parents weren't able to go or had to show up late. "She never misses a show," Brady says. "She always tries to be there for everyone."

What Brady might not realize is that Sue truly hasn't ever missed a junior national. She attended the first Junior National Polled Hereford Show in 1974 and has attended every one since. Sue didn't miss a beat when the polled and horned national junior associations combined and the Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) was started in 2000. She's been to each of these expos as well.

Although cattle shows are Sue's specialty, she also is there for junior and former junior members' graduations, weddings and other special events in their lives. Brady is certain that if no one else makes his graduation, Sue and Jim will.

Sue's time arrives

At this year's JNHE, 31 Kansas juniors shared in Sue's special recognition at the awards ceremony held on July 20 at the Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center, where the week's activities were held.

Tears were allowed to fall as these junior members, former members and others touched by Sue over the years watched her accept the award and listened to her tell of the journey that brought her to be the KJPHA advisor for 19 years.

Sue first talked of the time that she went to get dirty clothes from one of the KJPHA rooms at the first junior national in Nashville, Tenn. When she entered the room, she found kids from eight different states. This display of comradeship unbound by state lines served as a special moment in Sue's career as a Hereford mentor. At this moment any doubt that may have existed as to whether her time was well invested was permanently relinquished.

It was also at this first junior national that Sue made the "mistake" of signing up the Kansas and Nebraska juniors on mixed teams

for the judging contest. After doing so, she was called to the show office, where a big, burly man told her that there would be no kids from different states on the same team. Sue recalls, "I told the man I brought these kids together on a bus; they've worked together; they've roomed together; I don't see why they can't judge together." After some deliberation, Sue had her way.

This display of frankness, persistence and drive to create new friendships among juniors of different states is a perfect picture of Sue in action. Because of the stand she has taken for juniors all over the country, her mentorship has extended far beyond the Kansas group.

In their letter of recommendation for Sue's nomination as Advisor of the Year, the Mick and Donna Valek family wrote, "It's not only the Kansas youth who come to her for advice; if you watch Sue at the junior national, or any cattle show, youth from all states come to talk to Sue, whether it be to ask for advice, or just to say hi."

A little encouragement goes a long way

The Valeks are yet another family with which Sue's mentorship has crossed generations. She was a leader in Mick's showing years and now advises his daughter and son, Brandy and BJ. Brandy has been the president of the KJPHA for three years, and BJ is a second-year director. The family credits this involvement to Sue's encouragement.

Brandy says, "She encouraged me to be a director and I finally gave in; I was young and shy, and I didn't know if I was really the right person. I thought I was taking a big step when Sue thought I should be the junior board president, but with Sue at my side encouraging me I was able to come out of my shell." She continues, "I then was not only

president of the junior board but also gained the confidence to become Hutchinson Community College Block & Bridle president, vice president for my class, secretary for our FFA chapter and an officer for 4-H."

Sue's encouragement is demonstrated in a number of ways. "She gives me a lucky penny every year at the junior national," Katie Jo says. This lucky penny is a small token, but a precious gift to the Kansas juniors who've been receiving them year after year.

The Kansas juniors also receive matching state T-shirts to wear at JNHE competitions. Each shirt has a list of the Kansas attendees' names. "This keepsake gives them ownership in that year's memories," Sue says.

Where is her spare time?

It's clear that Sue dedicates a tremendous amount of her time, effort and dollars to the future of the Hereford breed. What's not so clear is how she is able to balance this commitment with employment and other activities.

Sue had taught business at Marysville High School for 36 years when she retired in 2001. During this time, she oversaw hundreds of students in their on-the-job training, which was part of the leadership program of Business Professionals of America. Sue also especially liked being asked to help with FFA activities.

After retiring from teaching, she worked for the Kansas State Department of Education to ensure that vocational departments throughout the state were in

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compliance. She now is a branch office manager for a printing company called Arbor Ink.

Sue has also served more than 40 years on the local Quality Beef Day show committee, assisting with fundraising, as well as judge and award selection. She was an organizational member of the Kansas FFA Foundation and has been active on her local hospital and bank boards.

