



Hank DeShazer

Passionate and Astute

AHA President Hank DeShazer is a successful businessman with a true love for agriculture and youth.

by Angie Stump Denton

Successful, humble and passionate are three words that describe the 2008 American Hereford Association (AHA) President Hank

DeShazer of Houston, Texas. Hank has built a very successful company, with several related businesses, while not forgetting his agricultural roots.

"Hank is a very successful businessman who built from scratch a nation-wide company with thousands of employees," says Craig Huffhines, AHA executive vice president. "We've been blessed to have him serve on our Board because he is so good with people and has a keen business mind."

From the beginning

Hank was born in Oklahoma on a small, diversified livestock farm, including cattle, pigs and chickens. "Dad worked on the farm for 10-12 years and then went to town for a job," Hank says. "Growing up, I showed cattle and pigs, and by the time I was 16, I had more cattle than Dad. After high school, I sold them all and bought a car for college."

While attending Tulsa University, Hank started working for Shell Oil Co. "I worked through college," Hank explains. "My goal was to get out of college before our oldest child went to grade school."

After working for Shell for 20 years, at the age of 42, Hank started his own business. Today he owns multiple businesses related to the construction, home improvement and remodeling industries and continues to serve as chairman of the board of the parent company.

"After I left Shell and started my own business, I knew I wanted

to get back into agriculture and livestock," Hank says. "If you've ever been involved with agriculture, you develop a love that never goes away. It was such a meaningful part of my upbringing. Agriculture gets in your blood."

In the late 80s he purchased some commercial cattle followed by some purebred Brahmans. Then with the goal of developing a better crossbred cow for the South, he decided to buy some Herefords to produce the famous tiger stripe. In 1994 he purchased his first purebred Herefords.

Another feature of the Hereford breed that attracted Hank was its junior program. "We may not be the No. 1 breed, but we have the No. 1 junior program," he says with pride. "We all should feel good about the Hereford breed and where it's going with the youth we have involved today."

For the kids

"I've been very successful in my life, and I believe it is because of my experiences in agriculture as a youth," Hank says. "I think the future of our breed and of our industry is with our youth. So I've been committed to do anything I can to give back to the industry. Providing opportunities so our young people can develop the same skills and the sense of responsibility that I did makes me happy."

When youth purchase a heifer from DeShazer Cattle Co. they are also developing a relationship with the DeShazer staff. "It is our desire to help youth with their purchases and give back to them for their accomplishments," Hank explains.

"The basic skills you learn working in agriculture prepare you to do well in whatever business you choose to be involved with. It is the difference between the very successful and those who just get along."

Ranch managers Tim and Fiona Lockhart share in Hank's passion for youth. "I'm very fortunate to work for someone who gives back to youth," Tim says.

The DeShazer Youth Scholarship Program was started in 2000 and since its inception has awarded more than \$60,000 to youth. Along with the scholarship program, the DeShazer team hosts a show camp each year. Tim says

"If someone asked me how to get started showing cattle I'd send them straight to DeShazers," he says. "Qualifying for scholarships is just part of the incentive. Show camp is such a great experience, and they really teach you how to raise and show a calf."

Roxanna Hudson, Conroe, Texas, says her two sons have been purchasing from DeShazer Cattle Co. for six years. "We learned about DeShazer Cattle Co. from our ag teacher," she says. "He took us to the sale, and we have been loyal customers ever since. Buying from DeShazers was beyond our expectations; they have helped the boys from the very beginning, teaching them how to care for and fit an animal as well as the importance of feed and nutrition. They taught them the importance of showmanship and herdsmanship, and responsibility and commitment."

Hank and the Lockharts strive to develop and foster relationships with their customers, creating a sense of family.

"My boys are extremely proud to show DeShazer cattle and always encourage others interested in showing to contact DeShazers," Roxanna says. "I appreciate, as a mother, there are a lot of different types of mentors your children can choose to follow. I can think of no better mentors than those at DeShazer Cattle Co. They are committed to help their customers from start to finish."

Serving members

Hank says when he was first asked to run for the AHA Board of Directors, he did not think it was something he would want to do. But after more consideration, he decided he did have skills he could contribute to the organization.

"The need I saw that was most important was to try to get our Association more in touch with the membership," Hank says. "With organizations, there always seems to be two sides to a story. So many times the membership does not get a good feeling about an organization they are involved with. I believe we as a leadership don't tell our story enough and the staff is not appreciated for what they do for the members."



Hank takes time to congratulate a DeShazer customer after a successful day in the showing.

2008 was the fourth annual camp that is for youth at all levels.

"We pair the experienced with the inexperienced so they can learn from one another," Tim explains. "During the three-day event, participants have a chance to learn all aspects of taking care of an animal from vet practices to hoof trimming, to how to pack a show box, to an embryo transfer demonstration, and we talk about activities available through the NJHA (National Junior Hereford Association)."

