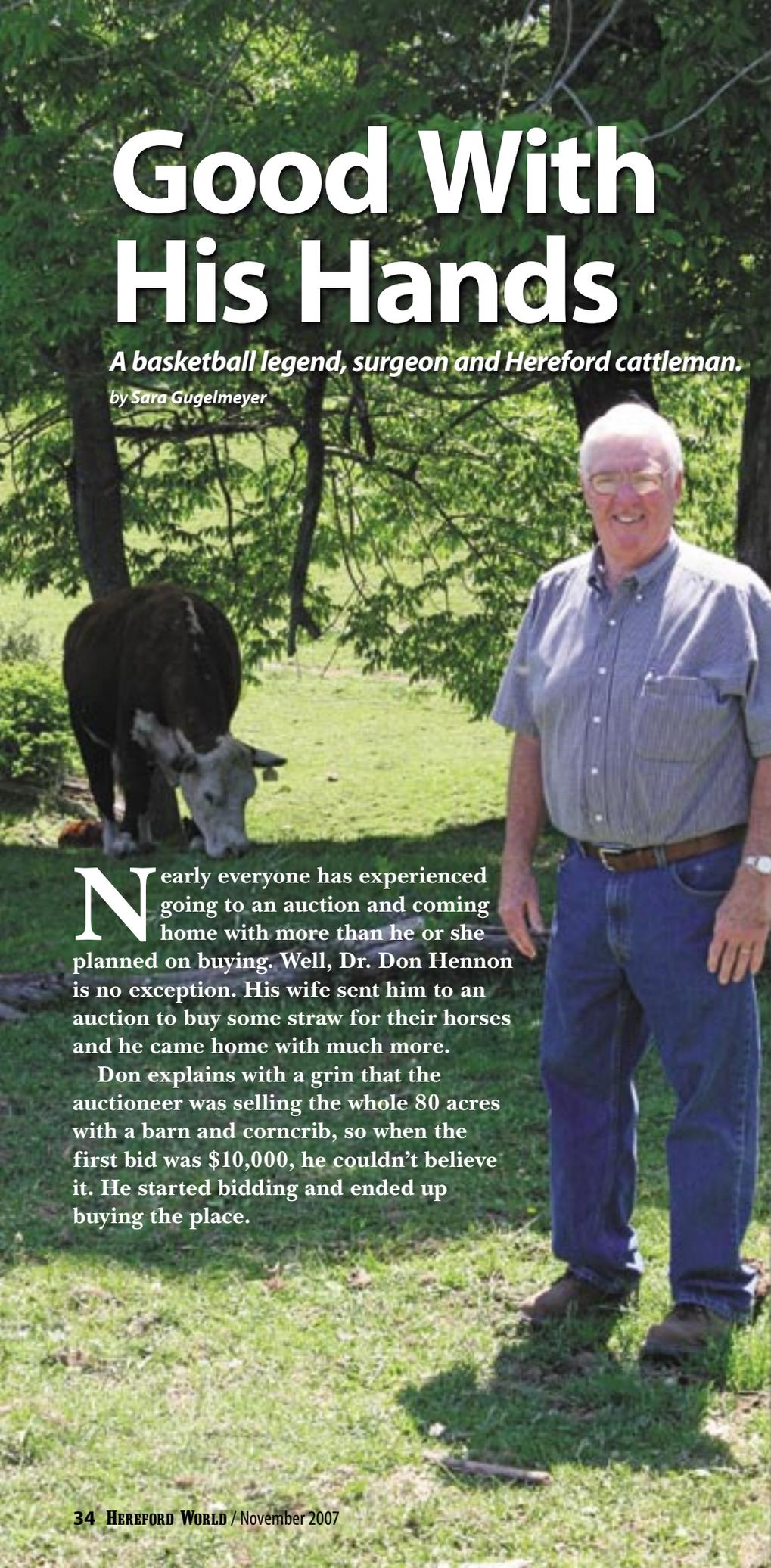


Good With His Hands

A basketball legend, surgeon and Hereford cattleman.

by Sara Gugelmeyer



Nearly everyone has experienced going to an auction and coming home with more than he or she planned on buying. Well, Dr. Don Hennon is no exception. His wife sent him to an auction to buy some straw for their horses and he came home with much more.