On top of all this responsibility, Sue has always had a lot of work at home. She and Jim hosted production sales from 1976-89. For seven of these years, the couple hosted a G&R Influence Show, where juniors who purchased cattle at G&R had an opportunity to compete against one another and learn from judging and fitting demonstrations.

Very few cattle at Rowland sales were sold to adults. The intention was

to make available show prospects to 4-H, FFA and junior Hereford kids. Eddie Sims, half of last year's Advisor of the Year duo, auctioned the G&R sales. "After Sue and Jim sold calves to the kids, they didn't just forget about them," Eddie says. "There is no end to the amount of expense that Jim and Sue have had so that children can go to the shows."

It's not shocking then that G&R calves have been at every junior national since the beginning. At the 1981 junior national in Hutchinson, Kan., 10 kids showed 24 head of G&R-bred cattle. Impressive showings like this have led to premier breeder awards more than once.

Sue and Jim were involved in the fundraising for the junior national in Hutchinson, and Sue played an active role in the organization of the 1994 junior national in Kansas City, Mo., as

the KJPHA advisor. On a smaller but still impressive scale, she has overseen countless state shows and just last year, a regional show, also in Hutchinson. In 2004 Sue helped the KJPHA and Kansas Junior Hereford Association members come together to organize the first combined state Kansas show.

How to get things done

The major decisions regarding the association are left primarily to the junior board members, but Sue takes their direction and handles the responsibility of the paperwork and ordering awards for the show. Sue agrees to take on these tasks, provided the junior members do their part to raise money and be responsible for assigned duties at the shows.

Sue also expects her juniors to be well-rounded individuals. "She has helped me do a lot of things, most of all team marketing and judging," Brooke says. Sue's expectation and assistance may be why at this year's JNHE, Kansas juniors took home awards in the Hereford bowl, 3-on-3 basketball, illustrated speech, judging and photography contests, not to mention several high honors in the showing, both for showmanship skills and outstanding cattle.

From each JNHE, Sue's juniors take home more than just awards. Their most important job is to make "three new friends." Sue has stressed this point for years, and follows up with the kids to ensure they're meeting juniors from other states.

It is this true concern for the personal growth of Hereford juniors that led the American Polled Hereford Association to induct Sue and Jim into the Hall of Merit for their contributions to youth in 1981, and the reason that Sue now is Advisor of the Year.

In true Sue fashion, she says the honor of this all are the lives that have touched hers. It seems that what goes around does come around, and in Sue's case, it's a beautiful thing. **HW**

Excerpts from a letter of recommendation for Sue

"...My connection with Sue goes back to my early days in 4-H in the early 1980s. My initial experience in 4-H was with Angus cattle, but following in my cousin's footsteps, I soon became involved in junior polled Hereford activities. And you couldn't get involved in those activities in Kansas (or southern Nebraska, for that matter) without running head-on into Sue Rowland, still can't. Here is a person with no children of her own, who has literally been a stepparent to scores of young people through junior Hereford activities. As long as I can remember, G&R Polled Herefords, owned by Sue and her husband, Jim, has focused on production of junior heifer projects, not necessarily for maximum profit, but for maximum benefit of young people..."

"...I'm proud to call myself one of "Sue's kids," and know my children will as well. The contributions made to the Hereford breed, the beef industry and society in general by Sue's "older kids" are impressive. Among that group are a former AHA board member, several breed association staff, numerous seedstock and commercial breeders of cattle, plus several teachers, business owners, and yes, a college professor. We all owe Sue credit for much of our success, and know she is having the same positive impact on the next generation. It's quite telling to observe how nearly all of my generation now has children involved in junior Hereford activities. I think each of us recognizes how much we gained from the program, largely because of leaders like Sue, and that we want the same opportunities for our children..."

"...My only regret is that I won't be in Louisville this summer if she is chosen for this recognition. But I know if she is selected, plenty of "Sue's kids," ages 4 to 40-plus, will be there to congratulate her."

— **Dan Moser**, animal sciences and industry associate professor, Kansas State University