



The Vanier family at Kansas State University. Pictured (front row, l to r) are: Donna, Mary and Jack Vanier; and (back row, l to r) Bob Krause (Marty's late husband), Marty, Kim and John Vanier.

Paving the Way

The Vanier family's longstanding tradition of supporting agricultural youth radiates through scholarship.

by *Brooke Roberts*

Each year, the Hereford Youth Foundation of America (HYFA) selects 10 outstanding youth to receive the Jack and Donna Vanier Family Scholarship. Approximately \$100,000 is awarded in individual \$10,000 scholarships, an endowment courtesy of Jack Vanier and his wife, Donna. Their support of education and leadership

for Hereford youth dates back to 2008, when the first Vanier Family scholarship was awarded.

The family has a long history of providing generous financial support for young people in agriculture. Jack and Donna's three kids — daughters Marty and Mary, and son John — describe a responsibility to share which led

their parents to create a scholarship supporting Hereford youth.

The trailblazer

Inspiration for the scholarship stems from the family patriarch, John J. “JJ” Vanier. A grain miller and cattle rancher, JJ worked hard to achieve success in his business undertakings. His thriving feed and flour milling company funded the purchase of the family’s ranch in Brookville, dubbed CK Ranch for its location in Central Kansas.

Hereford cattle first set foot on the property in 1936. Right off the bat, JJ started in the registered business and within 20 years had built a registered herd of 2,000 head.

Until recently, the Vanier family had ranching operations in Wyoming, Colorado, Oklahoma and two in Kansas. John, who has a degree in ag economics from Kansas State University, has been the family member directly involved with operating the ranches for the past 30 years. Today, CK Ranch consists of the original Kansas property west of Brookville, Kan., and has transitioned from the registered business to become a 100% commercial operation.

The family’s commitment to the breed is demonstrated through its leadership within the American Hereford Association (AHA), which has included three generations of Vaniers.

JJ was elected as the organization’s president in 1952, and was a Board member when “they put the big Hereford bull up,” as John says.

Jack also served as president. “He was very active in the business,” John says of his father. “This was his life. He loved the land and he loved the ranch. He was constantly going through the pastures, looking at cattle.”

The third generation of Vaniers to serve on the AHA Board, John himself, was a Board member during the years the horned and polled associations merged.



CK Ranch utilizes Hereford bulls on their primarily red baldy cow herd.

Although very involved in ‘adult’ Board affairs, JJ is best remembered for providing avenues for juniors to pursue higher education. John describes his grandfather as “a huge proponent of helping kids get a start in agriculture.” One of the family’s favorite pastimes that stemmed from JJ’s creative thinking was a youth livestock auction.

“We used to have what was known as the Red Circle Auction,” John notes. JJ would place stamps on sacks of feed sold from his milling business. “Kids would collect those stamps from buying the feed, and they would come out to the ranch and we would have a three-day event,” he explains.

The event, which included everything from square dancing to speaking contests, concluded with a livestock auction that featured cattle from the ranch, horses, pigs and sheep. Auction items could only be purchased with the feed stamps.

Mary Vanier points out that parents were not allowed into the sale pavilion — only kids, ringmen, the auctioneer and her grandfather, JJ.

“That was very deliberate,” she notes, “It enforced on these young people that it was their

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CK Ranch runs approximately 1,200 cows at the Brookville, Kan., location.



John remembers the many lessons learned from his father as he currently oversees the ranch managers at all four CK Ranch locations.

decision, and whatever decision they made on how to spend their points was something they were going to have to live with.”

Although the Red Circle Auctions no longer take place, the Vanier family’s dedication to young agriculturalists remains.

Mary says the HYFA scholarship is a means to support their grandfather’s efforts. “He was very much into young people using their minds and becoming self-reliant and

being responsible. I think that translates into the scholarship program.”

Farm-raised work ethic

The three siblings, all K-State graduates, value their upbringing in the Hereford industry and were all involved in exhibiting Hereford cattle at county and state fairs through 4-H.

