

## The Road Less Traveled

by *Nathan Hopkins*



As I reflect on my time serving the National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) as a board director, I always think of the great times and the memories

made, but I also ponder how it all came to be. My journey to getting on the board involved similar inspiration and encouragement given to other “boardies” before and after me, but my actual process was quite different.

Recalling a time in Madison, Wis., there was a “special election,”

as it was coined, for a second group of candidates vying for one position on the board. Such an election was needed because there were not enough candidates from the respective regions per the bylaws of the NJHA at the end of the original application deadline. As a result, a second deadline was established, and an aggressive campaign to recruit applicants was put in place. I was one of the candidates who made the second deadline, but that isn’t to say I just had my calendar dates wrong. I was very aware of the initial deadline — and had spent months preparing — but thought it best not to run.

I had a deep passion for the Hereford breed and wanted to give back in some way, but doing so through the junior board meant I had to give speeches, get outside my comfort zone and even “politic” — all of which intimidated me. I’ll say I took the easy way out and did what was comfortable, which was nothing.

It was then on a busy summer day I saw the need for junior board candidates announced on social media. When I saw the post, I knew I had been given a seldom to be had second chance. It sounds as if I had an epiphany, but I did have this realization that running for this position was something I needed to do. Prior to the initial deadline, I felt an uneasiness and was stressed about whether I was making the right decision. When the date passed, the worry vanished, and I joked about how I should have run and what type of candy I would have given out. With the fear of what lay ahead nonexistent, I was honest with others but, mainly, with myself.

### The best yes

I was given a second chance to make one of the best decisions of my life, but the same cannot be said for everyone else. Second chances are rare, and life is short, so I plead with anyone who will listen to forego the stress associated with taking risks and to trust themselves and their abilities. I don’t want to sound “preachy,” but I know people, especially juniors like me, need to hear this message. I feel it speaks volumes.

It would be a farce to ignore the role encouragement played in my decision to run for the board. I always thought of running for the board, but it was first proposed by my brother and a former board member who felt I would be great. Following this proposal, my family, my state association and fellow breeders and exhibitors offered their encouragement. Gathering the recommendation letters was probably one of the most rewarding processes because each individual who wrote a letter instilled confidence I would feed off of during the Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE).

I’ll brag on our Association because I have always felt the people are truly the best and offer encouragement like no other. With my time on the board, my assumptions have only been confirmed as I have been blessed to meet people from all over the country and beyond who share the same passion for Hereford cattle. I joined the board with the aim of contributing — which I have — but by serving, I have been rewarded more than I ever imagined at either the first or second deadline.

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# Hard Work Trumps All

by Bailey Jones



“Hard work makes it happen.” That was my official campaign slogan and words to live by when I decided to run for the NJHA board of directors a second

time. Being on the board was something I have strived for since my first JNHE in Milwaukee, Wis., when one of my biggest mentors, Nicole Starr, received her jacket. I was devastated the moment I did not receive a maroon jacket the first time I ran in 2015. I went back to my hotel room and contemplated not returning to the show the next day. However, I came back the next year ready to outwork everyone if I had to. Being on the board had been a dream of mine since I was 8 years old, and I was not going to let one little setback keep me from chasing it.

## A year to remember

The 2016 JNHE was in Madison, Wis., and I went up a few days early to help set up and get ready for trailers to arrive. I remember the whole week like it was yesterday, but the most vivid memory of the week was the night we got our jackets.

We were seated in the coliseum for awards night, and I knew retiring directors were handing out the jackets throughout the ceremony. I sat and watched Austin and Brooke get their jackets and knew there was only one left. This was it. My dad had just received the Advisor of the Year award, and Taryn stepped up to say her farewell.

I was sitting next to my best friends, squeezing their hands so tightly that I am surprised their hands did not fall off. Taryn’s speech went on forever as time seemed to slow to a halt. As she stepped down to hug her family, my stomach was in knots. I was sitting

near quite a few other candidates, so I did not want to get my hopes up when I saw her head our way up the stairs.

I could feel my heart beating out of my chest as I waited. I lost track of her in the crowd as everyone was trying to see where she was headed and who would be the next to get the maroon jacket. All of a sudden, she stood in front of me. I could not believe it — was this just a dream? Tears of joy streamed down my face as I jumped up and hugged her. I remember the feeling as the cool jacket slid over my shoulders. As she headed back down, I remember looking for my family at the end of the row and locked eyes with my mom. I ran to hug her and could hardly hold myself up.

We settled back into our seats to listen to the rest of the ceremony, but I did not hear much of what was said. It was all a blur. I was prepared for the work that lay ahead of us but was more excited for all of the memories we would make in these jackets. My predictions held true — the places we have been, the people we have met and the opportunities to give back to the association have meant so much to me over the years, that the work has never seemed like work.

Thank you is a powerful phrase we, as a society, do not say often enough. There are so many people I would like to thank who have helped me along the way. First, to my mom and dad, thank you for believing in me and reminding me I can do anything I set my mind to. And for running back to the hotel for shoes or anything else I forgot to grab.

Thank you, Brett, Riley, Lauren, Brady and Nick, for taking care of the cattle at all



hours of the day and for putting up with my complaining. To Amy and Bailey, as well as all of the American Hereford Association staff, thank you for always keeping me on track and making sure I get things done on time.

To all my fellow “boardies,” past and present, thank you for the memories of a lifetime. To my Hereford family across the country, thank you for encouraging me to follow my dreams and supporting me every step of the way. Most of all, to the members, whether I have known you forever or just met you, thank you for trusting me to lead you and for becoming some of my most cherished friends along the way. While I will miss my time as a board member, the memories made in this once-in-a-lifetime journey will forever be in my heart and will help me in whatever I choose to do. **HW**

