

A Legacy of Integrity

Gene Wiese, Manning, Iowa, leaves a legacy of integrity, knowledge and love for family.

by Christy Couch Lee

On Nov. 14, 2019, past American Hereford Association (AHA) leader and icon Gene Wiese passed away at the age of 90.

He accomplished a great deal in his nine decades on earth. But those who knew Gene say that although the awards were nice, those are not what truly mattered to this man. No, what mattered most to this man was simple: fostering an incredible legacy within his family and treating every man as an equal.

It starts and ends in Manning, Iowa

Eugene “Gene” Lester Wiese was born Aug. 31, 1929, in Carroll, Iowa. After graduating from Manning High School in 1947, he attended Iowa State University (ISU), where he earned a degree in animal science. There, he excelled as a member of the livestock, dairy and meat judging teams.

In 1953, Gene married Jean Alice Warnke and joined the family Hereford operation begun in 1912.

As partners in Wiese & Sons, the couple enjoyed traveling together to numerous stock shows around the U.S. and in Europe and Australia.

The couple managed the operation with their son and daughter-in-law, David (Dave) and Diana, and their daughter, Helen. Dave and Diana's three sons — Chance, Shayne and Trey — are the fifth generation of Wieses on the Hereford and farming operation. Another daughter, Kathryn, and her son, Kieran, live in Hawaii.

Love for family

Ask anyone who knew Gene and Jean, and he or she would tell you family meant the world to the Wieses. Dave says Gene expected a lot. But he also gave a lot in return.

“Though he was demanding, Gene was always very fair and would provide support and a positive outlook in any situation,” Dave says. “No matter the situation, either on the farm or in life, give 110%. Then whether you win or lose, succeed or fail, you can walk away saying you gave it your best.”

This lesson was instilled early with Gene's grandson, Shayne.

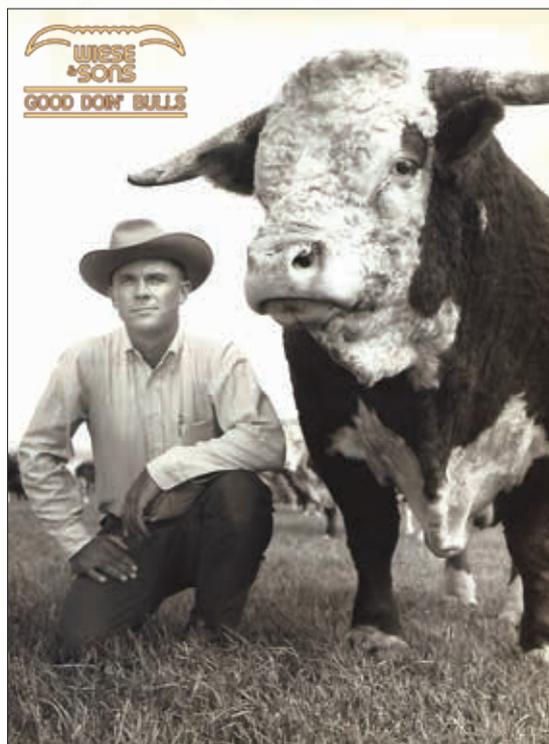
“He was a big believer that hard work pays off and success doesn't come easy,” Shayne says. “At a young age, he expected us to contribute to the ranch regardless if the job was very fun. I vividly remember chopping thistles with a spade and picking up garbage out of the road ditches. These experiences really set the foundation for my drive to be the first one up and the last one working. He taught all of us Wiese grandkids that hustle and hard work will get us closer to success than natural talent, and this translated to a lot of our past achievements in our young careers.”

Love for cattle and the land

Wiese & Sons takes pride in offering quality, “good-doin'” Hereford and Angus bulls for the commercial industry. Today, the operation consists of about 400 registered cows, with 175 yearling and 2-year-old bulls being sold by private treaty each year.

Few achievements in Gene's life brought him more joy than passing on the family operation — and the land — to the next generations of the Wiese family. Dave recalls seeing that joy for the first time.

“After my wife and I brought our first son, Chance, home from the hospital, Gene was beyond thrilled to meet his very first grandson,” Dave says. “Besides seeing the expression on his face, I can remember in this moment he told me, ‘You're not working for yourself anymore, but you're working for the next generation and the next agriculturalist.’ That's something that always stuck with me and made me realize the importance of



being a father and mentor to my children, as Gene was for me.”

Integrity was always a central focus of Gene's business and for his life in general, Chance says.

“The greatest advice my grandfather offered me was to ensure that you build your brand through honesty and integrity,” Chance says. “He could not stress enough: when you're marketing your cattle, tell that customer the truth and the whole truth

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Lester, Gene, Ed and Sam Wiese.



The next generation of Wiese men pictured (l to r) are: Chance, Dave, Gene, Shayne and Trey.

about that bull or female. He said, 'You sell one good bull, five people will know about it. You sell one bad bull, 20 people will know about it.'

