

AHA President David Breiner cherishes family, Herefords and the K-State Wildcats.

by *Angie Stump Denton*

Whether on horseback checking cows in the beautiful Kansas Flint Hills or in the boardroom leading the second largest breed association in the U.S., David Breiner depicts the true cowboy spirit of dedication, loyalty and honesty.

A True Cowboy



A cattleman since birth, David grew up near Norton, Kan., on his family's Angus farm — Hillsdale Angus, which was started by his parents in 1946.

His first hands-on experience with Hereford cattle was during his college years at K-State (Kansas State University) when he worked at the purebred beef barn. After graduating from K-State in 1972, he helped start Mill Creek Ranch in the Flint Hills near Alma, Kan., where Herefords have grazed the lush pastures for 40 years.

About the ranch

David helped select the foundation females to start Mill Creek Ranch in the spring of '72. Those females were Mark Donald, Line 1, Tiberius and Don Blanchard bloodlines.

In the late '70s David was given the opportunity to become the managing partner/owner of Mill Creek Ranch, a position he still serves in today. In 1996 Bob Moore of Pied Piper Farms, Hamlin, Texas, became a partner in the Mill Creek herd. This move was made to enable both Pied Piper and Mill Creek the opportunity to expand cow herd numbers and annually market a large number of bulls and heifers to their customers.

Today the Mill Creek herd consists of 300 brood cows and 100 replacement heifers. Both Hereford and Angus females make up the cow herd today.

Each February the ranch offers 150 bulls and 100 females in its annual production sale and through private treaty sales.

With the motto "The Brand that Works," David utilizes an extensive artificial insemination (AI) and embryo transfer (ET) program to produce seedstock for registered and commercial producers that are moderate in birth, high in performance and excel in carcass traits.

Mill Creek Ranch has participated in the National Reference Sire Program, Whole Herd Total Performance Records (TPR™) program and the National Hereford Feedout. The ranch has also donated semen to the



The Breiner family members (pictured front row, l to r) are: Clay holding Kennan, Kendra, David and Diane. Back row (l to r) are: Eric holding Rett, Ashley holding Rylee Jo, Ryan holding Quinn, Sharon, Chad and Callea holding Karsten.

2000 Bull Project and embryos to the Hereford Research Foundation.

When asked what excites him about the cattle business, David says it is the challenge to continue to breed better cattle that will help his customers improve their bottom lines. For example, a Mill Creek bull customer from west Texas who has been buying bulls for nearly 10 years has improved his average weaning weight from 600 lb. to nearly 800 lb. "Our customers depend on us to make a living," he says.

Focus on family

While at K-State, David met the love of his life, a Hereford girl named Diane McDonald. At David and Diane's wedding, someone took an Angus bull and painted its head white. As David says with a smile, "We've been involved with black baldies for a long time."

The couple has four married children — Chad, Clay, Ryan and Ashley — and five grandchildren. Chad and Callea Breiner live on the ranch. Chad manages the daily operations of Mill Creek, and Callea is a nurse practitioner for the Orthopedic and Sports Medicine Clinic in Manhattan. Their son, Karsten, is 5, and according to Grandpa David, "He is a big help on the ranch."

Clay and Kendra Breiner are both veterinarians and live in the Wamego, Kan., area where Clay specializes in embryo transfer with Cross Country Genetics and Kendra is board certified

in theriogenology and works with reproduction in multiple species. Their son, Kennan, is 16 months old.

Ryan and Sharon Breiner live in Manhattan, where Ryan is the herdsman at the K-State Purebred Beef Teaching Unit and Sharon teaches in the College of Leadership Studies. Their daughter, Quinn, is 5 months old.

Ashley and Eric Bohl live near Ellsworth, Kan., where Ashley is a loan officer and Eric runs a commercial cow herd and farming operation with his family. They have two children — Rett is 3, and Rylee Jo is 14 months old.

Dedication to serving the Hereford breed is evident with the entire family. Diane was president and served on the



American Hereford Women board. For her dedication to AHW she was named Outstanding Hereford Woman in 1988. Chad, Clay, Ryan and Ashley participated in the Kansas Junior Hereford Association, serving as board members and officers, and showed cattle at many regional and national events.

Dave and Diane were also advisors to the Kansas and the American Junior Hereford boards.

When he isn't working with Herefords or enjoying his family, David is involved in his community, having been the voice of the Wabaunsee Chargers for 21 years.

