



Retiring directors (l to r) Kelsey Powell, Jessica Middleswarth, Kelsey Stimpson and Austin Cole are pictured receiving their bronze bulls for time spent serving the NJHA.

As One Door Closes, Another Opens

Jessica Middleswarth, Kelsey Powell, Kelsey Stimpson and Austin Cole leave a lasting impression on NJHA youth as they hand off their maroon jackets.

by *Haley Stark*

Three years ago, at the 2014 Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE), four junior members sat anxiously in their seats, waiting for the retiring board members to hand off their beloved maroon jackets to four new board members. Little did these four acquaintances know they would soon experience one of the greatest nights of their lives as they embarked on a once-in-a-lifetime journey with the National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA).

For Jessica Middleswarth, Kelsey Powell, Kelsey Stimpson and Austin Cole, being handed the esteemed maroon jacket that night was filled with emotion and excitement, yet they had no scope of the experiences, hard work and memories they would experience over the next three years as newly elected NJHA board members.

Fast forward three years and these four individuals reminisce about all the unforgettable memories and countless hours of hard work poured into the organization to make it better and to inspire Hereford youth. Although they recently passed on their maroon jackets to the next group of excited and ambitious junior board directors, their love for the Hereford breed and youth membership is unending. It is something they'll hold dear to their hearts as they adventure into the next chapter of their lives.

Hereford roots

With all four retiring board members stemming from extensive Hereford backgrounds, their involvement with the NJHA is no surprise.

Middleswarth is a fourth-generation Hereford breeder from Torrington, Wyo. Her father introduced both her and her older sister to the industry and, later, the showing. Middleswarth was inspired to run for the junior board after watching members on the board before her, and she wanted to give back to the individuals who invested in her. One of those individuals included her older sister, Ashley Fitzsimmons, who had previously served as an NJHA board member. Middleswarth also ran for the board for her parents.

"I felt that I owed it to my parents because they got me involved in such a great association," she says.

Both Powell and Stimpson wanted to be elected to the NJHA board for as long as they could remember. For Powell, she always had the dream since she grew up on a Hereford seedstock operation in Mitchell, S.D., and became actively involved in the South Dakota Hereford Association. Yet, it was at numerous JNHEs that Powell truly fell in love with the NJHA and its members.

"I admired the board members," Powell says. "I knew I wanted to help the industry, leave my mark and help create tomorrow's leaders too."

Stimpson, born into a third-generation Hereford ranch in Melba, Idaho, affectionately recalls at 8 years old telling her mother she wanted a maroon jacket. Uniquely, Stimpson was just a junior in high school when she ran for the board after a phone call from her advisor, even though she originally planned on running in 2016.

"I wasn't expecting it but decided, out of the blue, to run," Stimpson says. "I met the age requirement by like 3 days," she laughs. "I was really nervous running younger, but I met a lot of great people as I was campaigning, and I'm thankful for that opportunity."

Cole, from Bowling Green, Ky., attributes his start in the showing to his baseball friend. At just 9 years old, he hit the showing with his Angus heifer but shortly switched to showing Herefords — the rest is history. Over the years he continued to get more involved within the NJHA



Jessica Middleswarth, 21, is the daughter of Jay and Marsha Middleswarth of Torrington, Wyo., and is a senior attending OSU as an agricultural communications major. She previously attended Butler Community College and participated on the livestock judging team. She says she is blessed to have the opportunity to be part of such a wonderful organization and encourages youth to get involved. In an emotional conclusion to her junior board term, she thanked her family and close friends for their support and her older sister for being the greatest inspiration and role model she could ever ask for.

and attended numerous JNHEs. Cole credits the people and experiences from JNHEs for his inspiration to run for the junior board. During his Hereford journey, Cole feels thankful for all the great friends he has met along the way. "It's been a fun ride," he says.

All four retiring members recall the intensity while they campaigned and interviewed for the open positions. Middleswarth remembers the seven other candidates she ran with, initially all full of nervous energy but, throughout the week, becoming good friends.

For Cole, he remembers the nerves setting in as early as the application process. When they applied, seven letters of recommendation were required along with several essay responses. After coordinating the legwork for the application, Cole also recalls the preparation, including his parents quizzing him on interview questions during the 14-hour trip from Alabama to Pennsylvania.