And even more than raising cattle, Gene was focused on improving the land for the future and had a mind for conservation, Trey says. For this reason, he was honored with the National Cattlemen's Beef Association Region III Environmental Stewardship Award in 1996.

"Grandpa Gene continuously stressed the importance of being stewards of the land," Trey says. "One piece of advice that I will always remember was him telling me, 'We're not in the cattle business, we're in the land business.' Without taking care of the land and resources now, there will be nothing left for future generations."

A True Friend in the Industry

Gene's legacy doesn't begin and end with his family. It also carries on and in those who respected and admired him — and those who called him a friend. Those friends share some of the greatest memories — and life lessons — learned from their decades of friendship with Gene Wiese.

Guy Colyer, Colyer Herefords & Angus, Bruneau, Idaho

Guy says he always respected and looked up to Gene — even before they ever met.

"Growing up, we didn't have any purebred cattle — we had commercial cattle," he says. "Our only contact at that time was through *Hereford World*. I would always read it from cover to cover, and I always had such respect for Indian Mound Ranch, Northern Pump Farms and Wiese & Sons."

Guy says he always viewed those big-name operations as "out of reach." And then, he and his wife, Sherry, began to attend national Hereford shows, including the American Royal in the 1960s, where Guy had his first opportunity to meet Gene.

"I could see the attention he drew, and the amount of respect everyone had for him during the national meeting at the National Western Stock Show (NWSS)," he says. "He judged all of the major shows, including the NWSS, through the late '70s and early '80s."

Through the years, a friendship developed. And, Guy says the admiration remained and Gene was a true icon of the Hereford breed.

"He was a real leader," he says. "Whenever he was in the room, he commanded attention. He was very kind, and yet you knew he was knowledgeable. He gave much of himself to leadership through the years, and yet he was humble and kind. He always had time to visit with anyone, and he never made anyone feel as if he was better than anyone else. I was in awe of his knowledge."

Gene was active in the American political scene and told many stories that drew Guy in, he says.

"I was watching the national news one night, during the time when Reagan was running for president," he says. "Reagan was coming off a plane in Iowa to deliver a campaign speech. And Gene was standing right there as he got off the plane. It was pretty interesting to see him on the national news with Reagan!"

Guy also enjoyed hearing stories of Gene delivering bulls to Lyndon B. Johnson's ranch during Johnson's term as U.S. President.

Love for others

Gene also believed in service to the industry. He was an AHA director from 1966-72 and served as president in 1970-71. He also served as a director and president of the Iowa Cattlemen's Association and the Iowa Hereford Association.

His service was also recognized through other organizations, as he was named an Iowa Master Farmer and an ISU distinguished alumnus, and he received the Alpha Gamma Rho Century Award.

And his compassion for others has carried into his children and grandchildren, Shayne says.

"Besides Mr. Gene's great eye for cattle, he was such an honest and caring person," Shayne says. "He is the perfect example of how someone needs to act to make it in this business. Customers

"Gene loved to tell stories getting to the ranch in Texas, and Johnson pulling into the drive in his limousine entourage to look at the bull Gene had brought him for that year," he says.

Gene leaves a legacy of quality, leadership and integrity, Guy says.

"I had the utmost respect for Gene, as did many breeders across the nation," he says. "He and his family were committed to raising good Hereford bulls to fit into the commercial industry. He was a great ambassador for the breed, and he was a great friend."

Bill Breeding, B&C Cattle & Co., Miami, Texas

Bill met Gene at the National Western Stock Show in the '60s.

"He was a young man then, and I was really young," he says. "He was one of the most positive, outstanding men I had ever met. He always looked on the bright side, whether it was life in general, the Hereford business, his family, or his good-doin' bulls."

Bill says he will always remember Gene for his kindness.

"It didn't matter that he was the president of the AHA (American Hereford Association) board of directors — he always knew you," he says. "He always had time to stop and say 'hello' and visit."

Gene's business sense was incredible, Bill says.

"Once, he gave me a little stock tip," he says. "He told me if I had any extra money, I should invest it in the ground floor of a little packing plant in Iowa. I said, 'Gene, why would I want to buy stock in a little packing plant in Iowa?' I was thinking of the little local lockers here in the area. Well, that little plant turned into Iowa Beef Processors Inc. (IBP). My billfold would be a lot thicker now if I had taken his advice."

When Gene passed, Bill says, he left a legacy of integrity and a positive mindset.

"He always knew it never did any good to whine about the market, the cattle business, or rain," he says. "He knew you needed to be positive in how you think, and things will generally turn out alright."

Lloyd Whitehead, Rocking Chair Ranch, San Angelo, Texas

Lloyd met Gene at the American Royal in 1966.

