

New Kids on the Scene

Four junior members share their first JNHE experiences.

by **Grace Jacobson**

Children experience many firsts — first words, first steps, first day of school and even their first Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE).

The 2021 VitaFerm® Junior National Hereford Expo brought more than 800 junior exhibitors to Kansas City, Mo., and many of those exhibitors were experiencing their first junior national. Although many first-time exhibitors grow up in the cattle industry, they must wait until they are 7 or 8 years old to join the National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA).

Kaytlyn also ran alongside her parents, Jon and Jessica, and brother, Easton, during the HYFA 5K race.

Leading up to Kaytlyn's first JNHE, the Harfst family diligently updated a countdown calendar until it hit zero, and the family made their way to Kansas City. Kaytlyn has been a part of the show cattle world since she was 2 years old, but JNHE was a new experience.

"This is a whole new level and scale," Kaytlyn's father, Jon Harfst, says.

Before leaving for JNHE, Kaytlyn participated in the photography and illustrated speech contests online.

Kaytlyn decided to give her speech on calving and learned how to take photos. "I got some good photos out in our pastures of some baby cows and some mommas," she says.

In preparation for JNHE, Kaytlyn would walk her

heifers, "Cookie" and "Emma," daily. "We would practice outside our barn and lead them around a couple circles and set them up to practice our stance," she says. "I would pretend Mom or Dad were the judge."

The family's collective highlight of JNHE was spending time with extended family. "We don't get together all that often, so it is a great opportunity for our entire family," Jon says. Family from Michigan, Oregon, Illinois and Colorado were able to come watch Kaytlyn or be exhibitors themselves.

Kaytlyn likes showing Herefords because they are easy to break and calmer than her other show calves.

All of Kaytlyn's hard work paid off when one heifer won her class in the owned show and went on to become the reserve division champion

in division III of polled heifers. The winning heifer was the great-great-great-granddaughter of the grand champion cow-calf pair Jon showed at the 1998 Polled Junior Nationals.

While it was easy to get swept up in the success of the week, Jon remembered why his family shows cattle. "The cattle are great, but it is all about the people," he says.

The family is excited to return next year and even have three heifers in mind for JNHE in Louisville, Ky. "We are absolutely coming back next year," Jon says.

Two times the fun

In Nara Visa, N.M., near the New Mexico and Texas border, you can find the Perez twins, Peyton and Libby, spending their days at Perez Cattle Co. They are 8 years old and showed four bred-and-owned heifers between the two of them. "Stitches" is Libby's favorite while "Petunia" is Peyton's. Stitches and Petunia were also their showmanship calves.

Peyton and Libby like that Hereford cattle are red and not all white so they are easier to keep clean. Red is Peyton's second favorite color — after blue.

To start off the week, the two competed in the judging competition. They went on to represent New Mexico in the fitting contest.

Peyton led Petunia to a top 15 finish in peewee showmanship.

"We have a fairly large operation, so show cattle are not an everyday gig," Tonya Perez, Peyton and Libby's mother, says. "However, they have a natural knack for showing, so that is rewarding."

The twins enjoy showing with one another, but both claim to be the most competitive.

Each day when the twins were finished showing, their plans were to play, play and play some more. They agreed making new friends was the best part of JNHE.



Kaytlyn and her heifer work together to win reserve division III champion.



The Harfst family takes on the 3.1-mile race together.

Beginner's luck

A 10-hour drive northeast of Kansas City will lead you to Battle Creek, Mich., the hometown of Kaytlyn Harfst. Kaytlyn had an eventful first JNHE. She competed in the illustrated speech, photography and judging contests. Then, she showed in showmanship, the bred-and-owned show and the owned show.



Peyton stares down the judge in his bred-and-owned heifer class.



Libby enters the ring with her polled heifer.



Peyton and Libby standing next to their stalls at the Junior National Hereford Expo.

Tonya watched the twins learn how to make friends on a whim at the cattle shows they attended. At JNHE, they met friends from Alabama, Illinois, Missouri and Kansas — one friend even joined them during their *Hereford World* interview.

The twins say their parents, Kyle and Tonya, taught them how to fit their cattle and helped with their daily chores. Both Tonya and Kyle grew up on Hereford operations, and Kyle has been a director on both the NJHA board and the American Hereford Association (AHA) Board.

With deep Hereford ties, it was natural for Peyton and Libby to join NJHA. “The junior program is amazing for development,” Tonya says. “The twins can now meet kids all over the country and see the world.”

For the Perez family, being a part of NJHA means setting the twins up for success. “There is a ton of activities we can do,” Tonya says. “However, the potential for opportunities and scholarships is the best through this junior association.”

The twins are excited to participate in next year’s JNHE, and plan on competing in even more contests.

Home state advantage

If you make the 10-hour drive from Nara Visa, N.M., across the Texas Panhandle and Oklahoma, you will arrive at WMC Cattle Co. in Wasola, Mo. There you will see a heifer named “Daisy.”

Her owner, 8-year-old Jett McConnaughy, leads her around for 20 minutes a day — the family’s rule. Along with her walk, Daisy is washed and blown dry daily.

Jett and his brother, Watson, help their parents, Travis and Sarah McConnaughy, every day with the family’s seedstock operation. “They know exactly what to tag each calf and how to write the tags out,” Sarah says. “They also help with pushing cattle up the alleyway.”

Raising Hereford cattle is not only a tradition, but a lifestyle, for the McConnaughy family. This made it an easy decision to get Jett involved in NJHA when he finally turned 8 years old. “The responsibility they have to take on when caring for an animal is a great tool,” Travis says. “Starting them young makes a big difference in their later years.”

When Jett was asked about his favorite animal, a long day of showing made it hard to recall his favorite, but cattle — especially Hereford cattle — cracked the top three.

This was Jett’s first year of showing. He showed at local prospect shows

leading up to JNHE. Sarah says every time Jett steps into the showing there is noticeable improvement.

“It was neat to watch him walk his heifer into stance a couple of times today,” Travis says. The family planned to continue their show season at the Missouri State Fair the beginning of August.

Jett says his favorite part of his JNHE experience was showing. He and Daisy took to the ring together during showmanship and the owned heifer show. Daisy was a heifer that the family raised and will eventually join the family’s breeding herd.

A bonus for the McConnaughy family was with JNHE held in Kansas City, where they were able to enjoy the large group of Missouri juniors and their families. Jett says that most of his new friends are from Missouri like him.

The McConnaughy’s first JNHE was a great experience even if a little tiring. They are excited for next year’s show and building on their involvement in the junior association. **HW**



Jett leads Daisy around the ring during the owned heifer show.



Jett shows off his heifer calf at the 2021 Junior National Hereford Expo.