Each retiring member had unique experiences while running and being elected. For Stimpson, it was starting her three-year term as a 17-year-old high school senior was quite unique. She reflects on the juggling act she began shortly after being elected — balancing school, classes and NJHA responsibilities. Even though at times being a director was challenging, Stimpson doesn't regret any second

of it and is thankful the experience helped her grow and mature.

After surviving the strenuous application process and campaigning at JNHE, the anticipation mounted to an all time high for each of the four candidates. They all look back on that awards night three years ago when they received that coveted maroon jacket as one they will never forget. Today, they've traveled thousands of miles, planned shows, worked tiring days in the ring and left a lasting impression on NJHA youth membership.

A bittersweet goodbye

With three years' worth of memories to choose from, the four retiring board members struggled to put their favorite part of their junior board experience into words. They reflect

nostalgically on the team comradery and family dynamic developed over their terms, which made every NJHA event enjoyable.

All four retiring members confidently said they'd miss the people within the association the most. With two dedicated leaders in American Hereford Association (AHA) staff, Amy Cowan and Bailey Clanton, the retiring four experienced three years of drastic growth and teamwork. "We've had to mature a lot as a team — we had to make decisions, work together, cooperate and learn how to handle situations and activities," Middleswarth says. Together their group, or maroon jacket posse, has become the closest of friends.

Stimpson says the junior board gave her the gift of travel, and she fondly remembers her favorite trips to Connecticut, Massachusetts and California. Growing up in Idaho, she never dreamed she'd travel that far northeast and have show experiences coast-to-coast. Among her favorite memories is working state and regional shows. There, she valued the people she met tremendously and loved serving as a role model to youth. "You always have eyes watching you," she says.

Similarly, Cole says he'll miss the constant networking he's experienced through his travels and the one-on-one interaction with the kids at junior shows. "I really enjoyed working with

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Kelsey Powell, 23, is the daughter of Steve and Lori Repenning of Mitchell, S.D. Kelsey is a 2016 graduate of South Dakota State University with a major in agricultural communication and animal science. She currently works at Forum Communications as a multimedia marketing coordinator. Kelsey used her final speech as an opportunity to share her perseverance when she wasn't elected to the board the first time. She encouraged those candidates that didn't receive a maroon jacket to brush themselves off, to not give up and to run again. "You won't regret it," she says.





Austin Cole, 23, is the son of Don and Katina Cole from Bowling Green, Ky. He is a 2016 graduate of Western Kentucky University with a major in animal science and a minor in business administration. Today he is employed at Triple C Hereford and Black Hereford Farm in northern Alabama. In his retiring remarks, he revisited three items he used during his candidate speech three years ago illustrating hard work, preparation skills and industry connections he developed over the past three years.

the juniors whether it be JNHE or FACES, watching those members grow over three years and get a couple years under their belts,” he reflects. Shortly after being elected, Cole and the rest of the team spent a day out on the lake in Oklahoma as a post-JNHE reward. There, he fondly recalls the fun they all had as a group — just hanging out, socializing and building friendships.

Part of serving on the junior board includes long days spent helping in the showing. Achy joints and sore feet are almost inevitable, but Middleswarth notes the work is all worth it. Her favorite part is when junior members come up to her and her fellow teammates, full of thanks and recognition for the junior board’s endless dedication. “What I take away from the junior board the most is the impact you leave on the kids,” she points out. Middleswarth says knowing she inspired a junior, even if it’s just one, is the greatest thing she’s done, and she’s thankful to have been a role model.

Powell notes the perseverance her time on the junior board instilled in her. Unlike her other teammates, Powell ran twice for the junior board, an opportunity she labels a learning experience. She looks back on the first year thankful that it allowed her to better prepare for running a second year, and it certainly paid off. “You only regret the things in life you don’t try to do,” she says. “And you change so much in those three years, it teaches you a lot— those are pretty big years in your life.” Like Middleswarth, Powell is thankful for her time in the ring,

keeping all the moments spent up close during the champion drive close to her heart. “It’s an awesome moment to see junior members’ hard work pay off,” she adds.

