



PHOTOS COURTESY OF THE ULLMAN FAMILY

Keith Ullman (l) and his dad Larry operate their Hereford farm that has been in the family since 1951.

college-bound youth from area Hereford families.

In a “practice what you preach” moment, Keith offered to donate a heifer at the next board meeting. The co-owner of Ralph E. Ullman & Son Polled Herefords with his father, Larry, Keith picked out a “particularly nice” heifer for the auction, passing up several opportunities to sell her.

He and his wife, Christina, worked diligently to promote the heifer through online advertising and handing out brochures and ads at events like the Buckeye Hereford Association’s banquet. They even obtained sponsors for the heifer. In the end, she generated more than \$5,000 for the scholarship fund.

Another breeder donated a heifer the following year, providing financial security for the scholarship. This year SOPHA gave out four scholarships compared to the single award available when it began in 2006.

“What’s been rewarding about this scholarship fund is how past recipients have given back,” Keith remarks. “They’ve been speakers at our annual banquet and one past recipient gave a sizable monetary donation to the scholarship fund. Others have purchased cattle or consigned them to our sale. It’s gone from just being a youth scholarship to one where recipients are giving back as they’ve transitioned into adulthood.”

Community

Giving back is an established mantra of the Ullman family, whose members have resided for many decades in Graysville, Ohio, a small, southeastern town nestled in Wayne National Forest.

“We’re all about stepping up to the plate for community activities. The Ullman family has sort of followed in [my father’s] footsteps,” Larry says.

Ralph set a lofty bar for his son and grandson. Over the span of 33 years, the “community go-getter” worked as a teacher, principal and coach. In addition to the SOPHA scholarship, he also helped secure funds for a new firehouse. Even during retirement, Ralph attended regular community meetings, often serving as president of many organizations.

Giving Their All

Ohio family shares a tradition of community support and raising Hereford cattle.

by *Amy Beth Graves*

Keith Ullman knew he needed to take action. The scholarship fund his grandfather, Ralph, had helped establish years ago through the Switzerland of Ohio Polled Hereford Association (SOPHA) needed an influx of cash to remain self-sustaining. Keith made a proposal — ask someone to donate a heifer to auction for the scholarship fund, which supports



Ralph (l) and his brother Harry in the early 1900s.

The entire family inherited Ralph's passion for their community. Larry has leadership roles with the Washington Electric Co-Op, Graysville Village Council, Community Improvement Council, volunteer fire department and many other groups. The retired math teacher also runs a small business with his wife, Donna, selling alternative energy supplies including wood burning stoves.

Keith's own commitment to the community is equally impressive. The Marietta High School math department chair is also the vice president of SOPHA, after taking over his grandfather's position on the board when Ralph passed away in 2007. Keith also serves on the board of the Buckeye Hereford Association. Additionally, he judges livestock shows and gives fitting and showing demonstrations to 4-Hers and "anyone willing to listen and try."

Christina, who owns a graphic design business in Marietta, notes, "My perspective on why the family is so invested in community is that they've all been school teachers. When you have that interaction with kids and families, you have a vested interest in being involved in the community."

Keith is always looking for a teachable moment for those young and old alike. The school teacher recalls a clipping lesson he gave to a boy at the barn.

"I basically taught him how to clip just like I teach a math lesson," Keith says. "I handed him the clippers and said, 'Clip away.' And he asked, 'On this heifer?' I said, 'Well, of course on this heifer,'" Keith laughs as he recalls the story. "Since then, that boy has purchased cattle from me, and he's going to show one of the animals this year at the junior national."

Keith and Christina have instilled the value of organizational involvement into their two college-age sons. Michael, 21, a mechanical engineering major at the University of Pittsburgh, serves as president of the mechanical engineering society and is working with a research team to develop an imaging system for the International Space Station. Jonny, 18, who will major in audio engineering and music business at Belmont University in Nashville this fall, has volunteered at the Peoples Bank



Ralph and Vera Ullman relax following a Hereford show at the Monroe County Fair.

Theatre where he served as a production assistant for major music artists.

