

# Guiding Youth



**Advisors of the Year, Gary and Nancy Maurer, have spent 23 years helping Iowa junior members.**

by **Sara Weller**

The Maurers' commitment to Hereford youth began when their children started showing Herefords. However, when their three daughters finished their youth careers and moved on, the Maurers didn't stop. In fact, it wasn't until 23 years and eight grandchildren later that Gary and Nancy Maurer of Independence, Iowa, decided to turn over the Iowa

Junior Hereford Association (IJHA) to someone else.

So it was very fitting that at their last Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) as IJHA advisors, they were named Advisors of the Year.

With such dedication to Hereford youth it's hard to believe Gary grew up showing registered Shorthorns his parents raised and Nancy's family raised and showed purebred Angus cattle. It seems they found Herefords by trial and error. "The first daughter started out showing Shorthorns; the second daughter started with Angus," Gary explains. "Then with the third daughter, we went to the Minnesota State Fair and saw a sale bill for a polled Hereford sale, and we bought our first Hereford there in 1977."

## 100% polled Hereford

After that purchase, they still had three different breeds in the pasture until 1981, when they "went 100% polled Hereford." At that time, in addition to their cattle operation, Gar-Nanc Cattle, Gary was also managing a grain elevator in nearby Aurora, Iowa, and Nancy was working there as his secretary, jobs they did for 25 years.

Once their three daughters, Michele, Melisa (Missy) and Marjorie (Margie), became active in the polled Hereford association, Gary and Nancy often helped out at the junior shows they attended.

In fact, Nancy had been involved in the Iowa Poll-ettes since 1980 and served as the queen chairman since 1981. So when they were asked in 1984 if they were interested in being advisors, they were excited about the opportunity.

The couple had already made a big impression in the Iowa beef cattle industry. At the 1982 Iowa Beef Expo, they bought the grand champion bull without being at the sale. There was a big snow storm that day and they couldn't get there, so Gary convinced the sale managers to put a phone in the sale ring so he could bid on the bull.

Afterward they were well on their way to making their mark in Iowa Hereford history. Gary was a member of the Iowa Polled Hereford Association board from 1989-99 and during that time, served as president, treasurer, sale manager, beef breeds representative and merger committee member. Nancy was named the National Poll-ette of the Year in 1992. She served as president of the Iowa Poll-ettes for six years and is currently the state treasurer. Later, in 2004, they were inducted into the Iowa Hereford Hall of Fame.

One of their largest tasks was in 1996 when Des Moines, Iowa, hosted the polled Hereford junior national. Their daughter, Michele, explains, "They canvassed the state seeking donations and making sure everything was done so the junior national would be a great success." She adds that Gary used his connections at the grain elevator to persuade numerous agricultural companies to support the event.

Their hard work paid off; Gary says hosting the event helped place the Iowa Junior Polled Hereford Association in financial stability. "We were able to get enough donations to place some money into a CD (certificate of deposit) for the children," he says. That money has been useful, since the junior association's membership has grown considerably.

The junior association now has 96 paid members, which is the largest ever. Still, Gary and Nancy don't take credit for the growth in



More than 25 Iowa juniors were in Denver to celebrate the Maurers being recognized as the 2007 Advisors of the Year.

numbers. "The growth is because of the docility and temperament and overall growth of the breed," Gary says.

The association hasn't been without hard times, though, Gary and Nancy say. The Iowa horned and polled junior associations just merged in the last three years. Gary says, "One side had more money than the other side, and we merged and forgot."

Although, their daughters, Margie and Missy, say it took time for members of the two associations to adjust. "They really helped to guide the youth as they worked together to become one," Missy says.

Nancy agrees, saying it was tougher to merge the parents than it was the children. "It took a year or two to make it work," she says. They started slowly, one step at a time. First they just had their shows on the same day and shared a judge, and then, eventually, they were able to totally combine the polled and horned associations.

### Accomplishments

Despite all of this, when asked what they feel was their biggest accomplishment, they don't mention mergers or awards they've won, they talk about the kids they've helped.

Gary and Nancy say they have many memorable moments but are really proud of all the kids who have taken the time to attend junior nationals, whether they are participating in contests, representing Iowa as queen, serving as voting delegates or showing cattle. The Maurers were very excited when Sarah Stream was elected to the national junior board because Stream is only the second junior from Iowa to serve in this capacity. Their daughter, Missy, was the first in 1989. Nancy says, "I tell the kids no matter what the outcome of any contest or showing their heifer — they accomplished more than the kids that stayed at home."