Words of wisdom

For as long as she can remember, Powell has admired and has looked up to the retiring junior board members. In fact, as a child, she always anticipated hearing those retiring members’ final remarks and speeches. “It’s neat seeing them leave their mark and inspire the next generation,” Powell says. At the 2017 JNHE, the tables were turned as Powell, Stimpson, Middleswarth and Cole gave their retiring remarks to youth membership and offered advice to the newly elected board.

Cole says his time on the junior board engrained the importance and necessity of organizational skills. Over three years, he learned to prepare events and stay on top of responsibilities, like sponsorship calls, in a timely manner. He advises the newly elected board members to be proactive and to use those skills acquired through junior board experiences to navigate trickier conversations. “We all have other stuff going on, but don’t drag your feet out and make sure you get stuff done and work hard,” he says. He pushes any excited youth member to take that step to run for the board — it pays off.

Middleswarth reminds the newly elected board members no one should take the job lightly. She considers this position one of the greatest things she’s done in her life and hopes the new board members will fill those shoes ambitiously and humbly. “This should be your priority as you represent one of the biggest associations in the country. Be inspired and take it seriously — people look up to you,” she says.

Being a junior board member encompasses far more than just working shows, and Powell offers to keep an open mind. When she ran and was elected, Powell thought she knew exactly what being a director was going to be like, but she quickly realized there was much more involved. When

Kelsey Stimpson, 20, is the daughter of Danny and Katie Stimpson of Melba, Idaho. She is a senior at OSU, completing her agricultural communications degree. Kelsey has been a part of the NJHA for 12 years and has attended many JNHEs. She intends to give back to agricultural youth in the future and encourages NJHA members to step outside their comfort zones and to pursue greatness. Kelsey wrapped up the retiring addresses with thanks to their dynamic duo, Amy and Bailey Clanton. She also expressed her gratitude to every individual that played a crucial role in her time on the junior board, including the youth members. She called her time on the board a “miraculous journey.”





tackling day-to-day responsibilities associated with the role, which are sometimes tedious, she encourages the new board members to remember to revisit their “why” — which ultimately is their passion for the Hereford breed and the kids that are a part of it.

Powell also points out that the skills gained showing cattle hold true in the working world as well. She reassures the newly elected board members that the hard work and dedication they’ve established through the showing and the campaigning process will aid them in their junior board years.

Stimpson advises the newly elected board members to constantly step outside their comfort zones. She says that a person setting his or her mind to something and working hard is critical to accomplish any goal. As a team, they have encountered obstacles, but working together and working hard individually has helped them resolve all of those problems. “Be yourself and capitalize on every single opportunity imaginable. Meet every person possible at junior national and Faces of Leadership,” she says. “It’s crazy what people remember, you leave an impact by just being personable and outgoing.”

Oh, the places you’ll go

Although the four retiring junior board members may be closing one chapter of their lives, they hold near-

and-dear to their hearts, they are all diving into new and exciting opportunities and to stay actively involved in the NJHA and the AHA.

Both Middleswarth and Stimpson are currently seniors at Oklahoma State University (OSU), finishing up their agricultural communication degrees. Middleswarth aspires to be a lifelong advocate within the industry, and upon graduation in May, she hopes to find a job in agricultural broadcasting. Ultimately, her goal is to return home to Wyoming and to carry on the family tradition of raising quality

Hereford cattle and leaving a lasting legacy in the breed.

Stimpson’s personal experiences as a junior board member and officer turned her passion for youth membership into her purpose. She dreams of one day working for a breed association. “Serving on the

board has ignited a passion in me to continue to give back to youth, so I would love to work with youth development and youth programs in the future,” she explains.

Cole currently manages a cattle operation in northern Alabama and has high hopes for his goals within the cattle industry. He says he’s taken the leadership skills he’s learned while being on the Hereford junior board and uses them in his job on a day-to-day basis. Outside his career, Cole wants to continue to show and to sell Hereford cattle for as long as he’s able. He plans on vacationing at JNHE every year.

Powell is currently employed as the marketing coordinator for Forum Communication in South Dakota, where she serves as an advocate for the industry and shares her own agricultural story. She also hopes to extend her own herd back home and to stay intricately involved in the family operation because she can’t imagine her life without it. **HW**



Austin Cole, Kelsey Stimpson, Jessica Middleswarth and Kelsey Powell closed one chapter of their lives as they passed on their maroon jackets to four new NJHA board members.