



Nicole with Emily at her first junior national.



Nicole at the wash rack.



The Starr sisters thrive on exhibiting at a show.

Years of Growing, Learning, Succeeding

Reflecting on my years as a Hereford junior member.

by *Nicole Starr*

When I led my heifer, Emily, into the ring at my first Junior National Polled Hereford Show in Des Moines, Iowa, who would have thought 14 years later it would lead me to serve as the American Hereford Association (AHA) junior activities intern.

With the help of my parents, sisters and our hired hand, Paul, I successfully made it through my first summer of showing. Little did I know when I first stepped into the ring in Des Moines that my career would develop around something that started as a hobby and way of life.

I have two sisters; my older sister, Lindsay, is employed at Genex/CRI, and my younger sister, Danielle, is a sophomore at Purdue University and serves on the National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) board. My parents, Joe and Amy, educated us about the cattle industry, gave us the opportunity to show across the country and introduced us to this life full of endless opportunities.

As time progressed our life revolved around the junior national and NJHA program as all three of us girls became old enough to show. Going to cattle shows, especially the junior national, was what we always looked forward to during the summer. Since my mom stayed at home, our summer schedules consisted of working with our heifers and practicing for the illustrated speech and team marketing contests.

Now, like any family with three little girls, there were frequent fights about whose turn it was to wash, check the heifers or

mow the lawn, and I'm sure for my parents the list goes on and on. Just imagine what it was like traveling for a week with four women who "had" to pack every pair of jeans and boots they owned, filling the trailer to the max. However, frequently people would tell my dad, "What a lucky guy to have three daughters addicted to showing."

When school began in the fall, all my friends were talking about their fabulous summer vacations to Disney World, seeing Mickey and Minnie. In the back of my mind, I'd be thinking about how much more fun my summer was — driving 12 plus hours to a junior national, working hard in the heat. My

classmates didn't understand what a blast it was showing my heifer that I had worked so hard with and meeting other kids, who have now become some of my best friends.

Working at home on the farm has taught us responsibility, the value of teamwork and the benefits of dedication. We, the Starr sisters, thrive on exhibiting at a show, seeing all our friends and seeing hard work and dedication pay off. When one of us wins, we all win.

Looking back on my years as an NJHA member, I have had the opportunity to serve in several leadership roles. In no other organization would I have gained job-oriented skills while showing cattle. It's a great combination, and words cannot describe the experiences I have had.

After a few years of showing, I became more active with the



Wisconsin Junior Hereford Association. That is when I got my feet wet in planning shows and leadership events and implementing new programs that benefited youth. Because of my passion to serve others and be an advocate for the breed, I decided to run for the NJHA board of directors.

At the 2005 Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) in my home state of Wisconsin, I was elected to the NJHA board. During those three years, it was an honor to work with adults and juniors throughout the country who were so passionate about the youth department. At the time it was one of my biggest achievements, and I value every experience I had as a board member.

I was privileged to work with Chris Stephens, former AHA youth director. The countless hours he spent were significant in the development of the NJHA. Thank you, Chris, for being a role model and inspiration to me during the three years I served on the board. By serving as an ambassador of the NJHA, I realized the effect a group of people can have on an organization. The ability to communicate with different types of people, promote junior programs and plan events from start to finish are what I gained most out of my term.

I will always treasure the close bond with the other board members. As a retired board member, I look forward to catching up with them and picking up right where we left off from the last show. These people are my closest friends because of the strong common interest and dedication we share for this breed. The contacts made during those three years have assisted me greatly as I continue as a junior member and college student soon to be entering the work force.

It is odd to think that something as simple as showing a heifer at the age of 7 would sway the decision of my college education and career. With the strong interest I had in agriculture, cattle specifically,

I chose to follow the path of majoring in animal science/agribusiness at Michigan State University (MSU).

It was the connections that I made prior to college that lead me to be employed at the MSU Purebred Beef Center. During the past years, I feel I have been able to call MSU my home because I am able to work with the cattle and travel to the National Western and North American International Livestock Exposition.

When I look back on my college career, the memories I share with the other students, who are like family, will be the highlight. I would like to thank Cody Sankey, my boss, for being a great influence on me and allowing me to be part of such a rare opportunity that most college students do not have.

As my education progressed, I learned the value of an internship. Making the decision to spend a summer away from home was difficult, but I knew the benefits of having an internship could lead to job potential and would far outweigh one summer of showing.

With my strong involvement in the breed, I was able to land an internship that I had always dreamed of. As the junior activities intern, I have been able to exercise the skills I acquired as an NJHA board member and apply them to the new role I took on.

This internship enabled me to travel to junior shows across the country, assisting states in organizational planning and junior national preparation. I thought I knew what it was like to plan a junior national when I was on the board, but these past few months brought on new responsibilities since I was involved in all aspects of the event.

As the intern it was a full-time job arranging JNHE contests and judges, processing cattle entries and corresponding with parents and the Oklahoma planning committee. Being able to work with the junior board in a different position was a great experience. They are a

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Nicole says she treasures the experiences and friendships made as a junior board member.



As junior activities intern, Nicole facilitated the mentor program during the 2009 JNHE.



While at Michigan State University, Nicole has worked at the MSU Purebred Beef Center with a team of other students pictured here. In that role she has been able to travel to the National Western and North American International Livestock Exposition to help exhibit MSU cattle.

Nicole and the MSU team with the reserve champion junior heifer calf at the 2008 North American International Livestock Exposition.



wonderful group of young adults working toward the benefit of this association.

I feel honored to have been Amy Cowan's first intern. I can't thank Amy enough for letting me be part of her first year as youth director. What I learned by working under her is priceless; the credentials gained I will carry through to future career endeavors. I appreciate her

taking an interest in techniques I wanted to enhance, giving me the opportunity to explore new areas while working at the AHA.

As junior members and parents, you should be thrilled to have Amy guiding the AHA youth department. She has so many ideas for the program; and her dedication and enthusiasm for her new position are apparent on a daily basis.

Amy and I, along with Sara Faber, AHA marketing and shows coordinator, made a great team. The three of us spent countless hours at the office and driving back and forth to work together. It was a summer full of endless laughs. I'm so glad I have become such great friends with these two ladies.

I cannot stress how important it is to push yourself each year: participate in JNHE contests, attend PRIDE (Program for Reaching Individuals Determined to Excel) Convention and run for the NJHA board. The benefits of getting involved in the NJHA are infinite. The amount you put into this program is what you will get out of it.

A few weeks ago I was reading my retiring article in the *Hereford World*, and as I read what I had written about my journey on the board, the following quote caught my eye: "I am excited to find out where this experience will take me in the future. I implore each of you to never be afraid to take a challenge to strengthen yourself, because you never know where it might lead you." A year ago I would never have guessed the opportunity I had on the junior board would take me to the position of AHA intern.

Being in the NJHA has been an astounding time in my life. The activities offered and the people that I have met shaped me into the person I am today. I am looking forward to a strong finish as I show up at the 2010 JNHE, where I will wrap up my 15-year junior career, and as I begin my professional career after graduating from MSU. **HW**