

# Moving On ... With a Mission

*Retired junior board members have places to go, people to see, lives to change.*

by **Teresa Oe**



Pictured with their Golden Bull trophies are retiring junior board members (l to r): Wade Perks, Rockford, Ill.; Matt McCurdy, Chatsworth, Ga.; Heather Thomas, Gold Creek, Mont.; and Ashley Middleswarth, Torrington, Wyo.

**E**ach year four of the 12 National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) directors retire from a three-year term on the board and move on to tackle new challenges. It's always fun to see where these talented young people came from and where they're going. As usual, this year's retirees have set their own impressive missions for life after the board.

### Heather Thomas

At the young age of 19, Heather Thomas has retired as the NJHA president. This fifth generation Hereford breeder from Gold Creek, Mont., has a mission to help people know and understand God. Her heart is set on helping people, be it through ministry or public service.

For the past year, Thomas has interned with the Clark Fork City Church School of Ministry in Missoula, Mont. She took three

weeks in the spring to share God's love with children of a poverty-stricken community in South Africa, and joined Clark Fork as a student this fall, focusing on music and worship.

Thomas showed her first Hereford heifer at the age of 7. She recalls "having to look under Angel's belly to see the judge." It isn't surprising that she got an early start in the Hereford arena; it's truly a Thomas family affair. Her parents, Bruce and Tammy, and grandparents, Richard and Shirley, operate Thomas Herefords and Thomas Cattle Services together, and her older siblings, Kurt and Amber, were both active members of the NJHA. Kurt served on the junior board from 1999-2002.

Former directors including her brother and aunt Terri Jo Thomas Anderson,

as well as the Gary Bishop family, inspired Thomas' decision to pursue directorship, in addition to her self-motivations.

"I love the Hereford breed, and know a lot about it, but my heart really was in it for the kids, to set a standard and be a role model," Thomas says. She served as a director her first year on the board, reporter the second and president the third.

Thomas encourages junior members to take advantage of all the NJHA offers. "We have contests that literally set you up for life," she says, citing examples like job interview and team marketing.

Thomas herself has participated in the Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) since 1999, and was a first-time exhibitor in 2001. She and her sister won national champion horned female in 2002 in Sioux Falls. The same year, her sister won reserve champion steer. "If one wins, we all win," Thomas says, noting again the family investment in each other's work and play.

### Matt McCurdy

Matt McCurdy, Chatsworth, Ga., is a senior at Oklahoma State University (OSU), pursuing a degree in animal science. He too has a long line of Hereford blood as a fourth generation Hereford breeder. Matt and his family, including parents Don and Kay, sister Krissi, and cousin Seth Ridley, help operate Matt's grandfather Sherman's operation, Leonard Polled Hereford Farm.

McCurdy started showing Hereford

Perhaps the most important aspect of serving on the junior board is helping younger members. Matt McCurdy cites this as one of his favorite parts of the job.

Junior board members have a number of responsibilities, large and small. Here, Heather Thomas assists with registration at the 2006 Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE).





cattle when he was 12 years old and exhibited year-round during high school on the local, state and national level. He's been a member of the Georgia Hereford Association since 1997 and attended his first JNHE in '98. McCurdy decided to run for the board to give back to the NJHA and to the juniors involved, as well as to get out and meet more people. He served as treasurer in 2004-05 and vice-president in '05-06. He speaks fondly of the places he's gone and the people he's met. He also talks of the satisfaction he's gained through helping the juniors with their problems and questions.

McCurdy's acquaintances weren't the only individuals who made his time on the board special; rather there were 11 comrades who had a definite effect. "Every board member gained from each other," McCurdy says. "You come together to form a whole and learn from each other."

One of the changes implemented while McCurdy was on the board was moving the PRIDE (Program for Reaching Individuals Determined to Excel) Convention from Kansas City, Mo., to different land-grant institutions each year. McCurdy feels this is one of the best decisions the board made, enabling youth participants to view colleges all over the country.

It's hard to tell someone in one sitting why he or she should run for the board, McCurdy says. There are too many experiences and too many opportunities to describe, but meeting new people, growing as a leader and traveling around the country are among the reasons he lists.

McCurdy has returned home from college each year for the summer to help run the ranch and to show throughout the months he has available. While he is not certain exactly how his future will unfold,

he says Herefords are definitely part of his plans.