Don explains with a grin that the auctioneer was selling the whole 80 acres with a barn and corncrib, so when the first bid was \$10,000, he couldn't believe it. He started bidding and ended up buying the place.

Don's wife of 48 years, Madeline, says when Don came home, she asked him if he had gotten the straw, and he just laughed and told her to sit down. She says, "I think he felt a little sorry for the owners, but he told me he thought it was a good investment."

It may seem a little unusual for someone with little knowledge of livestock beyond the five or six horses already owned to step out and buy a farm, but then Don is no ordinary man. In fact, he is like three men rolled into one — basketball legend, surgeon and Hereford cattleman.

The basketball legend

Don grew up in Wampum, Pa., which he describes as a "little basketball town." He says, "Everybody played basketball," including himself. In fact, he was good, really good, although he would never tell anyone that. In high school he was coached by his father, whom basketball enthusiasts call the great L. Butler Hennon, to a scoring record that stood for 48 years. Don says he feels lucky to have had the opportunity to be coached by his dad. "Fathers are a little tougher on their sons, but it's worth it," he says.

Don earned a scholarship to the University of Pittsburgh, where he dominated the court. Don has the three highest individual scoring games in Pitt history — 45, 41 and 41 — and nine of the top 20. He scored more than 35 points nine times, more than 30 points 23 times. In his first game for Pitt, he scored 34 points. He was named All-American twice.

It was at the University of Pittsburgh that Don met his wife Madeline. She was in nursing school there, and they met on an arranged date, although they both smile and laugh when they explain that each of them had done some research on the other. Don says, "It wasn't really a blind date."

Left: Hennon is pictured in the pasture on part of the 80 acres he bought on a whim in 1985 at an auction.

Madeline says he was so modest that he never told her he even played basketball, so she had no idea how good he was. She says, "Then one day he asked me if I would like to come see a game, and then I knew."

The surgeon

Still, there was nothing common about Don; when his teammates were dreaming of playing in the NBA, he had his sights on medical school. He says of the NBA, "I thought about it for a while, and I got drafted. But when they called, I had already decided I was going to medical school." Don says he knew he made the right decision after his first summer because he played for a traveling team and realized he wouldn't have liked all the traveling.

Madeline agrees that medical school was the right decision for Don, although she says, "I am disappointed about one thing." Don was invited to play in the Olympics, and although he really wanted to, he didn't. She says, "The school wouldn't let him miss class, and he would have to be gone for six weeks."

He explains that school officials told him he could go but that they couldn't guarantee his spot when he came back. Madeline says that Olympics was the one when the U.S.A. basketball team won the gold medal in Rome. She says she would have liked him to have a gold medal, but he made his decision to go to medical school, and "he had to stick with it."

Madeline and Don were married soon after they graduated from the University of Pittsburgh, and he started medical school the following week. She worked as a nurse while he went to school, and they struggled to make it while living in public housing.

Don chose to continue school and become a general surgeon. He says, "After you are in school awhile and you are pretty good with your hands, surgery is pretty attractive."

After his residency, Don was drafted into the military, and they moved to Fort Bragg, N.C., for one year, and then he served one



Bob Glenn, Bar H Farms manager, worked as a dairyman for 25 years before he started with Bar H about nine years ago.



Don and his wife, Madeline, enjoy sitting on the porch at their home near Sewickley, Pa.

year in Korea. He says if anyone has ever watched the television show MASH, his time in Korea was exactly like that.

After his time with the army, he opened his own practice, where Madeline also worked for a while. She says, "I worked in the office a couple days a week and took care of the horses and children." By this time, the couple had four children.

It wasn't until 1985, when Don went to buy straw and came home owning a farm, that they even considered the cattle business. The couple's home is in the country outside Pittsburgh in Sewickley, Pa., with about 30 acres, where they keep their horses. After the couple bought the farm in Mercer, Pa., about an hour from their home, they had to decide what to do with it.

Don started his research by looking through a beef cattle book he had acquired years earlier. He says, "I was trying to decide what

to put on the farm, and I had a book on beef cattle, so I did some research on beef cattle. I discovered that Herefords had a good disposition and weren't going to kill me, so that's what I bought."

