

# Hall of Fame, Merit Inductees Honored

## Hall of Fame

Jim Courtney, Alzada, Mont.; Lawrence Duncan, Wingate, Ind.; Bob Harrell, Baker City, Ore.; and Dale Micheli, Fort Bridger, Wyo., were inducted into the Hereford Hall of Fame during the American Hereford Association (AHA) Annual Membership Meeting and Conference.

The Hall of Fame award is presented annually and recognizes dynamic breeders who have influenced the advancement of the Hereford breed.

### Jim Courtney

In 1916, Jim's father homesteaded the land in southeastern Montana that is now Courtney Herefords. Eventually, his father purchased adjoining land in 1929 right before the Great Depression. Despite the hard times, Jim's parents raised sheep and kept the ranch together through the 1930s. Jim graduated from Carter County High School, where he met his future wife, Hazel. He was the 1950 Carter County class salutatorian, but did not go to college. Instead, he returned home to help his parents run the ranch. He continued to build his knowledge and gain insight to the livestock industry by attending many Extension classes related to sheep and cattle breeding. However, Jim credits most of his knowledge to direct experience on the ranch.

When Jim and Hazel married in 1953, there was not a cow or bull on the place — just 1,000-1,500 head of sheep. In 1957, Jim's friendship with neighbor, Walt Crago, led to the beginning of Courtney Herefords. Walt raised registered Herefords and offered to lease 40 heifers to Jim. All were half-sisters making a solid



genetic foundation for the start of the future Courtney herd. Jim leased the Hereford females for three years, retained the heifer calves and sent the bull calves to Walt.

The semi-arid, Badlands grassland and limited water resources where the Courtneys reside was considered traditional sheep country since the early days of open range and early settlement. Yet, through diligent stewardship of land and water, Jim established a registered Hereford cow herd and built one of the breed's most respected seedstock programs in this challenging environment.

In both the cattle and sheep industries, the Courtney brand is recognized for outstanding quality and functional, efficient stock that fit their climate — the result of a good stockman's eye and a continued quest to improve performance with each generation.

With more than 50 years dedicated to its breeding program, Courtney Herefords became one of the most unique gene pools in the American Hereford breed. Founded upon the Real Prince Domino bloodlines from Canada's premier herds, Jim built his program on structured line-breeding and outcrossing based on time-proven genetics. Courtney's range country environment and the needs of their bull customers strictly dictate the direction of their breeding plan. This is a true grass and cake outfit featuring a factory of great, problem-free, efficient mother cows that hustle, calve on the range and graze out year round.

The Courtney brand is recognized for powerful, traditional Hereford cattle — multi-trait Herefords that accentuate the breed's long-proven strengths for soundness, fleshing ability, fertility and longevity. Loaded with quality, they are backed by the impressive Britisher, Ardmore and Standard Lad sires in North America. Courtney has a complete and thorough knowledge of Canadian Hereford genetics. He knows the cow herds across Alberta as well as any in North America, evaluating them through the eyes of an American cowman, which benefits his program and customers.

Jim became the AHA president in 1999 at a time when the Hereford breed needed him most. Jim is a fighter for his industry. Serving several turns as an officer of the Montana Stockgrowers Association and on the board of directors of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, Jim is known as a man of integrity who will fight for the betterment of the industry. His no-nonsense style and straight-to-the-point attitude is, and has always been, about taking the side of the cattlemen. Deep down, Jim always knows that you have to fight to sustain an economic and political environment for ranchers. His family has depended on it. As it relates to the Hereford breed, Jim helped drive the AHA to focus on the needs of the commercial cow-calf industry.



**Jim Courtney** was inducted into the Hereford Hall of Fame. Pictured (l to r) are: Whitey Hunt, Colleen Courtney, Larry Moore, Leslie Moore and Mark St. Pierre.



**Lawrence Duncan** was inducted posthumously into the Hereford Hall of Fame. Pictured back row (l to r) are: Lary Duncan, David Duncan, Ray Duncan and Hattie Duncan. Pictured front row (l to r) are: Whitey Hunt, Gary Duncan, Jack Weatherman, Will Weatherman, Caril Weatherman, Jill Duncan and Mark St. Pierre.

## Lawrence Duncan

Born in 1935, Lawrence Duncan was raised on the family farm in Montgomery County, Indiana, where his parents raised registered Duroc hogs and draft horses. At the age of 10, Lawrence began showing Hereford heifers and steers in 4-H at the county and state fairs. After graduating from high school in 1954, he attended Purdue University, majoring in animal husbandry. He married his wife, Petzi, and they honeymooned at the Fort Worth Stock Show. Following graduation from Purdue, the newlyweds moved into his parents' house and began farming.