Nancy says she has always encouraged the juniors to participate in all JNHE contests, but she specifically wanted them to participate in showmanship. "I thought all of them should go out for showmanship," she says, "so I sign everyone up, and if they really don't



**Left:** Nancy serves pizza Saturday of JNHE week. She and Gary provided lunch for all of the Iowa juniors.

**Below:** Gary helps his daughter, Missy, and his grandson, Tyler, fit his heifer for the showing.



want to, they scratch. But I think getting involved in everything is an important part of junior national — it is a great way to meet other kids."

Another way the advisors helped the kids out was making sure they had a way to get to junior nationals. Nancy says, "We made transportation available to those kids who otherwise wouldn't be able to get there. I am sure a lot of these families wouldn't go otherwise." Gary says most of the time they get the use of the semi free, so they just have to drive it. They have driven semis to junior nationals in Michigan, Montana, Oklahoma and Texas.

Mike and Becky Simpson, Redfield, Iowa, say they logged many miles with the Maurers when their children were Iowa juniors. They say the most memorable trip for them was the 1,400-mile drive to Ft. Worth, Texas, in 1997. "Gary and Nancy were instrumental in organizing the trip, acquiring the semi, booking the hotels and planning the route," Mike and Becky wrote in their nomination letter.

### Guiding, not leading

The Maurers insist they think their job as advisors is to guide the juniors rather than to lead them. Their philosophy seems to have worked. Former junior member Angela (Van De Wiele) Johnson says, "They encourage the members to actively manage the association. My father and I know of no one that has put more time into making the Iowa junior program enjoyable and educational for the members and everyone involved."

After 23 years, one would think the Maurers would have had their sights on the Advisor of the Year award. But, Nancy says, "I was very surprised; I didn't even think about getting it. There are so many great advisors out there."

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Nearly all of Gary and Nancy's family traveled to JNHE this year. Seven of their grandchildren participated. Pictured is all of the family that could be there with their grandson Tyler's heifer.

Gary adds that it did cross his mind because he knew they had been considered for nomination last year. Still, he says he chose to “let the chips fall where they may,” and adds that he was very honored to receive the award.

### **Time to step down**

Despite the deep-felt relationship between the Maurers and their junior members, Nancy and Gary know it is time to step down. Their children are encouraging them that it is time, but Gary says he knows it is, too. “I think I would be intimidated if I was a 7-year-old approaching a 60-year-old,” he says. “We’ve had our fun, we have been down that road, and I just think it is time to have someone else take the reins.”

At the April Iowa junior board of directors meeting, Gary and Nancy announced they would be retiring. Then they asked Dennis and Tena Biddle of Walcott, Iowa, if they would

be interested in serving as advisors. The Biddles were approved by the membership at the annual meeting in June. They will join Steve and Jinny Landt, Union, Iowa, who have served as advisors with the Maurers since June 2005.

So what will Gary and Nancy do with all their spare time? Well, even at 60, they are both still working. Gary now works for Blin Management as a project coordinator, and Nancy works as a grain merchandiser and truck dispatcher at Fairchild Feed Supply. She says, though, that when she isn’t working, she would like to get caught up on her scrapbooks and follow their eight grandchildren to school activities and ballgames, and, of course, watch them show their calves.

Although the couple admits they are slowing down, they aren’t leaving the Hereford industry behind. They still manage their cattle operation, Gar-Nanc Cattle, although it is now a

partnership between them and their daughter Missy and her husband Steve Rau, named GNRF Cattle. Plus, they have seven grandchildren who participated at JNHE this year so they will be back to watch and help. Gary says, “Now we will be able to enjoy more since we aren’t working so much.” He adds, “Lord willing, you will see us at many more junior nationals.”

Gary also emphasizes, “There needs to be people willing to step forward and help if states need advisors because it is much more of an enjoyment than it is a chore.”

Dennis and Tena Biddle recognize the legacy the Maurers have left behind. “We would like them to be honored and recognized with this one last distinguished award for all the hours they have put in and everything they have done through the years. Their shoes will definitely be hard to fill, and they will be deeply missed.” **HW**