



Retiring National Junior Hereford Association board members pictured (l to r) are: Brandt Downing, Culver, Ore.; Rylee Barber, Channing, Texas; Taylor Belle Matheny, Mays Lick, Ky.; and Hannah Williams, Kearney, Neb.

The Bonds of Friendship

Taylor Belle Matheny, Rylee Barber, Brandt Downing and Hannah Williams pass on their maroon jackets as retiring NJHA directors.

by **Grace Vehige**

As each of the four retiring National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) directors gave a retiring address at the 2020 VitaFerm® Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE), songs like “Best Day of My Life” and “I Hope You Dance” echoed throughout the arena. There were tears shed, smiles met with laughter and families with full hearts.

Taylor Belle Matheny, Rylee Barber, Brandt Downing and Hannah Williams were each presented a

maroon jacket in 2017 at the “Showin’ for the Roses” JNHE in Louisville, Ky., and that moment paved the way for four new acquaintances to become lifelong friends. Over the past three years, this “posse” worked alongside their teammates to help guide, lead and encourage one another and the entire NJHA junior board family.

The passion and vision for the Hereford breed each retiring director has is obvious. All will continue to be leaders in and out of the Hereford

breed as they achieve their goals. While it would have been just as special to end their journey in the same arena as it started, Rylee, Brandt, Taylor Belle and Hannah were able to “Come Home to Hereford” in Kansas City, Mo.

Creating a legacy

Each of the retiring directors represents diverse backgrounds and skills, which made this team all the more special. Hailing from Oregon to Texas to Nebraska to Kentucky, these bright individuals operated on the strengths of one another and had fun along the way.

“We each have different backgrounds, ideas and beliefs, therefore, bringing something unique to the table. When [Rylee, Brandt and Hannah] speak during a board meeting, I am always eager to listen because they are individually so smart and think through any decision we make,” Taylor Belle, retiring chairman from Mays Lick, Ky., says.

Taylor Belle’s family raise both purebred Hereford and commercial cows to be utilized in their embryo transfer program. Having been a member of the NJHA since she was 7 years old, she has always been actively involved with the Hereford breed. Running for the junior board was a great task as both of her parents and her brother served on the junior board. Naturally, she wanted to follow suit of this honorable family tradition and welcomed any words of wisdom her family had to share with her.

“My brother was chairman before I was, and his advice to me before our first meeting was to listen before speaking to understand where the board is currently at before I formed opinions and find things that need to be changed. I think that was the most beneficial advice I had been given,” Taylor Belle shares.

Born in E. Lansing, Mich., and raised in Channing, Texas, Rylee Barber has the Hereford breed deep within her roots. With Benedict Herefords on her mother’s side and Barber Ranch on her father’s, Hereford cattle are a part of Rylee’s way of life. She helps operate the family-owned



Taylor Belle Matheny and Noah Benedict discuss how to direct showmen for the final drive.

Barber Ranch, it having produced both horned and polled Herefords since 1904. However, it is not just Hereford cattle that runs in the family. Rylee's grandfather, mom and aunt all preceded her on the junior board, so she naturally has been involved in the NJHA since birth.

"The junior board was always there to help me growing up," she says as she shares a story about a yearling heifer overpowering her during her first JNHE. "It wasn't just my first year that I got pushed around the showing, and every time I needed it, there was someone by my side to pick me up and dust me off."

In the northwest corner of the country, Brandt Downing and family planted roots in Culver, Ore. Although Downing Cattle Co. recently dispersed, Brandt was born into the Hereford breed and grew up raising and showing Hereford cattle. Over the years, Brandt's family has been faced with hardship. His father's accident left a lot of uncertainty for him and his family, but Brandt said a lot of people in the breed stepped up to help.

"Running for the junior board was my chance to give back to the association in a sense," Brandt explains. "I wanted to be there for juniors to look up to and come to for any kind of advice, whether it be directed toward the cattle industry or

anything. I wanted give back to those that have helped my family so much."

A fellow Kansas State University (K-State) Wildcat to Taylor Belle is Hannah Williams, born and raised in Kearney, Neb. Similar to Rylee's rich history with the Hereford breed, Hannah is a fourth-generation Hereford breeder with traces of Hereford cattle on both sides of her family. Her family's current program is a small cow-calf operation with focus on marketing bulls private treaty to commercial customers. For Hannah, her inspiration to run for the junior board stemmed from past directors.

"There were a few board members I had always looked up to, but one in particular was Kristin (Bielema) Capparelli... Although most of the drive for me to run stemmed from Kristin, I had always wanted to be a leader in the Hereford breed and to be a role model for others as well," Hannah says.

Just drink the lime juice

Election week can be difficult and has its share of unforeseen circumstances. Rylee spent all week memorizing and perfecting her speech only to get to the podium and forget every word. Luckily for her, everything turned out in her favor.

Hannah had a different bump in the road. Explaining the long and tiring election process, she recounted how she lost her voice while campaigning.

"My dad wanted me to slow down, try to rest my voice and drink a lot of lime juice so I would be ready to go for the big speech night. After drinking a lot of lime juice, which never helped, I delivered my speech sounding like a very raspy old man," Hannah shares.

All junior board candidates face their own obstacles. What truly matters is how they move forward. Rylee's advice for the new board team is to "always act like the leader you are."