"Gene was well known in the Hereford business, and I looked up to him," Lloyd says. "I was a newcomer, and he took me under his wing. He was one of my idols, from a young age."

remember if you are nice and fair with them. That's the legacy he leaves. Breeding good cattle is challenging, but being a good person isn't. I believe that is the main goal of all of us grandsons, and we want to continue to leave that legacy at Wiese & Sons. We want to be known for our great cattle, but even more so for our kind and considerate natures."

Leaving a legacy

Gene's legacy lives on in his family, and his values are destined to carry on for generations, Chance says.

"Gene's greatest legacy was to ensure the next generation here on the operation was set up for nothing but success," Chance says. "To this day, I

can still recall when I approached both Gene and Jean to inform them of my intentions to return to the operation. To see the sheer emotion on their faces made me truly realize what this place meant to the two of them. I think we all realize he left some big shoes to fill."

Above all, Dave says, Gene instilled the value of family.

"Gene would always stress to be sure to take care of ourselves both physically and mentally, continue being stewards of the land, and to always be thinking about the next generation," Dave says. "Most importantly, be sure to value your life, family and loved ones because no matter what happens in life, they'll be the ones alongside you through the good times and bad." **HW**

Loyd always looked up to Gene for his service in the industry. And, he says, he was proud to follow in Gene's footsteps as the AHA president years after Gene.

As the years progressed, Loyd and Gene's friendship grew. With that evolved many inside jokes.

"I called him the 'Moses of the Hereford Association,' because he knew everyone and the history of the Association," Loyd says with a laugh. "He didn't like the title. But I gave it to him, anyway."

Gene will be remembered for many positive traits, Loyd says. First, his service to the Hereford industry.

"He gave back to the Association, serving as AHA president," Loyd says. "And he always helped others, by answering any question you asked. He was very knowledgeable. And he had great integrity. You could buy a bull, sight unseen, from him and know he would work for you."

Above all, Loyd says, is the legacy he leaves behind through his family.

"Gene was a family man and a God-fearing man," Loyd says. "His family carries on his legacy through Wiese & Sons, and they will for a long time."

Dave Schubel and Phil Keppler, SK Herefords, Medina, N.Y.

Dave and Phil first went to Wiese & Sons in 1986 to purchase 10 heifers. Phil says from that first visit, they were impressed.

"As we inquired about coming out, Mr. Gene said, 'If you come, you won't be disappointed,'" Phil says. "And for some 30 years later, he was right. We were never disappointed."

From that first visit, Dave says, Gene's true character shone.

"Mr. Gene was always more interested in knowing about what you had to say, rather than talking about himself," Dave says.

Gene provided guidance and advice for Dave and Phil throughout their 30-year relationship. Every Saturday for those three decades, the duo chatted with Gene by phone. And, Dave says, he knew the advice they received was solid.

"Mr. Gene was so iconic because of his macro understanding of the beef industry," Dave says. "So many seedstock producers know how to sell bulls, but they don't know the continuation of the food chain. Mr. Gene knew how to sell bulls, but he always realized commercial cattlemen were producing beef for consumption by the public. He had a total world view of the beef industry. Mr. Gene

knew his way around a corporate balance sheet, and he also knew how to produce cattle."

As well, Gene provided a wealth of history of the Hereford breed, Dave says.

"Mr. Gene encompassed a tremendous era of the cattle business," Dave says. "I loved to hear him tell stories of running cattle by railcar across the country and to Denver. He was involved in the cattle business when there was a lot of romanticism to it."

Dave and Phil have many fond memories of their time with Gene through the years.

"The last major show Mr. Gene judged was the Fort Worth Stock Show," Dave says. "He said, 'Boys, come on down. You'll be my security.' It was a hoot. We drove the car, we took him down, and we were in the middle of the ring with him. It was a great time."

Phil says Gene also had a soft spot for youth.

"When my kids were growing up, we would all drive out to Manning, Iowa, and spend time with the Wiese family," Phil says. "One time, we delivered a bull to them. My sons, Nathan and Whit, brought a box of grass clippings from our home farm to keep with the bull, so that the bull wouldn't 'forget home.' Gene was so touched by this, he gave each of my children a heifer."

The legacy Gene leaves behind is multifaceted, Dave says.

"First, he left us a tremendous package of genetics," Dave says. "Our herd is essentially Wiese genetics. The animals are functional and have a great disposition."

Secondly, Dave says, was his ability to help others see the best in themselves.

"He had an uncanny ability to make us believe in ourselves," Dave says. "We probably believed we were better than we actually were. But he convinced us we were actually that good."

Integrity and Gene go hand in hand, Dave says.

"Mr. Gene was an inspiration for vision, honesty and integrity in the cattle business," Dave says. "He was the real deal."

And, Phil says, the greatest legacy he leaves behind is in Manning, Iowa.

"Mr. Gene had a profound love affair with his wife, Mrs. Jean," Phil says. Dave agrees.

"It was a lifetime love story," he says. "Mr. Gene was the concept person, and Mrs. Jean was the right arm with the details and the numbers. They made a good team." **HW**