



Carter Gnuse wanted his own Hereford heifer to start a cow herd. Since purchasing the heifer from Richard Doetker's local church fundraiser, Gnuse has shown the heifer's steer calves as 4-H projects.

When You Give a Hereford

**A retired law enforcement officer
with contagious generosity gives
back to his community with the
help of Hereford cattle.**

by **Katie Maupin Miller**

Richard Doetker spent his days serving Lincoln, Neb., as a law enforcement officer and his evenings caring for a small herd of purebred Hereford cattle. Growing up sorting cattle on his parents' farm in Pickerell, Neb., taught Doetker patience, steadiness and composure.

Those traits came in handy for his years policing. Doetker's calm demeanor and steady voice diffused many potentially dangerous situations. At home, his cattle provided him light on his darkest days. Watching a white-faced calf take its first unsteady steps was a welcome reprieve from the weight Doetker carried as a criminal investigator.

Now retired after serving as an officer for 25 years and an investigator for 17, Doetker's Hereford cattle help him give back. Over the last four years, he has donated two purebred calves to help his community and Nebraska cattlemen. In doing so, Doetker has learned you receive more when you give, and he hopes to inspire others to do the same.

"Your act of kindness is like helping God answer someone's prayers," Doetker says.

When you give a church a calf

In October 2016, Doetker's congregation, Candlewood Church, was at risk of losing its building. Its rented space was up for sale, and the church would need to raise \$700,000 to buy the property. Doetker looked at his spring calves and decided to sell a show-quality heifer to give the proceeds to the church. He listed her on Craigslist for a phone bid-off.

His first bid tugged on his heartstrings. Then 9-year-old Carter Gnuse bid all the money he earned from his bucket calf — \$650 — to buy his first Hereford heifer. Doetker was moved. His first cow was also a Hereford his father helped him buy at their local sale barn. That commercial Hereford instilled a love for the breed in Doetker that lasts today.

In Gnuse, Doetker saw a kindred spirit. And, as a law enforcement officer, Doetker saw many troubled young people who needed the lessons a Hereford heifer could provide, such as responsibility, accountability, hard work and honesty.

Each interested bidder who contacted Doetker heard of Gnuse's bid and his dream of having a Hereford heifer to start his cow herd. Like Doetker, they were moved. None had the heart to bid against the boy.

Meanwhile, Gnuse begged his dad to text Doetker each day to learn if they were still in the lead until finally, the text came that Miss

“Your act of kindness could be helping God answer somebody else’s prayers.”

— Richard Doetker

Candlewood, as Doetker named the heifer, was officially Gnuse’s.

“I was excited and ready to go get her, when I found out I won,” Gnuse recalls.

Gnuse and the heifer garnered champion Hereford heifer honors at their local show. Since her show success, Miss Candlewood raised two steer calves Gnuse also exhibited. Now, his fingers are crossed for a heifer calf.

The *Lincoln Journal Star* ran a story about Doetker’s heifer donation, and people moved by the article mailed checks to the church. Although Miss Candlewood was likely worth more than her winning bid, Doetker’s kindness and Gnuse’s dream to be a cattleman raised more money for the church than either could have imagined.

“Sometimes, by doing the right thing and helping other people, you get something back



Eileen and Richard Doetker have raised purebred Hereford cattle on their Roca, Neb., farm for more than three decades. His Hereford cattle brought Doetker joy even during his most stressful days as a law enforcement officer.

yourself. Carter not only got the heifer, but he also got a chance to help out a worthwhile cause,” says Gnuse’s father, Todd Gnuse. “The church got the money, and Richard got a chance to help a young boy start his herd just like his.”

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Carter Gnuse garnered champion Hereford honors at his local show with the heifer bred by Richard Doetker.



Nebraska's March 2019 flood left many roads near the Hansen family's cattle operation completely unpassable.

When you give a couple a calf

On March 13, 2019, a perfect storm of frozen ground, iced-over rivers and torrential rain spawned an unprecedented flood in Cushing, Neb. It sent large ice chunks and a wall of water heading toward James and Darlene Hansen's bottom field, where they calved cows each spring.

Darlene received a call to leave her bank job and help move cows and their new calves to higher ground. By the time she reached the river bottom, the rising water made it impassable for her four-wheel-drive pickup truck. So, Darlene got out and waded through the freezing water to a small strip of higher ground where the cows were seeking shelter.

Her father-in-law was calling several cows to higher ground, and Darlene desperately tried to push the rest of the cows and calves off the shrinking dry strip of land. However, the cattle were reluctant to leave the dry ground and wade through the icy water to reach safety. Some cows would start across but quickly run back for their calves.

Darlene could see the water was rising quickly, so she scooped up a calf whose dam

was on her way to higher ground and trudged into the cold water. She stopped and clung to a tree as she called James to tell him, "It was bad." Struggling to keep herself and the calf above the rising currents, Darlene made the heart-wrenching decision to let the calf go and watched as the water took it. She grabbed shrubs and brush along the fence line and fought her way to another tree where her husband and father-in-law found her — cold and battered by the water and ice.

Once warm, Darlene and James went back to the bottom pasture for a final daring rescue attempt of the cows and calves on the shrinking strip of dry land before the second wave of flooding reached them. Together, they were able to haul another 28 calves and 16 cows to safety. Sadly, around 20 head were lost.

Doetker heard tales of the historic flood on the news. Once again, he felt moved to help and had just the way in mind. Doetker had a Hereford bull calf, named for a good friend and generous veterinarian, and wanted to donate the calf in his late friend's honor.

Doetker called Chris Bernt, a farmer who lived in the flood-devastated area. Bernt told him the Hansen family's harrowing tale, and Doetker could not think of anyone more deserving. The Hansens were shocked by a stranger's generosity.

"There definitely still are good people out there! I'm not sure we deserved the bull or not, but it was so appreciated — more than they will ever know," Darlene says. "The Bernts were so kind to tell Rich and Eileen about our ordeal. We had so many people calling to see if we needed anything and offering to help any way they could."

Richard and his wife, Eileen, delivered the bull. After dropping the calf off with the Hansens, they went to eat at a restaurant the Hansens recommended. When it came time for the tab, it had already been paid for. It turns out kindness is contagious.

As for the bull calf, he is grown and working for the Hansens. His first calves arrive in January, and as a way of paying it forward, James leased him to his neighbor to cover his small cow herd for free.

One day, when the bull retires from the Hansen farm, James plans to send Doetker a check for him. Although it's unlikely Doetker will accept it. Likely, the money will be paid forward once again because, as Doetker will tell you, kindness always keeps going.

"You go in thinking you're giving, but you're receiving so much back," Doetker says. "Giving is addictive. As I said before, your act of kindness could be helping God answer somebody else's prayers." **HW**



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE GRAND ISLAND INDEPENDENT

Eileen and Richard Doetker (l) gave a purebred Hereford bull calf to commercial producers Darlene and James Hansen after they lost several head of cattle in an ice-driven flood.