

Grimmel-Wolfrey Named Advisor of the Year

by **Bridget Beran**



Bailey Clanton, American Hereford Association national shows coordinator and youth activities assistant, presents Michelle Grimmel-Wolfrey with the Advisor of the Year Award.

Cheerleader. Supporter. Photographer. E-mail master. These are just a few words the members of the Maryland Junior Hereford Association (MJHA) use to describe their advisor, Michelle Grimmel-Wolfrey, Jarrettsville, Md.. Dedicated to serving the juniors of Maryland since 2005, Michelle was honored with the Advisor of the Year award at the 2015 VitaFerm Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) in Grand Island, Neb.

A first-generation Hereford breeder, Michelle's father grew up on a dairy farm in the mid-80s and took part in a government buyout to become a grain farmer. While the Grimmels bought some beef cows to graze the pastures, the 5,000 acres of corn, wheat and soybeans, along with a produce stand, made up most of their operation. However, when Michelle was 10 years old they got their first Hereford heifer, and the herd has been growing since then.

Michelle and her sisters — Kristen, Lindsey, Melissa and Madelyn — have owned Grimmel Girls Show Cattle since 1991. Melissa got involved in the MJHA and National Junior Hereford

Association when she was young, and Michelle went right with her. When they went to the 2005 JNHE in Milwaukee, Wis., Michelle helped to coordinate flights and hotels for the MJHA. Its current advisor was stepping down, and several parents asked Michelle if she would be interested in taking the position. Ten years later, her juniors nominated her for Advisor of the Year.

"I was completely mind blown," Michelle says. "It's just getting recognition for all your hard work. It's also nice to show my kids that Maryland's not invisible and that someone from Maryland can achieve something that big. It lets them see that you don't have to be from a big state with hundreds of kids or cattle to be recognized."

Little state, big presence

Though Maryland is the second smallest state by acreage in attendance at the JNHE, Maryland's junior members still entered almost 50 head of cattle. Under the guidance of Michelle, they had 55 juniors and more than 100 head of cattle at the 2014 JNHE in Harrisburg, Pa. Getting that kind of turnout was no easy feat.

In preparation for the closest JNHE in many years, Michelle sent out letters to all the Extension agents in Maryland to inform them that one of the largest junior shows in the country was going to be down the road. She also mobilized her juniors, encouraging them to talk to their 4-H clubs about the JNHE and to tell them about the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity which they had a chance to be a part of. Preparing those kids for a show the scale of the JNHE was another situation all together.

"We were starting out with all of these kids who had only gone to a country fair and that was it. We were trying to teach them what they needed to do and preparing them for the showing and stalling and getting them to JNHE," Michelle explains. "Seeing them and their stalls and cattle and

the way that they showed, they looked like they'd been doing it for years and that was something I was very proud of. They really took the information we gave them to heart and used it."

While she says there were some challenges in going back to basics with people who had never shown on that scale, seeing the turnout and getting so many new people to experience the JNHE was more than worth the work, Michelle says. Encouraging people to go to the JNHE is nothing new to Michelle or the MJHA. To get cattle the 20-or-more-hour drive to most JNHEs, Maryland rents a semi and trailer to haul many of its exhibitors' cattle, which also allows far more juniors to show.

"Taking the pot gave us the opportunity to come out here all those years ago because not everyone has the ability to go otherwise," Michelle says.

If MJHA members participate in three club fundraisers, they can put their cattle on the trailer for free and they only have to worry about getting themselves to the JNHE. Half of the cattle exhibited by MJHA members came to Grand Island on that trailer and it allows the MJHA to have a much bigger presence than many coastal states.

"That's our big thing that we pride ourselves on," Michelle says. "Anyone can go to junior nationals. You don't have to have a lot of money. You don't have to have the best animals. I tell our kids the quality of your animal only matters for



Maryland juniors say they can always count on Michelle to be ringside to capture the perfect photo.



Michelle waits in the make-ready area with her younger sister Melissa Grimmel as she prepares to go into the ring.

10 minutes when you're here, the time you're in the showring, that's it. The rest of the time you're doing contests, you're playing with your friends, you're meeting new people. That's the important part. We just want to give every kid the opportunity to come to JNHE and that's what we're all about."

The experiences her juniors get from attending the JNHE are invaluable to Michelle and she encourages them all to get everything out of the experience that they can.

"I love watching the kids throughout the week of junior nationals," Michelle says. "I've enjoyed seeing how the kids from different counties who don't know each other at all become best friends. I saw it happen with my sister, Melissa. She was the very shy peewee who didn't talk to anybody and now everyone knows who she is and she has friends from all over the country. She's going into a career in this industry because of going to JNHE."

Constant support

Maryland juniors refer to Michelle as their cheerleader because she brings a lot of enthusiasm to their association and tries to encourage everyone. From telling them good luck as they head to the ring to taking photos ringside, being there for her juniors is at the top of Michelle's priority list.

"It speaks volumes about Michelle's character in caring about the youth

and their success," Mary Bowen, Sunderland, Md., wrote in her letter to nominate Michelle for Advisor of the Year. "She is a cheerleader for all members, whether it be at our preview show or the member's own county fair."

Mary's children are members of the MJHA and she said that Michelle's dedication to MJHA members has been unwavering. When the Bowen family's home burned down in 2010, Michelle made a point to reach out to their children and to encourage MJHA members to lend a hand in whatever way they could.

"Michelle is an excellent role model," Mary wrote. "She has a passion for the cattle industry and she tries very hard to teach the junior members as much as she can. She is very patient in answering the members' questions about breeding cattle and how to show them."

That patience comes from a deep understanding of what it's like to not know. When Michelle and her sister Kristen started showing Hereford cattle, Michelle says they had no clue what they were doing.

"We have pictures of us in the showring and our show sticks were upside down. It was a disaster. We got knocked down several times in the ring," Michelle says. "We learned from asking people or people coming up and offering us advice. We do as well we do because of the other breeders in our state, and throughout the

country as well, helping us and giving us little tips along the way. I try to do the same thing with our younger or newer kids. If I see a kid who wants to do it but is struggling or a little sad or down because they didn't do well, I'll go up to them and talk to them and say 'Hey look Melissa was the same way' or 'I was the same way.' We were in that position. So I tell them 'if you set your mind to something, you can do anything.'"

Encouraging her junior members to be better is one of the things that makes her such a great advisor, according to member Tucker Schmidt, Taneytown, Md.

"She takes her own time to do the things that many advisors would dismiss as trivial or meaningless, such as making sure each and every person helps out," Tucker wrote in his nomination letter. "Whether it was in the barn with my animals or outside of showing, Michelle has enabled me to be a better person and guided me to be a role model for those younger than me or with less experience."

Her communication with her juniors has helped the MJHA grow during the 10 years that she has been the advisor, which Mary commended. Michelle recommends other advisors also work to communicate with the parents and kids in their states.

"Talk to some of the parents, especially the ones who have been doing it for a while, and see what works," Michelle says. "Talk to the kids as well. Let them have their input and explain to them why you make the decisions that you do."

Whether she's in the barns or watching ringside, Michelle always tries to put her junior members first and for that, they're grateful.

"Michelle has done wonders for this association," Tucker says. "She is an extremely kind and caring individual who puts the needs of the association before her own to benefit the juniors. I have a hard time putting into words everything Michelle does for our association and I can't think of where we would be without her." **HW**