The Hereford cattleman

He says he first picked Herefords for their docility but then learned of their impressive efficiency. "In the summer, I take 30 or 40 cows out to graze pasture only, and they can really utilize the grass. They come back in fat without any other feed," he says.

Knowing little about beef cattle in general or specifically Herefords, he had to educate himself, he says. Through much reading his knowledge grew quickly. "I first read books on beef cattle and started subscribing to *Hereford World*, *Hereford America* and others right away and sought help from others." He

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This pair is a good example of the quality cattle Don and Madeline Hennon own. Bar H Farms was awarded premier breeder and premier exhibitor at the 2007 Pennsylvania Farm Show.

says there were many Hereford producers who were willing to help. "I had very few people who weren't helpful. Most helped me out and gave me suggestions and answered any questions," Don says. "You just have to look around, ask questions and learn."

It was a learning experience, Madeline says. She laughs as she tells a story about when Don brought home a few of the cattle and turned them out by the house. "A bull got out at night, so Don had to get him in. He was chasing him around in his underwear," she says.

Madeline says she is glad that Don bought the farm and cattle. "I am glad he has that. It took his time and money, but it is a very good interest," she says. "I almost panicked at one point and thought we should quit it, but he was determined."

His determination has paid off. The operation, which they call Bar H Farms, has expanded to total 315 acres including a 208-acre farm of grass only, which the Hennons purchased in New Galilee, Pa. They own about 40-45 cows and three bulls plus yearling heifers. In total he says he owns about 80 registered Herefords. He markets his cattle through

consignment sales and private treaty. This year he sold 15 in TLR Polled Herefords' Tri-State Elite Production Sale in Ohio. He is a little concerned about keeping the quality of his herd while selling that many. "Taking that many cows to a production sale puts a dent in a program," Don says. But this year the farm will be doing a large number of embryo transfers to make up the difference.

In fact, Bar H has a progressive agreement with a commercial producer to place embryos in the producer's commercial cows. Don pays him for the use of each cow as a recipient. This year they placed about 25 embryos in recipient cows. "It works great for both of us because he has a lot of extra cows and space. It is an advantage for him, too, because he has grade commercial cattle, so he is making just as much or more doing this than raising his own calves," Don says.

In order to properly care for all the cows, Don hired a farm manager about nine years ago. Bob Glenn and his wife, Patsy, live on the farm. Glenn says, "Doc," as he calls him, "makes all the decisions; I just get them bred." Glenn is a retired dairyman. He worked for more than 25 years milking cows but loves working for Don.

Glenn also helps Don prepare the yearlings to show. They show at about five or six shows a year, Don says. One is the Pennsylvania Farm Show. Bar H Farms has won the premier breeder award three years in a row, from 2005-2007. It also won premier exhibitor in 2005 and 2007.

Despite Bar H Farms' success, Don says he would like to continue to improve its quality of cows. He says he would like to have the cattle to show successfully on the national level. "I would like to eventually show nationally and see if I can win something with the cattle I have raised," Don says. He also wants to expand his herd. "We would like to get to about 60 cows here and 20 to 25 embryo cows," he says.

Don is also involved in leadership roles in the Hereford industry. He has been a director of the Northwest Pennsylvania Polled Hereford Association for 15 years. He is also involved with the Pennsylvania Hereford Association (PHA). He has served as a director of PHA for 15 years and vice president for three.

He should have more time now for his Hereford interest; just this year he retired after being a general surgeon for 40 years. He says he is looking forward to helping with the cattle more now that he is retired. "Before, I had to be careful with my hands," he explains. And although it seems as if he's had his hands in a little bit of everything, from medicine to cattle, he still loves basketball. He says he never misses a University of Pittsburgh game.

It's hard to imagine that this quiet, modest man had such an explosive persona on the court. Sports columnists say he had a flair for the theatrical. In the game against Duke when he scored 45 points, he launched a hook shot about 17 feet over his defender. Many people say he is one of the three greatest players in Pitt history. However, when asked about basketball, he doesn't mention any of this; it seems he'd rather talk about his Hereford cows. **HW**