

# Hearts for Helping

With more than 10 years of service, an Oklahoma couple is named Advisors of the Year.



Sam and Rhonda Eck, Thomas, Okla., accept their award from 2019 NJHA Chairman Taylor Belle Matheny.

Sam and Rhonda Eck were honored as the 2020 Advisors of the Year, July 14, during the 2020 VitaFerm® Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) in Kansas City, Mo.

They have advised the Junior Hereford Association of Oklahoma (JHAO) for more than a decade and have been involved in the JHAO for a number of years, always being the first to volunteer their time and to help when needed.

## Helping hands

Current JHAO president Parker Cantrell, Collinsville, Okla., has been mentored by the Ecks and speaks highly of their influence on the association and its members. He highlights the couple's genuine heart for youth and how they are often

seen giving hugs in the aisles, high fives in the staging area and words of congratulations to kids as they walk out of the ring.

"These seemingly small moments only prove they truly care for this industry and our youth," Cantrell says. "They are the greatest examples of Hereford ambassadors and they are helping to preserve this wonderful way of life for future generations."

For Cantrell, the Ecks' generosity and helping hands extend farther than the showing.

"A few years ago, I was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes, and to say it was devastating is an understatement," Cantrell says. "Not long after, Rhonda, who is a diabetic also, was there to not only give advice but much needed moral support. She

is undoubtedly one of the kindest individuals I have met and is a true example of a servant's heart. I could recount multiple examples of her generosity to so many young Hereford enthusiasts but there isn't enough space to fit it all."

Cantrell says much like Rhonda, her husband and co-advisor, Sam, has a tireless work ethic and is extremely dedicated to the junior association, which he demonstrated during the 2020 Oklahoma Youth Expo (OYE).

The OYE is, under normal circumstances, a demanding and pressure-filled event for all livestock exhibitors, Cantrell says. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, OYE rescheduled the show to an earlier date, and Sam was there to do anything he could to make sure the adjustments ran smoothly.

## Raising up the next generation

Both Sam and Rhonda truly have the best interest of Oklahoma junior members in the forefront of their mind.

"Without the Ecks, I wouldn't have had the opportunities I have now and I believe the same can be said by a multitude of Hereford exhibitors not only in Oklahoma but across the country," Cantrell says.

The Ecks agree watching junior members grow up with the breed and seeing how hard they work is the most rewarding part of advising.

"My advice to anybody who thinks they want to be an advisor is, one, patience is a pretty big deal," Sam says. "But mostly I would say, remember it's a kids' organization.

"Advise them and let them make mistakes because that's where they're going to learn the most," he adds. "At the end of the day, our job as advisors is to raise up the next generation so that someday they can lead and be advisors for this association." **HW**