



Pushing for Participation

The Illinois Junior Hereford Association rewards members for their participation in the “extras.”

by **Christy Couch Lee**

No doubt about it — the Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) holds some of the greatest competition ever to enter a showring. And, sometimes, the competition in the ring overshadows the many competitions outside the ring — those that help

to develop numerous life skills that will benefit youth for a lifetime.

In order to shine the light on the value of these contests, the Illinois Junior Hereford Association (IJHA) recently created a program to reward IJHA members for their participation in such events.



Peewee HYPE winners recognized for their 2011 participation are Trevor Bickelhaupt, second; Haley Bickelhaupt, second; and Lauren McMillan, first.

Buddy Edenburn, Penfield, Ill., is an IJHA advisor and serves on the board of directors for the Illinois Polled Hereford Association (IPHA). Last year, he and his wife and co-advisor, Lisa, developed the Hereford Youth Participation and Engagement program (HYPE).

“We wanted to encourage kids to

participate in events and contests — and the program has nothing to do with how you place in a contest,” Edenburn says. “You earn the same amount of points whether you place first or last.”

How it works

The “HYPE year” begins with the Illinois Beef Expo in February, where points can be earned in the judging contest and by participating in the Hereford show. Next is the IJHA preview show with numerous contests and the show. Following is the JNHE with its 22 skill-based contests and show and the Illinois and Du Quoin State Fairs.

“In addition, we have two junior meetings each year — one during the IJHA preview show, and one during the Illinois State Fair,” he says. “If you attend the meetings, you also earn points. It’s not about winning, but it’s about participation.”

In the program’s first two years, nearly 30 IJHA members have enrolled in the program, which is sponsored by the IPHA. Awards are presented to a member in each age division, an approach which is in alignment with the National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) categories — peewee, junior, intermediate and senior.

Points are weighted based on the level of competition.

A member can receive more points for JNHE because of the number of contests but all the events are equally weighted to give everyone a chance,” Edenburn says.

Prizes are awarded at the association banquet held during the Illinois Beef Expo.

Why the need?

The Edenburns saw a need for a program like HYPE when they began as IJHA advisors four years ago.

“We had very little involvement in contests from our members,” he says. “We wanted to encourage these kids to get involved and be interested.”

And the response has been positive, he says.

“We can see a difference in the past two years — not everyone is just wanting to play 3-on-3 basketball at the JNHE anymore,” Edenburn says with a smile. “Several of our members are giving speeches, and I see much more involvement across the board.”

And this involvement can lead to great things later in life, he says.

“Of course, we’re all here for a cattle show,” Edenburn says. “But these contests help our youth and prepare them for life. Speaking in public, being able to talk to an adult and look them in the eye, these contests help youth develop confidence and get them out of their comfort zone. Kids need to be able to step out and do that.”

Haley and Trevor Bickelhaupt, Mt. Carroll, Ill., are 11-year-old fourth-year NJHA members. They won 2011 peewee division HYPE awards.

Throughout the year, the Bickelhaupts attend the Illinois Beef Expo, the IJHE preview show, JNHE, and the county and state fairs.

Depending on the show, the twins participate in speech, showmanship, team fitting, creative arts and Hereford Bowl competition, in addition to exhibiting their heifers. Of the contests they enter, each has his or her favorites.

“One of my favorites is fitting, because it’s fun and you don’t have to have the best heifer — but you can always have fun fitting and always get better,” Haley says.

They were both surprised and honored to receive the award, Trevor says.

“I didn’t know we were going to win, and I was surprised,” he says.

Haley says the award program encourages Illinois Hereford youth to do more.

“You’re already there to show,” she says. “And a lot of the contests

help you now and later in life. Why don’t you do them while you’re already there? If you’re on the borderline of doing it, go ahead. They’re fun!”

Edenburn says if you’re a state advisor considering beginning a program of your own, remember that each participant is valuable.

“Don’t get discouraged if you only get a couple of kids participating — because that’s a couple of kids you’re helping,” he says. “Fifteen years from now, they’ll be better kids because of it.”

By highlighting the benefits of contest participation, the IJHA is doing something even more important — shining the spotlight on the talents and skills of its members.

And really, is there anything more valuable than that? **HW**