



QUEEN FOR A YEAR, MEMORIES FOR A LIFETIME

Past National Hereford Queens reflect on their experiences and why they continue to be involved with Herefords.

by *Bridget Beran*



Suzanne (Boyd) Matheny
served as the National Polled Hereford Queen in 1988.



Jennifer (Dorrell) Gatz
served as National Polled Hereford Queen in 1992.



Heather (Hicks) Birdsall
served as National Polled Hereford Queen in 1996.

Since 1975 every national Hereford show has been graced by the presence of a national queen. Decked out in white from her banner to her boots, she serves as an advocate for the Hereford breed and an example for little girls throughout the barn.

But at the end of the year, she takes off her crown and rejoins the rest of the world. Then what happens? Well, like these three former National

Polled Hereford Queens, she becomes an involved member of the National Hereford Women (NHW) and oftentimes an involved mother, raising her children with the same passion for the Hereford breed as she had all those years ago.

For Suzanne (Boyd) Matheny, Mays Lick, Ky., raising her children in the Hereford breed was a no-brainer. After serving both as the 1988 National Polled Hereford Queen and on the

National Junior Polled Hereford Council, she knew she wanted her kids to have the same opportunities and experiences she had.

“It was a wonderful experience that I’ll always cherish,” Suzanne says. “It allowed me to travel to many different places and meet new people and form lasting relationships that I still have today. It was a great experience to be an ambassador for the polled Hereford breed at the time.”

In 2009, following the merger of the American Hereford Women (AHW) and the National Organization of Poll-ettes (NOP), the National Polled Hereford Queen came to represent both sides of the breed as the National Hereford Queen. The crowning of the new national queen was moved from the National Western Stock Show to the American Royal in congruence with the annual meetings for the American Hereford Association (AHA) and the newly formed NHW. While there have been some changes to the queen program, including the addition of the princess tea and a service project which is led by the National Hereford Queen at the Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE), the national queen still dons her white outfit and serves as an ambassador for the Hereford breed.

Serving as National Hereford Queen allows one young woman to attend each national show, criss-crossing the country from Harrisburg, Pa., to Reno, Nev. Heather (Hicks) Birdsall, Homer, N.Y., says that growing up going to the former Junior National Polled Hereford Show and Forum and seeing the National Polled Hereford Queen each year made her want to run for the position.

“It was every little girl’s dream. It was something I’d wanted to do from a very young age and being able to achieve that dream was an incredible opportunity,” Heather says. She served as National Polled Hereford Queen in 1996 and has continued the family tradition of showing Herefords with her son, Sam, 9, attending his third JNHE in Harrisburg. Daughter Sarah, 7, looks forward to entering the ring next year as an official junior member.

Heather says she loves the addition of the princess tea at JNHE, an event where young girls get the opportunity to spend time with state and national Hereford queens.

“Sarah was so excited for the princess tea,” Heather says. “I think it’s a great way to get state

queens more involved than just the showing and things like that help get those younger girls involved and excited about being a queen one day.”

Suzanne, who currently serves on the NHW board of directors, also praises the princess tea because it allows queens to serve as mentors for young girls. She says the sparkle in a young girl’s eyes when she gets the chance to interact with a queen is one of the things that make being a queen so special.

Jennifer (Dorrell) Gatz, Leona, Kan., says she sees that same sparkle in her little girls, Lauren and McKenna. Jennifer calls serving as the 1992 National Polled Hereford Queen a tremendous honor. Running for queen was important to her because she wanted to give back to the association that had given her so many wonderful experiences throughout her childhood. Being queen also gave her incredible opportunities and taught her important lessons.

“Serving as queen allowed me to represent the breed that I loved and serve as an ambassador for the Hereford breed and the beef industry,” Jennifer explains. “I was also able to be a role model for the younger junior members. It allowed me to continue to develop communication and leadership skills. I loved having the opportunity to travel, meet new people and see so many different Hereford operations.”

Passing the torch

All of these women are driven by a love that they possess for the Hereford breed. Since their times as queen, they’ve passed that love on to their children. Suzanne, Heather and Jennifer all say they made it a point to take their children to JNHEs and to

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Eighteen years ago, then, National Queen Heather is pictured with current National Hereford Queen Brooke Jensen when she was just a toddler, at the Jensen Bros. sale in 1996.



Heather watches as her son, Sam, shows.



Showing Hereford cattle is a Hicks and Birdsall family tradition. Here Dennis and Heather greet Sam as he exits the showring.



Heather passes the tradition of being a Hereford queen down to her daughter, Sarah, and takes her to the Princess Tea during the 2014 JNHE.



McKenna, Taylor, Jennifer, Lauren and Jordan Gatz.



All three Gatz children are now junior Hereford members — carrying on the Dorrell family tradition. Pictured (l to r) with Jennifer are Lauren, McKenna and Jordan.



Suzanne talks to daughter, Taylor Belle, while son, Austin, prepares his heifer for the showing.



The Matheny family in Harrisburg: Taylor Belle, Austin, Suzanne and Andrew.

encourage them to be involved, in and out of the showing.

“Because I was so active during my junior years, I grew up with the passion for the Hereford breed. That’s the way I wanted my own children to grow up,” Suzanne says. Her son, Austin, and daughter, Taylor Belle, compete in the Certified Hereford Beef (CHB®) grill-off, illustrated speech and judging contests. Taylor Belle, 16, plans to run for Kentucky Hereford Queen as well as National Hereford Queen in the future.