Mentors

Through the years David says he's had several mentors in the Hereford business, including his father-in-law, Harold McDonald, who exported polled Hereford cattle to Japan and England in the '60s.

He also lists Miles McKee, Bud Snidow, Gibbs Rehm, Jack Cooper and Jack Evans as individuals who have guided him through the years.

Marketing minded

David admits marketing has changed significantly in the past 40 years.

"When I first started selling Hereford bulls, we made contacts through telephone calls, cattle shows and ranch visits," he explains. "We mailed letters and sale catalogs and customers were sitting in the seats on sale day. Those things are still

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Mill Creek Ranch has exhibited at National Western Stock Show for 33 years. Viewing attendance there as a marketing opportunity, David says, "If you stay at home potential customers will never find you."

important, but we've added a lot of other marketing avenues."

He lists digital cameras, e-mail, video technology, online bidding, online sale catalogs, websites and entire production sales done strictly on the Internet as new marketing tools used today.

"But as much as marketing has changed, much has stayed the same," he explains. "Producers have to produce a quality product, take care of their customers and try out new avenues to continually find new customers.

"Selling cattle is a people business and a service business. People buy from the person/ranch they trust and the service that operation provides them. You never know when a contact will become a customer, so you have to continually work to promote your breeding program and take care of the ranchers who have put their faith and pocketbook in your hands."

Board tenure

While on the American Hereford Association (AHA) Board, David served on the show and sale, breed improvement, CHB, Hall of Fame/Merit, executive, building and financial committees.

"I have learned to listen and try to understand all sides of an issue before making a decision," David says. "It is important as a Board to not make new rules that can affect the ability of any of our members to make a living from their Herefords. More importantly, when you serve on the AHA Board, you cannot be agenda driven, you must be open-minded and do your best to serve all facets of our great industry."

AHA Vice President Cliff Copeland describes David as being welcoming when Cliff joined the AHA Board and says David helped him learn the ropes as a new Board member.

"Since then," Cliff adds, "David has been relentless, no matter what the issue, of being concerned about how any decision the Board makes impacts the membership. He has been particularly interested in furthering performance analysis of the breed. He has been a great board member and president."

Joe Rickabaugh, AHA director of field management and seedstock marketing, has known David for many years. "I had the privilege to work the summer of my junior year in college for Mill Creek Ranch and the Breiner family," he says. "David is a staunch believer and supporter of the Hereford breed and is always striving to make his herd better and do a better job for his customers.

"As president he has strived to hear the voices of many members — large and small from all across this country. He has traveled extensively



Q&A with AHA President Breiner

In 2010 the American Hereford Association (AHA) Board approved a new strategic plan. What are your thoughts on this strategy? What are the top five tactics you hope the Board and staff continue to focus on?

I think it's very important to develop a strategic plan for long-term goals for our

Association. The top five tactics I hope the Board and staff continue to focus on are:

- 1) Improve the overall quality, consistency, predictability and profitability of Hereford genetics.

With the move of AHA's DNA testing to GeneSeek Inc. and the breed's initiative to develop genetic markers for measurable traits, we are moving forward in being able to increase the accuracy of breeding values in the Hereford breed.

- 2) Build strategic alliances.

We are now working with GeneSeek to gain information through genomic-enhanced EPDs (expected progeny differences). And with help from the Hereford Research Foundation, we are able to fund feed efficiency testing and genomic EPD accuracies. Alliances with other breeds and universities enable us to work together for the betterment of the cattle industry.

- 3) Continue to grow CHB.

We have made tremendous strides in the last two years with the Certified Hereford Beef (CHB) program through increased marketing outlets, increased demand for whitefaced cattle and the CHB[®] product, and the overall profitability of CHB.

- 4) Enhance electronic data management system.

We made the decision to change computer programs for data entry and registrations. This change was a learning curve for everyone, and we are continuing to make the process more user-friendly for our breeders. The move to a paperless data system is something that will need to be addressed in the future. The registration certificate, as we know it, is going to change.

- 5) Increase investment in member and customer education and service.

As I said before, we are in the people and service industry, and we need to continue to find ways to educate and serve our breeders and their customers.

How would you summarize your tenure on the Board?

I have been fortunate to be a member of the AHA Board during a time that our breed has gained momentum because our breeders have taken the challenge to improve our breed to meet the needs of the beef cattle industry. The Hereford cattle today are more industry oriented than I have ever seen them during my time of being a Hereford breeder.