### **Ashley Middleswarth**

This young lady's mission is to become an agricultural education teacher and FFA instructor, and to someday teach at the collegiate level. Ashley Middleswarth is the daughter of Jay and Marsha Middleswarth of Torrington, Wyo. She is a senior at OSU, double majoring in agricultural education and animal science.

Like McCurdy, Middleswarth is also the fourth generation in her family's Hereford tradition. Middleswarths have hosted an annual bull sale for more than 50 years.

After nine years as a member in both the Wyoming Junior Hereford Association and the NJHA, Middleswarth decided it was time to run for the NJHA board. She'd admired predecessors and wanted to influence others as she had been influenced. Middleswarth succeeded in her goal, serving two years as a director and one as secretary (2004-05).

"I enjoyed most being able to see people of all ages come together and experience things for the first time," Middleswarth says. "Getting to see people succeed and enjoy what we're doing in the Hereford industry."

What Middleswarth and her fellow board members did in the Hereford industry included making decisions as to which polled and horned shows to combine at the JNHE and representing the breed at the 100th anniversary of the National Western Stock Show.

This year's board members also attended the Youth Beef Industry Conference (YBIC) in March at Mississippi State University, Starkville. Here, the directors networked with other young

On top of their other duties, many junior board members still find time to exhibit Hereford cattle. Ashley Middleswarth was one of these busy young adults in Louisville.

cattlemen, sharing knowledge and experiences. "You learn so much more than you ever thought you could," Middleswarth says.

Middleswarth encourages future board members to remember that they are "12 people united as one." She notes that with one agenda, outside forces are less able to negatively affect the board's progress.

Middleswarth is president of Collegiate FFA at OSU and an active member of the Collegiate CattleWomen and Block & Bridle. She also works as a College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources Career Liaison, and in the summer returns home to help on the ranch. Middleswarth has exhibited cattle on the national level and was named the Wyoming State FFA Star Farmer in 2004. Someday, she hopes her own family too will have a Hereford foundation and experience in organizations such as FFA and 4-H.

### **Wade Perks**

Wade Perks' mission is to take what he's learned and apply it to the ranch he grew up on. Perks Ranch, Rockford, Ill., is home to Hereford and Red Angus cattle. Perks' Grandfather Cam and Father Doug purchased their first purebred Herefords in the mid-1970s, making Wade the third generation in the Hereford business. Wade is seeking experiences to take back home and apply directly to the ranch in hopes of maintaining the Perks Ranch tradition.

Perks graduated from OSU this spring with a bachelor's degree in

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## Retiring NJHA Directors

animal science. He enjoyed school and saw an opportunity at Texas Christian University (TCU) to further expand his knowledge of the cattle industry. He is now participating in an intensive nine-month ranch management program. All students in the program are required to pick a ranch to apply the things they've learned as a thesis-like project. Handy for Perks, he has a ranch he's looking to advance.

He credits many people for his knowledge and continued interest in the cattle business. "Tommy Coley taught me about the industry and the work that goes into the production of running a ranch," Perks says. He credits Matt Coley, Craig Crutcher and Jody Watson for their help in developing his skills on the show side.



Seeking out the opinions of the membership is critical to the junior association's success. "You have two ears and one mouth," Wade Perks says.

Perks' production and showing experience prepared him for a successful term on the NJHA board, including his reign as president in 2004-05. He also is a former president of the Illinois Junior Horned Hereford Association, and now president of the combined state junior association. Perks says the most important thing future board members can do is remember that "you have two ears and one mouth." Being observant of your surroundings is critical.

While on the board, Perks says he gained confidence as a

leader and in his public speaking ability. He enjoyed seeing different ranches, taking long van rides with other board members and making new friends. He always has enjoyed the unity of the Hereford people, and testifies that the willingness to help one another is a unique characteristic of the breed.

At OSU Perks was a member of the meats judging team and the 2005 National Champion Livestock Judging Team.

This past summer, Perks served as the Certified Hereford Beef (CHB) LLC marketing intern. He says his leadership in the NJHA and the confidence he gained therein helped him greatly with his internship. He enjoyed his work with CHB LLC and hopes to possibly work for the organization again in the future. **HW**