

The Road to Junior Nationals

The VitaFerm® Junior National Hereford Expo builds leadership skills and promotes education in youth.



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The annual issue of the September *Hereford World* is focused on coverage of the VitaFerm® Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE). The western states hosted the JNHE at the historic National Western Stock Show grounds, and volunteers from across the western states along with the American Hereford Association (AHA) staff hit another home run.

It is evident by the enthusiasm of the more than 800 juniors and their families who attended this is an event they look forward to each year. It is also clear these families have a passion for Hereford cattle, but it is also easy to see a bond is formed way beyond the cattle. Without doubt, the costs of and commitment to these events continue to grow, but what a way to invest our resources. Anytime we can commit and provide an opportunity for our youth to gain an experience and to have a platform to learn skills, it is well worth the expense.

A time for reflection

After the JNHE this year, I had an opportunity to travel to my home state of Indiana and to judge the beef show in the county where my family started our 4-H careers. I come from a family of seven children, and my parents wanted us to be involved in 4-H and as many other youth activities as possible. This year, the fair was even a little more special because 50 years ago my oldest brother lost his life in Vietnam. To say the least, I wasn't very old at the time, but I remember the hardship it caused my family to lose our anchor.

In memory of my brother, my parents started an annual award given to a 10-year 4-H beef member who exhibited good character, good leadership and had a competitive nature. These were skills my parents believed were important, and they felt 4-H helped build these skills in young adults. It was an honor to go back to

the fair, to judge and then to see a great young man be presented with this year's Roger Ward Memorial.

It was also great to get to catch up with family and friends and to witness the importance this county fair has for the community. The stands were full of folks who were there to support the youth. This area is a huge agriculture area with a substantial amount of row crop farming, and it was certainly devastated by the weather this winter and spring just like most of the country. This circumstance certainly did not temper the excitement during the fair. There is still something special about a county fair.

I did spend a portion of my 4-H career at this fair, and this was way before there were jackpot shows, and national junior shows were just starting to take hold. During these times, the national junior shows were mostly two-to-three-day events with the focus on a heifer show and, possibly, some showmanship. Junior nationals have sure changed, and not only have the junior shows progressed, but the evolution has moved into year-long events. Events like Faces of Leadership, Bridging-the-Gap and the Junior Fed Steer Shootout are just additional opportunities to arm our juniors with information allowing them to support agriculture.

Please enjoy the stories and reports of the JNHE throughout the *Hereford World*. They will tell stories of just a few of these special young breeders. It is fun to watch the emotions shared throughout the week. Those include joy and disappointment. Our focus needs to be committed to building productive adults, and each of these emotions needs to be learned. Again, congratulations to everyone involved. I am certainly proud of everyone who is committed to the National Junior Hereford Association. **HW**