

Enthusiast

Dave Shelberg loves Hereford cattle and helping children.

by Sara Gugelmeyer



“I have such a love for Hereford cattle that I want anything and everything I can get a hold of about them. I’ve been that way for a long time.”

It’s true. It is possible to be a Hereford enthusiast without actually owning a single Hereford. Don’t believe it? Just ask Dave Shelberg. Dave raised Herefords as a youngster, but now he’s involved in the Hereford industry in nearly every other way.

Little red barn

The year was 1948 (or ’49, Dave’s not completely sure), when he and his brother traveled to the Chicago National Livestock Show, where he first saw a Hereford. He would have only been 8 or 9 at the time, but being at that livestock show left an impression on Dave that remains today. Shortly afterward, Dave and his family moved to Arizona and purchased an acre of ground across the road from their house. On the acre up went a “little red barn,” as it was affectionately called by the family.

Then in 1957 Dave put a Hereford in it by winning the FFA calf scramble at the livestock show in Phoenix. “After that we kept a few head of Herefords on the Little Red Barn Ranch, but it was more of a hobby than anything,” Dave explains. “I wanted to get in the Hereford business in a big way, but I couldn’t because I didn’t have the financing and the land was being developed all around us.”

Phoenix’s suburban growth choked out Dave’s Hereford operation after only four years.

That didn’t slow down Dave’s love of Hereford cattle, however. After high school, he earned a teaching degree but began working in the meat sales industry. Selling meat was his profession,

but he made time to peruse Hereford magazines and travel to national Hereford shows. “I’ve been to every major show in the U.S.,” Dave says. “I’ve been to Denver more than the others but also San Francisco, Louisville and Kansas City, to name a few.”

Hereford people

Despite being a relative outsider, Dave was always encouraged by the hospitality and friendliness of Hereford breeders. “The Hereford people have always come up to me and made friends,” Dave says.

Dave has met many “Hereford people” over the years. His meat sales job required travel and frequent relocation. He lived in Denver for 13 years, which he says afforded him plenty of Hereford socializing at the National Western Stock Show. One year in particular he remembers with fondness.

“One warm winter day in Denver, I was at the pens down below looking at cattle, and this lady said to me, ‘Come on in.’ Now I didn’t know her, and she didn’t know me. She introduced herself as Mary Barber and said ‘I’d like to get you a cold Dr. Pepper, and I want to introduce you to Mr. Moler.’ I will never forget that. She said, ‘Go ahead; pet him.’ And I pet him, and he was just so docile and so wonderful that I gave him a hug, and he just looked at me. He was a wonderful bull and I’ll never forget him. He just stood there like we had been friends forever.”

Another breeder who made an impact on Dave’s Hereford interest was Larry Stark, who managed the Las Vegas Hereford Ranch, Prescott, Ariz. “He helped me

develop a real interest in Herefords 'cause I could call him or see him at the shows and he would answer my questions," Dave says. "He had a lot of influence on my life and the Hereford industry in Arizona."

American Hereford Association (AHA) Director of Seedstock Marketing Joe Rickabaugh also has aided Dave's love for the Hereford breed. About six years ago, Dave called Joe and introduced himself. "He didn't know me, and I didn't know him," Dave says. "I just looked his number up in the *Hereford World* and said, 'Joe, I want to be more accurate about the Hereford industry. I asked him if I could call him once a month, and he said, 'Dave you don't have to wait til the end of the month; call me anytime.' So I call him if I've got a question, and he gives me honest answers, answers you can take to the bank."

Another Hereford breeder approached Dave at the Louisville show a few years ago. "I had a camera and a gentleman came up to me and asked if he could help me take pictures," Dave says.

The breeder was Charlie Herring, Punkin Ridge Polled Herefords, Beaumont, Miss. The two struck up a conversation and have built a friendship. Dave says they usually talk once a month about many things but mostly Hereford cattle.

Dave attended the 2010 Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) in Indianapolis. "My eyes were opened coming to the JNHE," Dave says. "Success doesn't come easy, but it is learned through their Hereford projects. Many times I saw kids working together to help get an animal ready for its class. These kids want to show their love for each other regardless of what spot they finish. The money I spent for the trip to Indianapolis was worth every penny."

Contagious enthusiasm

All this Hereford knowledge doesn't end with Dave. He and

his wife, Karen, have settled in Florida where Karen is a schoolteacher. Dave is retired but is finally using his teaching degree. For more than four years now, Dave has helped first graders learn to read. He would go to the school two days a week, and about 18 children read to him during the day.

Several years ago, Shelberg was recognized for his service with the Senior Volunteer Award given by the Duval County Public Schools.

He also shares *Hereford World* magazines with the children, who greatly enjoy looking at the pictures of baby calves, he says. As encouragement for improved reading skills, he gives the children pencils and pens from the AHA with the Hereford logo on them.

"We talk about cattle," Dave says. "These kids ask me questions about hamburgers and things like that. It has been rewarding for me and for the kids."

The teachers at Sheffield Elementary appreciate Dave's dedication to the children. They say he encourages the students to try their best and celebrates each accomplishment. When he sees those young readers in the community, he always takes a



Dave traveled all the way to Indianapolis to watch the JNHE and encourage juniors like Rylee Barber (pictured here) whose grandma he met in Denver several years ago.

moment to let their parents know how hard they've been working on reading.

At 70 years young, he doubled his time spent at the school to four days a week, starting this fall. He also doubled the number of children he helps learn to read and learn about cattle. "It's a way for me to help kids and expose them to things they've never been exposed to before," Dave says. "Most of these kids have never been on a farm before or even seen animals."

Dave admits he doesn't have the means to own cattle now; he resides in a subdivision, but not owning cattle doesn't stop him from sharing his Hereford enthusiasm. He says, "I have such a love for Hereford cattle that I want anything and everything I can get a hold of about them. I've been that way for a long time." **HW**



Dave enjoys helping young children learn to read and teaches them about Hereford cattle too.