Together, this retiring team led the junior membership and worked to provide new opportunities. Interacting with the junior members is a "job perk" for directors across the board.

Increased involvement with the juniors was a goal for all four directors. As authentic leaders, they worked

together to foster new ideas. Rylee says the team placed a lot of focus on developmental contests and programs.

"As a team, we collectively got together and discussed the differences we wanted to make and what our lasting impact would be," she says. "The motivation and focus to make our program and our JNHE the best there is year after year is reason enough to keep us moving in the right direction."

As it is true with any relationship, open lines of communication kept this team motivated to make a difference within the NJHA.

"Communication helps any team run the best it can," Taylor Belle says. "The four of us have always been great with communicating and making sure that everyone is doing okay. Not only did we focus on communication in the meeting room, but also outside of it so we could be the best possible team."

Cashing in moments for memories

Prior to their election in 2017, the four "oldies" did not know one another, but together, they earned a position on the junior board. If you ask any of the retiring board members what their best moments were, each of them will answer with a moment they spent



Rylee Barber stands prepared to help junior members in the showing.



Hannah Williams talks with her team member Abigail Spindle as they work the showing.

together. Whether it be traveling to New Zealand, skiing (or attempting to ski as Hannah described in her retiring address) or spending time with junior members, these great leaders value time spent together.

“I wouldn’t have wanted this experience with any other people. Rylee, Hannah and Taylor Belle, they were my go to, and they’re going to continue to be lifelong friends,” Brandt says.

As Taylor Belle recalls election night, she says, “I remember exactly where I was sitting in Broadbent Arena with my family. Austin Cole began giving his retiring address, and the nerves hit me. ‘Would I really get elected?’ This was a goal I had set for myself since I began showing at JNHE and was something I was very passionate about doing.”

Rylee agrees, “I literally was in complete shock. I never expected to get to wear the jacket I had always hoped for... I have had a lot of special moments at JNHEs over the years, but that one trumps all.”

The maroon jacket has always meant more to these young leaders than an addition to their wardrobe. When a retiring board member meets a newly elected candidate with a

maroon jacket, that candidate’s world turns upside down.

“Take this experience and enjoy it. Put your full effort into any job you are given,” Hannah says.

Without a doubt, this dynamic team gave their full effort while serving on the junior board, and that paved the way for their close bond.

“Family is the best way to describe our team... We spent a lot of time together outside of the junior board becoming friends, and I think that is what has made us so close,” Taylor Belle agrees. “In the end, I couldn’t have picked three better people to serve with.”

A future with Hereford

While this year’s retiring team may have taken off their maroon jackets for the last time, their time in the NJHA has prepared them to shoulder bigger responsibilities. Each retiring director has plans to work within the agricultural industry and to stay involved with Hereford cattle.

The retiring chairman, Taylor Belle, exhibits the characteristics of a patient and authentic leader.

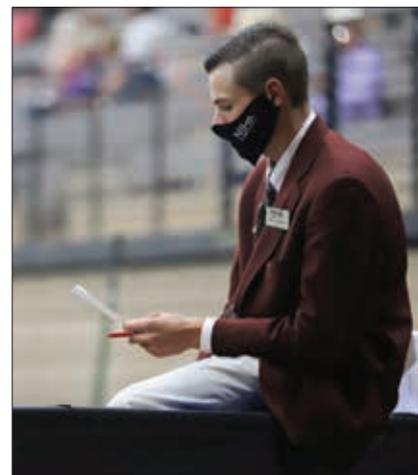
As advice offered to the newly appointed board team, she says, “Often times I think you feel like you have to come in ready to make a change, but it can be more beneficial to see what is already in motion and find areas where you can make an impact.”

Taylor Belle currently attends Texas Tech University, pursuing her master’s degree in agricultural communications. She plans to stay involved with her family’s operation and to find ways to help the NJHA in any way possible.

A recent graduate of Texas A&M University, Rylee began working as the Youth and Membership Programs Coordinator for the Junior Beefmaster Breeders Association.

Despite the change in breeds, she says, “The NJHA is home to me... The people involved in the Hereford breed are second to none and will forever be a part of my family.”

Brandt has a gratitude for the moments life has given him. He stresses to never take your time



Brandt Downing checks the show order as cattle enter the ring.

for granted. “It can all be gone with the blink of an eye, and time really goes fast,” he advises. “I never really believed it, and my time on the junior board really proves that. It feels like yesterday we were in Louisville running for the board, and now I’m done. And so, cherish the time you have because it really doesn’t last long.”

On a livestock judging scholarship, this Oregon native packed up and headed to the Midwest. He recently completed two years at Butler Community College and plans to attend K-State this fall to achieve an animal science degree and a business minor. In the future, he has plans to work in the agricultural industry and to bring back Downing Cattle Co.

The final retiring board member, Hannah Williams, shares the same love for the Hereford breed as her teammates. She currently attends K-State, pursuing an animal science degree. She plans to continue building her Hereford herd alongside her dad and to one day pass on the tradition of showing cattle to her kids.

“Being elected to the junior board meant I had an opportunity to leave a legacy and strive to be a great leader for other Hereford youth... I know that I will forever be involved in the Hereford breed,” she says.

With goals to leave a legacy and exhibit leadership, there is no doubt these four did just that. **HW**

FLASHBACK