Competition

Keith has loved showing ever since his grandpa gave him his first cow when he was 7 years old. The revenue generated from selling the offspring of "Old Cow 40" paid for Keith's first year of college. Keith inherited a love of competition but also uses the showing to advertise his business.

"If you're going to use the show arena as a means of advertising, it needs to be cattle you raise. I don't breed for show cattle, I show breeding cattle," Keith says. "I'm really proud that our show heifers become our best cows."

The Ullmans maintain that the key to great cattle is the best genetics possible, quality feed, good animal health, and presentation to potential buyers. Three generations of hard work have gone into improving genetics through methods like embryo transfer (ET), in vitro fertilization (IVF) and artificial insemination (AI).

The family's current 60-head herd started in 1951, when Ralph and his wife, Vera, invested in registered polled Herefords. As Keith tells it, his grandfather came "within an eyelash" of starting a Shorthorn operation but, at the last minute, decided on Herefords because of the docile nature of the breed.

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The Ullmans typically have 30 calves per year, split between fall and spring.



Keith in 1992 with the farm's first state fair champion, Big T Brooke A16.

"He set the framework for our success," Keith says. "When he passed away, we only had two animals that had been champions at state fairs. Since then, we've had over 20 state fair champions."

The ever-competitive Ralph reveled in every success. Christina can still picture him "beaming from ear to ear" when they had the reserve grand champion Hereford female at the Ohio State Fair in 1992. She and her husband agree if Ralph were alive today, he would be ecstatic about the family's success in the showing.

"I remember when I was young, he would be so proud if we won a county fair and would brag to his buddies at the feed store about the winnings," Keith recalls. "I'd say, 'Grandpa, it's just a county fair.' It didn't matter if it was big or small. He was very, very competitive."

Champions

Likewise, Keith remembers every champion he had and can rattle off the list of winners from the Ohio State Fair, the West Virginia Fair, the North American International Livestock Exposition, the Eastern National Livestock Show, Keystone International Livestock Exposition and the Ohio Futurity. This past show season has been the Ullman family's most successful to date, as they were named premier exhibitor and premier

breeder at the Ohio State Fair and had two division champions out of four animals exhibited at Keystone. In the past year, the Ullmans have had 15 different Herefords either win their division or win overall grand or reserve champion at a state or national show.

"That's pretty cool for an operation our size," Keith says. "But with my full-time job as a teacher, it wouldn't be possible without all of the time my dad invests in the day-to-day operation of the farm. It's really a team effort."

A self-described perfectionist, Keith washes the show cattle every day and typically competes in eight to 10 shows a year. Performing well in the showing makes marketing cattle fairly easy, especially with Christina's graphic design expertise in photographing sale cattle and maintaining their website.

Coordinating private treaty sales is an aspect Keith particularly enjoys. After calves are weaned off in the fall, Keith tries to bring potential buyers out on weekends and fills those days with as many visits as possible. Buyers come from Ohio, Kentucky, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania and West Virginia. Remaining cattle are sold at the West Virginia Beef Expo, the Ohio Beef Expo, the annual SOPHA sale, and, next year, the Kentucky Beef Expo. Keith stresses the long-term value of a quality female to his buyers.

"I know genetics are 50-50, but in my estimation, the quality of the calf is two-thirds the cow and one-third the bull because the cow is the one who has to raise that calf to weaning age," Keith explains. "I try to emphasize to people that when you purchase a high-quality calf, it should be one that you can count on for generating revenue for 10 years. It's an investment."

He points to a customer who retained a cow for 18 years. "I asked, 'Has she been a good cow?' And he said she'd been the best cow he's ever had," Keith says. "It's so rewarding to hear that."

Continued Commitment

Although gearing up to retire from active teaching, Keith will not soon retire his herd. He will continue improving the growing herd on the family's 225 acres, rotating cattle among their three properties. Future plans include developing relationships with cooperating recipient herds to expand their ET program.

"The relationships and friendships I have made over the years with other people within the Hereford breed have really meant a lot to me," Keith says. "Building connections is the key to success in business and in life."

It's those connections that will keep Keith and the Ullman family invested in their community for years to come. **HW**



Keith accepting reserve grand champion bull honors at the 2017 Ohio State Fair.

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