“We grew up with cattle people and know the values instilled with kids that grow up with the same kind of environment we did,” Mary says. “Feeding cattle, doing chores, showing — those are the kind of values and work ethic that we want to support.”

The Manhattan, Kan., resident and current president of Grand Mere Development has also worked as a college advisor and acknowledges, “I can always tell the kids that grew up on farms or ranches. They tend to stick out as leaders because they’re very responsible, they’re

very organized, and they do what they say they’re going to do. Those are all great values that Hereford and 4-H and having a ranch or farming background brings.”

Likewise, Marty frequently hires college students to work on her land in Manhattan. A licensed veterinarian and director of development for the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility in Manhattan, she agrees young people who grew up with responsibilities on the farm are strikingly different from their peers.

“Wow, the differences are amazing,” she describes. “They come in with a sense of maturity and a sense of responsibility that is incredible for their age.”

She also appreciates their problem-solving skills. “If there’s some kind of problem they identify, they don’t just bring me the problem. They often bring me a solution — or a variety of solutions — that we can talk through.”

The family upholds that Hereford youth are standouts amongst today’s young people and are confident that scholarships go to well-deserving individuals who share the family’s strong values. John recognizes being involved as a Hereford youth requires a strong work ethic and passion for the breed and the industry.

“I do honestly believe the kids with agricultural backgrounds understand and have learned from their parents the right way to do things,” he says. “You get out of it what you put into it, and it’s quite obvious that the kids give everything they’ve got.”

Removing speedbumps

“John and Mary and I knew that we were extremely fortunate to be able to grow up out there on the ranch,” Marty says. “We were able to have lots



John says the work ethic young people learn growing up in the Hereford breed sets them apart in today’s workforce.

of opportunities in college and out of college that we recognize a lot of other students weren't able to have or weren't able to take advantage of."

She continues, "What comes along with that is a bit of a responsibility to help others and to share. Between that responsibility to share and the fact that the Hereford industry has been so important to the family, it just naturally led to the Hereford Youth Foundation.

"Every once in a while, even with hard work and effort and try, there's just some hurdles you can't get over because of finances," Marty notes, "So if we can reduce or take away that hurdle [then] that allows those students to be able to move ahead and take advantage of those opportunities. All that can do is strengthen them as people and by virtue of them being involved in the Hereford industry — strengthen the industry, as well."

Mary admires the ways in which the scholarship motivates young people to carry on the tradition. "So many of them — they thank us and then they commit to trying to do the same thing when they are able."

All three siblings share an appreciation for the thank-you notes they receive from each year's scholarship recipients. "It is so impactful and heartwarming to hear that we've been able to truly provide a meaningful helping hand to these students," Marty says.

John notes seeing the young people go on to make something of themselves is particularly



The first 10 Jack and Donna Vanier Family Scholarship recipients were recognized at the 2016 American Hereford Association Annual Meeting in Kansas City, Mo.

rewarding. "That's probably the big thing — is just watching them go wherever life takes them."

Recipients are quick to express their gratitude and to put their earning to use in pursuing higher education.

"This scholarship has helped me tremendously working toward my agricultural business and accounting degrees," says Tyler Eldred, a 2017 recipient. "Without the generosity of the Vanier Family, and many others like them, higher education would be a lot less attainable for many. I cannot thank the Vanier Family enough for what they have done for me and many other Hereford Youth over the years through their generous support and scholarships for young adults in the Hereford breed."

JJ passed away in 1980, but his philanthropic nature lives on through the Vanier family's scholarship. Although JJ was not alive to see his son and grandchildren establish the scholarship, John knows his grandfather would have been proud. **HW**



Jack and Donna Vanier have always been avid supporters of Hereford youth. At the 2008 Junior National Hereford Expo, they were on hand in Kansas City, Mo., with the National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) board to honor their dear friend, Bud Snidow, as he was named an honorary member of the NJHA.