Each year 15-20 kids attend the event at the ranch. Following the camp, the group travels together to the Texas junior Hereford show. As Tim explains, the event is educational and gives the DeShazer clients a chance to bond.

Klee Walker, a 17-year-old Hereford junior from Terrell, Texas, exhibited two DeShazer-bred heifers at this year's Junior National Hereford Expo and has been buying from DeShazer Cattle Co. for five years. He says he appreciates all that Hank and Tim have done for him through the years. Klee has earned about \$12,000 for his college education because of his success with DeShazer genetics.

Hank's family

Hank DeShazer and his wife, Sandy, have three children and 10 grandchildren, and all live within 10 miles of one another.

His children are very active in the DeShazer family businesses. Susan is vice president of sales; Robert helps in accounting and with computers; and Michael oversees operations. All three children also serve on the board of directors.

A smart businessman and dad, Hank asked his children before they joined the family business to first work for someone else and experience the workplace. Hank says it is gratifying to have his family so active in his business. "You get so much satisfaction seeing your children succeed," he says.

Hank and Sandy's grandkids range in age from 4 to 18 years old, and the oldest will be attending Pepperdine University this fall.

The cattle venture is something Hank takes pride in but says his family never developed an interest in. Sandy and Hank do share a love for horses. The couple breeds and shows Egyptian Arabian horses.

Hank explains that after their kids went to college, the horses were how he and Sandy spent their time together. "They filled that empty nest syndrome," Hank explains. **HW**

“Too often members see registration fees and the cost of doing business, and they don’t understand what the Association does for them. As a Board and staff, we need to continue to look for ways to help our members,” Hank says.

When asked how he thought the AHA serves its members, Hank summarized:

1) We are first class in management of the breed.

We do an excellent job managing registrations, servicing our membership and transferring animals.

2) We are a very mature organization.

We have people who have served the Association for more than 40 years. The staff is very efficient at what they do.

3) We are creative.

The Board and staff work together to develop programs that provide services to our members and other organizations. Programs such as the American Breeders Records Association (ABRA) helps us keep costs down for our Hereford breeders while maintaining a quality staff.

4) We have an outstanding junior program.

We have

the top, first-class youth organization in the beef industry. The organization does more than teach kids to show cattle; it helps youth develop life skills and teaches them how to act professionally.

5) We are participating in several exciting research projects that will help us quantify the benefits of the Hereford breed and thus help us better market our product. Those projects include the Harris Ranch heterosis project as well as Amana Colonies and Circle A Ranch.

Hank admits there are programs and services the Association needs to continue to work on to remain competitive in the beef industry. “I think we need to continue to improve the Certified Hereford Beef (CHB) program,” he says. “We need to continue to be creative in developing ways to lower costs for our membership and do a better job of searching for ways to help our breeders be successful.”

During his tenure on the Board, Hank has served as chairman of the finance, building and land acquisition, and show and sale committees

and has served on the marketing committee. Huffhines says Hank’s business background and wealth of knowledge has made him a strong asset to each of those committees.

“Due to the improvements and development of downtown Kansas City, the AHA headquarters site has been a prime site for future development,” Huffhines explains. “With Hank’s expertise and knowledge of commercial real estate, he has been very instrumental in evaluating the value and market opportunities of our current headquarters location as well as developing strategies for future locations should we have to move.”

Lee Haygood, Canadian, Texas, has served on the AHA Board with Hank the last four years. “Hank is a great businessman and the business skills he’s brought to the Board table have been invaluable,” Lee says. “But more than that, he’s got a solid cattle knowledge and is a quick study. He has been a source of logic and fairness, which has helped us make sound decisions.”

Last words as president

Hank will retire from his position as AHA president and as an AHA Board member at the AHA Annual Meeting, Nov. 3 in Kansas

City. The DeShazer herd was dispersed Sept. 15-16 due to an opportunity for Hank to sell the ranch. Although DeShazer Cattle Co. no longer exists, Hank says his belief in the Hereford breed and the opportunity for its continued growth in market share and success in the future.

“I believe Hereford cattle are the most efficient cattle in this day and age with the current feed, fuel and fertilizer costs,” Hank says. “Hereford breeders need to continue to strive to provide commercial cattlemen what they are looking for — longevity and feed efficiency and cattle that are easy to deal with and that cost less to maintain.”

Hank lives by the philosophy of enjoying life and living life to the fullest. He says humbly and with unmatched passion, “I love what I do, and I hope I make a difference.” **HW**

Editor’s Note: Look for profiles on the other two retiring AHA Board members, Lee Haygood and Bill Cox, in the November Hereford World.

