

Behind the Scenes at 'A Hereford Scene in 2016'

More than 120 volunteers were instrumental in the success of the Junior National Hereford Expo this year.

by *Kayla M. Wilkins*

The 2016 VitaFerm® Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) was one for the record books. Exhibitors from near and far loaded up their cattle and chased the white lines to Madison, Wis., in July to not only show their cattle but also to participate in a variety of contests and events. Because of the enthusiasm of junior members and their

families this year, the 2016 JNHE was record-breaking with more than 900 exhibitors in attendance.

Junior members had the opportunity to show off their skills in an array of contests to let their projects shine in the showing and, most importantly, to foster lifelong relationships with other cattle kids.

Although the show seemed to go off without a hitch from an outsider's perspective, there



More than 120 Hereford enthusiasts and agriculturists came from across the state to volunteer their time at the 2016 VitaFerm Junior National Hereford Expo.



Sondra Brancel says there is no way to fully thank all the volunteers for the huge part they had in assuring the success of the JNHE in Madison, Wis.

was plenty of work done on the front end and behind the scenes to make the experience exceed expectations the show chairmen, BJ Jones, Darlington, Wis., and Sondra Brancel, Endeavor, Wis., had set.

In addition to American Hereford Association (AHA) staff, National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) board members and Wisconsin Junior Hereford Association (WJHA) leadership, more than 120 volunteers flooded into Madison, and Brancel says the show couldn't have happened without them.

"People give BJ and I all the credit," Brancel says, "but I just turn it back around to the volunteers because people would not be as pleased with this show if it weren't for the support of all of the awesome people in our state — Hereford breeders and people in the ag industry."

Meeting a need

Three years ago when the idea was first tossed around by the WJHA to host the JNHE, Brancel says they didn't even have to ask for volunteers because they immediately had dedicated families eager to lend a helping hand anywhere necessary.

Because the JNHE is such a big event, it took Brancel some time to collaborate with previous hosts to identify the needs so she could most strategically place individuals in the right areas to assure the show would run smoothly.

Once a plan was in place for all the moving parts of the JNHE, it wasn't long before Brancel and Jones called on those families to serve as leadership for the volunteer committees.

"It was the people you didn't have to ask to help," Brancel says. "They just wanted to and that was really important to us."

Once those executive committees were formed, each committee was soon overwhelmed with volunteers ready to do everything from checking in cattle and putting down bedding to working the ring



JNHE attendees were welcomed to Wisconsin at the Block Party Sunday evening where they enjoyed brats, live music and a junior mixer.

and everything in between. To put into perspective just how integral volunteers were this year, Brancel says nearly every piece of the JNHE had a volunteer involved at one point or another.

She explains that before the show started, they had enough volunteers to fill every job they predicted they might need, but little did she know more would show up just in the nick of time to work on the unexpected projects they hadn't foreseen.

"The number of 120 is light to be realistic," she explains. "It's probably 20 to 25 people at least beyond that, in addition to all the families that have just said they wanted to help while they were there. There has been so many unexpected and unforeseen responsibilities that people have just jumped in. There is no belly-aching, they are just willing to do it."

Because of the magnitude of this event, Brancel says it was a true blessing to have so many people come out to help and go above and beyond, in some cases.

"People just jumped in," she says. "They were scheduled until 8 p.m. and ended up staying until 10 p.m. All of that is really humbling; just to have all the support that we have had here from our state."

At the conclusion of the show, Brancel reflected and could only

be overjoyed by the hard work and dedication brought forth by so many people in their home state to make their vision a reality.

"We are just so proud to be from Wisconsin," she explains. "The people here that are wearing those yellow shirts really exemplify what makes us so proud."

Behind the scene

Among the many playing a part in the show's success were two men

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BJ Jones and Sondra Brancel, co-chairmen of the show, were overwhelmed with joy after seeing how many individuals offered their help as volunteers.



Volunteers played an integral part in the success of the JNHE from checking in to packing up and everything in between.

who can speak for them all when they say it was a true blessing to lend a helping hand.

Mark Ireland, Watertown, Wis., was one of the many individuals aiding exhibitors and their families during check-in and worked every day for long hours at the ring after that. Ireland is no stranger to the cattle industry as he grew up on a dairy farm and then found his career with ABS as a cattle breeder for 40 years. During his time there, he first found his desire and passion for the people of the cattle industry.

“Cow people are the best,” he says. “All breeds, all cattle, from 4-H to FFA, it is a pleasure to be around the youth of America and where they are headed.”

Just as the cattle industry is nothing new for him, neither is volunteering. Since he is retired now, he has plenty of time on his hands and says he spends much of that time volunteering in a variety of places. In fact, when he was done helping with the JNHE one evening, he went straight to the local food pantry and had a hand in feeding more than 300 people.

For Ireland, volunteering is always a very rewarding experience, and he immensely enjoys the opportunity to be involved, especially when involvement includes the youth of the ag industry.

“I just feel good about doing it,” he explains. “It is pretty simple. I am going home tired and happy. In life that is pretty important. That is as good as it gets. This was very rewarding to be around the kids, the families, the cows and the cow people.”

After this experience, among others, Ireland says while some may question the future of tomorrow, he feels pretty confident.

“The thing people say is, ‘kids now a days,’” he says. “They aren’t around the kids I know. I know farm kids and our future is in good hands, really good hands.”

It is because of the potential he sees in the youth that he enjoys working as hard as he can to assure the success of events like the JNHE.

“I really enjoyed being around the youth,” he says. “I am a grandfather now and if we don’t help our youth, what use are we? They are our future.”

Fellow volunteer, Dan Irwin, Stockton, Ill., would agree the youth are the reason behind so many coming together for an event of this magnitude. He says along with the influence they can have on volunteers, it is also a time to strengthen ties within the Hereford industry.

“That’s why we do this. Because you get to renew friendships that you knew over the years,” he says. “You come here and meet new people and be friends.”

Irwin is the vice president of the Wisconsin Hereford Association (WHA) and says he can recall when Jones first presented the possibility of the JNHE in Madison, Wis.

“We jumped on board with it,” he says, “Just to see it develop and grow through the two years is neat to be a part of.”

Although Irwin signed up just to spread bedding, he says he soon found himself involved much more extensively. In fact, because of the challenge presented with the shavings in the ring being too soft,

Irwin willingly drove two hours home to haul back his tractor and lawn roller to help in overcoming the problem. Along with his assistance there, Irwin spent long hours working the ring with Ireland, too.

He says even with the long hours it was an experience he wouldn’t trade. To him it was honoring and humbling to be a part of such a large-scale event promoting youth involvement in the cattle industry and beyond that, his opportunity to give back.

Three years ago, Irwin went through a very trying time with the loss of his girlfriend and says the support of the people within the industry really played a big part in keeping him going. Still, today, he experiences the genuine loving spirit of people within the Hereford family.

“There was a man at the show that came up and made a point to ask me how I had been doing since that time. That just shows how much people care and that’s what volunteering is about,” he expresses. “It’s about giving back to the people that care so much about you.”

The idea of giving back and caring is nothing new for those in the Hereford industry. Each year volunteers flood in to make each JNHE the absolute best it can be for the youth and families involved. Brancel says the quality of Hereford people is simply second to none in her eyes.

“I have grown up my entire life with Hereford cattle and there is one thing that doesn’t seem to change much and that is how awesome Hereford people are. And Hereford people in Wisconsin are certainly no exception,” Brancel says. “Our Hereford family and our own families in the barn have been willing to help mean the world to us. They have just never let us down. There are not words to express how thankful we are.” **HW**