For Heather, her kids wouldn’t even be here if not for Herefords. She met her husband, Dennis, while they were both serving on the National Junior Polled Hereford Council. They started their Hereford herd after they got married and once Sam was old enough, they started attending JNHEs.

“Our kids have been raised with Herefords since day one. We’ve made JNHE a family event and it’s something that they now look forward to every year. We wanted our kids to have the same experiences as we did,” Heather says.

For each of these families, they say that JNHE is their version of a family vacation. Jennifer returned to JNHE once her son, Jordan, was old enough and says the first time was like taking a walk down memory lane. Seeing friends from her time as queen and now watching her children build new friendships and build lifetime skills are major highlights of attending JNHEs.

“The JNHE has been the highlight of our summer for the past five summers and we look forward to continuing this tradition as a family for years to come,” Jennifer says. She encourages

her children to be involved in all aspects of the JNHE including 3-on-3 basketball, illustrated speech, judging, Hereford idol, photography, poster and the CHB grill-off.

“Although the show is the main reason to attend the JNHE I think it is also important for juniors to take advantage of all the other opportunities to get involved at the JNHE,” Jennifer says. She hopes one day Lauren and McKenna will follow in her footsteps and serve as Kansas Hereford Queen and run for National Hereford Queen.

A tradition of leadership

For the past 40 years, the National Hereford Queen has set an example of leadership and grace for young girls of all ages in the NJHA. These former queens say that it’s important that queens work to tell the story of the Hereford breed, especially during their term as National Hereford Queen.

Suzanne, Heather and Jennifer agree that running for national queen was important because it provided them with another opportunity to be a junior leader and an ambassador for the Hereford breed.

“You really have to work for it and it has to be something that you really want to do and have that passion and love for the breed of cattle and the people,” Suzanne explains.

Whether it’s handing out awards, walking classes into the showing or being interviewed for a local paper at a show, serving as a queen provides an excellent opportunity to be a representative for Herefords.

“Queens are ambassadors for the breed and can help tell the story of the cattle industry and more specifically the Hereford breed,” Jennifer says. “I think it is important to have as many voices as possible telling our story and the queen program is another avenue

that can be used to positively promote the Hereford breed.”

While the queen program has a strong focus on advocacy and leadership, the friendships made in the queen courtyard at JNHE and across the country at various sales and shows are part of what makes the experience special. Heather says that between herself, her husband and her children, they know people from New York to California and everywhere in between and these relationships wouldn't have been possible without the Hereford breed.

“I hope future queens will build friendships and relationships that will last a lifetime,” Jennifer says. “The friendships and life lessons that are built through the program are invaluable. I think it is a great program and a great opportunity for the young ladies of the Hereford breed to take advantage of.”

The long-standing tradition of national queens has brought many back to their roots with their children and relatives.

“I think the queen program is important because of the tradition that it holds. Looking back over the years through the past queens you'll see so many familiar names with children involved in the junior program today,” Jennifer says.

Queen support system

From parents to queen coordinators to breeders, a queen needs all the backup she can get. Suzanne explains that while people may not think about it, being in the showring for 10 to 12 hours a day can take a lot out of a queen. Queens are always in the limelight, more than they want to be sometimes, she says. Because of the demands of being a queen, she encourages people to reach out to their state and national queens.

“Encouragement is huge. Invite the national queen or your state queen to your sale, thank her at shows, show her that someone

appreciates that she's there,” Heather says.

Attending sales across the country is one of the things that make being a queen so special. For the most part, queens must be invited to sales. The experiences past queens have from attending sales and shows are the memories they hold with them for years to come.

“The people were what made this experience so special to me. Hereford breeders from across the country welcomed me at their sales and shows and made me feel like a part of their family,” Jennifer says. “I met so many people and learned so much during that year I served as queen. It is amazing to look back and reflect on the experience. There truly isn't a better organization of people anywhere than the Hereford breeders.”

Breeders can now support the queen program through the “queen sponsorship program” (see sidebar). This program helps support travel and wardrobe for future National Hereford Queens through monetary donations. NHW hopes that this extra sponsorship will allow more women to pursue their dream of being National Hereford Queen.

“I would love to see us get to a point where all the girls who are state queens want to run for national queen. I'd like to see that all these young women have the dream and the desire to run for national queen,” Suzanne says. “I hope that anyone who gets to walk in the white boots will hold that as the most precious opportunity out there.” **NHW**



Queen sponsorship program

The National Hereford Queen is required to travel to six national shows plus the Junior National Hereford Expo. For one year she dons white outfits, needing summer and winter appropriate wardrobes, as well as white boots. While the memories she will make are priceless, funding her journey can add up. To help ease the financial burden, the National Hereford Women (NHW) began the queen sponsorship program, which allows sponsors to donate at four different monetary levels. All donors receive a certificate of appreciation. Categories include all previously listed benefits as well as those listed below.

Pearl	Ruby	Emerald	Diamond
\$1-\$500	\$501-\$1,500	\$1,501-\$2,999	\$3,000 and up
Website recognition and banner recognition.	NHW meeting invitation and announcement at all major shows and sales.	NHW letter recognition and <i>Hereford eNews</i> mention.	Mention in the <i>Hereford World</i> , special guest status in the “national Hereford courtyard” and an appreciation plaque.

