



Chris Stephens

It is no surprise that long-time Hereford advocate, Chris Stephens, loves his job. Chris, originally from Wesson, Miss., serves as the American Hereford Association (AHA) director of youth activities.

He began showing Herefords in 1988 at the age of 10. Chris became active in the Mississippi Junior Polled Hereford Association (MJPHA), where he later held various leadership positions including president for three years. While serving as president of the MJPHA, Chris was involved in hosting the first combined polled and horned Southeast regional show at EE Hereford Ranch, Winona, Miss.

His leadership continued as he ran for the National Junior Polled Hereford Council (NJPHC). He served on the NJPHC for two years and then was elected chairman in 1995. He also served as chairman of the first youth merger committee.

"I met some of my dearest friends that I am still close to today while participating in the various youth programs offered through the NJPHC," Chris says. "Serving as chairman of the junior council helped me learn a lot about the association's functions from an

AHA standpoint. Sam Shaw, who at the time was the American Junior Hereford Association president, and I traveled to Canada together to help the Canadian Hereford youth implement some important changes to their junior program."

Chris participated in 10 junior nationals, winning numerous awards including champion senior showman and first-place junior merit winner. In 2000 he served on the host committee for the first combined Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) in Tulsa, Okla.

Chris worked at Durham Hereford Ranch in Stillwater, Okla., during his four years attending Oklahoma State University (OSU). He double majored in agricultural communications and animal science and was a member of Agricultural Communicators of Tomorrow and Block & Bridle. He served as chairman of the Little International — a livestock show hosted by OSU's animal science department.

The summer before graduation, Chris completed an internship with the AHA, serving as youth activities intern. And after graduation from college, Chris began working for Bader Rutter & Associates in Lincoln, Neb., as an account manager for DowAgro Sciences. He was also the editor of *The Steward*, a Dow publication.

In December 2002 the AHA director of youth activities position opened. He accepted the job, along with all the responsibility. "As director of youth activities, I have a long list of duties," Chris says. He is in charge of all National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) activities, contests and the board of directors. Chief organizer of the JNHE and coordinator of the Program for Reaching Individuals Determined to Excel (PRIDE) Convention and the Hereford Youth Foundation of America (HYFA) are some of his main responsibilities, as well as assisting with all national shows and other association events and being the primary staff contact for the American

Hereford Women and the National Organization of Poll-ettes.

"In 2003 we made some big changes in the youth programs," Chris says. "We began moving the PRIDE Convention from being hosted in Kansas City to different land grant universities across the country. And at JNHE we have added new programs and contests such as team fitting, mentor program, Great American Hereford Grill-off and Hereford Idol."

Chris helped reorganize the Hereford youth foundation board in 2004. He credits the new changes affecting HYFA to the help of Bob Call and a core group of outstanding leaders and youth supporters. "HYFA has gone from \$200,000 net assets to more than \$1 million in just four years," Chris boasts. "We organized the first HYFA Gala in '04 and have had tremendous success ever since raising money for scholarships and Hereford youth events."

Besides being a success for the AHA, Chris also spends his time, when not at work, building the breed. "I like to attend Hereford cattle shows and sales on the weekends," he says. "I also like to assist local 4-H and FFA students with their livestock projects. It is important to give back."

Chris also enjoys traveling. He has visited 48 states and parts of Canada; however, on his trips, he likes to make certain he visits Hereford operations. On a more personal note, Chris loves to attend his alma mater's football and basketball games to cheer on the OSU cowboys.

Being a positive influence on the lives of Hereford juniors and a positive role model for all youth are priorities for Chris. He says, "My favorite part of my job is working with the junior board members and improving the association and raising dollars for scholarships. My advice to anyone: making a positive first impression is key. And, set goals for yourself." **HW**