As I have said many times in the past six years: "It's an exciting time to be raising Herefords. We need to keep our knife sharp and don't keep anything that you wouldn't buy. We need to look ahead to the future needs of the beef industry and make sure our breed is in the forefront. If we continue to do that, then increasing market share and profitability of our membership should follow."

What do we need to work on as a breed?

We need to continue to encourage our breeders to submit data to increase the accuracy of our database, find markers for cancer eye, embrace technology and constantly strive to promote the Hereford breed in order to continue to increase our market share.

attending events throughout the U.S. He's a great cattleman that cherishes family, the Hereford breed and Kansas State University."

This past July David had the opportunity to represent AHA at two large Hereford events. First he attended the Junior National Hereford Expo in Grand Island, Neb., and then the World Hereford Conference (WHC) in Calgary, Canada.

"The JNHE in Nebraska this summer was amazing," David says. "The number of exhibitors, the quality of the cattle, the opportunities available for our junior members and the family atmosphere that surrounds that show are a wonderful testament to the Hereford breed and the interest our breed has gained in the last few years."

He adds that attending the WHC was an amazing opportunity to listen to how the Hereford breed has evolved in other

countries and how the AHA impacts the Hereford industry worldwide.

"I have tried to attend as many Hereford activities as possible as AHA president," he explains. "Working with the AHA Board of Directors has been a true highlight for me. This outstanding group works tirelessly for the betterment of the Hereford breed, and it has been my privilege to be a part of that."

Looking forward

David's year as AHA President comes to an end on Nov. 3 during the 2012 Annual Meeting. Although he's passing on the gavel, his dedication and loyalty to the Hereford breed will continue for many years to come.

"After serving my year as AHA president, I will continue doing what I have always done — raise cattle, make them better, take care of my



Proud grandparents of five, David and Diane agree that if their grandkids want to raise Herefords and ranch in the Kansas Flint Hills, they will do what they can to help them continue the family tradition.

customers, help the Hereford breed increase market share as well as enjoy and spend time with my family," David says. "Retirement is definitely not in my future as I enjoy production agriculture too much to ever quit." **HW**

What have been some of the biggest challenges during your tenure?

Turning CHB LLC into a profitable entity is one thing I am most proud of. To make that happen, we had to make some tough choices as a Board.

Another challenge has been the change to our new computer system. Computers are great when they work right and can be a real test when they don't. The AHA data entry department should be commended for working through the computer issues and helping our membership understand the new system.

Looking at what's facing the Board and the industry in general, what challenges do you think Hereford leaders and Hereford members have to address?

A recent article that I read stated that by the year 2050, everyone would be a vegetarian because there wouldn't be enough water left to produce beef for human consumption. As a breed, we need to promote the importance of animal protein in everyone's diet, continue to promote the positive attributes of the Hereford breed such as fertility, leanness and tenderness, and be spokesmen and women for our industry.

If we, as beef producers, don't educate the consumer about the health benefits of our product, who will?

How do we continue to gain commercial market share?

We must continue to search for the most profitable genetics and eliminate the problem genetics so when our customers purchase breeding stock, we are helping them improve their herds, which, consequently, increases their bottom lines. The heterosis value of whitefaced cattle has proven to give a 7% advantage over other breeds. Promotion of the black and red baldie is how we will gain commercial market share.

When you were elected to the Board, what were your goals for the Association? How has that changed?

When I ran for the AHA Board, my goal was to increase market share and to help the organization be profitable. We have accomplished both of those goals, and I am very proud of that. While I served on the Board, CHB LLC became an important goal, and I am pleased that it has grown so much and is also profitable during my tenure.

Of the programs offered by the Association, which do you think offer the most opportunity for members in the future?

I think some of our important programs are:

- 1) Junior program. Our outstanding junior association is where the future leaders of our Hereford breed will come from.
- 2) CHB. The CHB program gives our breeders another way to market our product.
- 3) Genomic-enhanced EPDs. GE-EPDs will give our breeders more selection tools to help them make better breeding decisions.
- 4) AHA database. We need to encourage our members to continually turn in data that will make our EPDs more accurate. But our breeders need to understand that selection criteria is not single trait but rather encompasses data, visual appraisal and customer acceptance.

What do you consider to be the most important accomplishments the Association has achieved during your tenure as a director and officer?

The most important accomplishment would be the interest in Hereford genetics, which was driven by the advertising campaigns and research with universities and ranches like Circle A, Harris and Amana to prove the breed strengths. These research projects proved what heterosis can accomplish for the commercial cattleman. **HW**