In order to buy a place for him and his new bride, Lawrence held his first Hereford sale in 1958. The high-seller went for \$1,200. From the beginning, he found the most difficult part of hosting sales came down to organization, particularly organizing help and all of the cattle. Lawrence learned it was necessary to improve the cattle handling equipment and facilities to make it all work. Even after 48 sales, Lawrence was still learning and improving.

Lawrence's dad, Harvey, always said, "If you're able to farm, you should pursue it." While waiting in line for stalls, it occurred to Harvey that nearly everything was done alphabetically. If their name started with an 'A,' it would be listed first. The name Able Acres fit both criteria, so their prefix was 'AA' from then on. Today, Able Acres consists of 140-150 cows, along with 2,200 acres of row crops and hay. As the farm expanded, so did the



Duncan family. Through the years, Lawrence and Petzi welcomed five children: four sons, Lary, Gary, David and Andy; and one daughter, Caril. All five children own Hereford cattle and take pride in their involvement in the industry. There are eight grandchildren who also have connections to Lawrence's legacy of owning and raising Hereford cattle.

Lawrence credited his longevity in the Hereford industry to two things: quality genetics and quality relationships. The Duncans have continually adopted new technologies through the years, including in vitro fertilization (IVF) and embryo transfer (ET). Lawrence was an innovator in the Hereford breed. His peers, Ray Ramsey, Bruce Everhart and Rick Davis, credit his efforts to getting more youth involved and educated in the cattle industry. By providing opportunities to work alongside him and get involved in their program, anyone willing to listen was welcomed by Lawrence. He is remembered for doing it the right way, treating people the right way and setting the standard for others to follow.

Able Acres utilizes all the tools available to provide reliable, honest and quality genetics that have been sold to buyers throughout the United States. Lawrence and his family were early adopters of collecting performance data and have been dedicated supporters of the AHA's Whole Herd Total Performance Records (TPR<sup>®</sup>) program. In addition, Able Acres has been performance testing bulls through the Indiana Bull Evaluation Program

(IBEP) for many years. The IBEP has provided valuable data and has helped the Duncan family continually improve their operation through the years.

Lawrence passed in April 2020 and is being inducted posthumously into the Hall of Fame. Lawrence was a dedicated grain and livestock farmer whose passion was breeding Hereford cattle. His farm, Able Acres, received six Golden Bull Awards from the AHA. Lawrence was selected by his peers to receive the Robert C. Peterson Lynnwood Farm Lifetime Achievement Award in 2011. In 2019, Lawrence was inducted into the Indiana Livestock Breeders Hall of Fame and is now a 2021 inductee to the AHA Hall of Fame.

## Bob Harrell Jr.

In 1870, Bob Harrell Jr.'s ancestors traveled in a covered wagon across the historic Oregon Trail to Baker City, Ore. His parents, Bob and Edna Harrell, established Harrell Hereford Ranch along the foothills of Baker Valley, in the high-country of Eastern Oregon, three generations later. Today, Harrell Hereford Ranch is a family-run operation, managed by the fifth and sixth generation of Harrells, consisting of Bob Jr.; his wife, Becky; and daughter, Lexie.

Bob was raised in Baker City and graduated from Baker High School. After graduation, he attended Oregon State University for two years, and then transferred to Kansas State University (K-State). At K-State, Bob competed on the livestock judging team and earned his bachelor's degree in animal science.

The cattle ranch originated in 1970 with 80 acres and 100 head of Hereford cows purchased from Harold Thompson's TT Herefords in Connell, Wash. Under Bob's management, the ranch has grown to six ranches and currently consists of 400 registered Hereford cows, 400 black baldy commercial cows, a 1,000-head backgrounding feedlot and 25 Quarter Horse broodmares. The cattle run on 8,000 acres of high-desert, native range. With the help of six employees, the







**Bob Harrell** was inducted into the Hereford Hall of Fame. Pictured (l to r) are: Whitey Hunt, Duncan Mackenzie, Edna Harrell, Becky Harrell, Bob Harrell Jr., Lexie Harrell, Beth Mackenzie, Wannie Mackenzie and Mark St. Pierre.

Harrells also manage 3,000 irrigated, tillable acres of alfalfa and meadow hay, pasture, corn silage, earlage and small grains. The Harrell herd has been enrolled in performance testing since its inception in 1970, and for more than 51 years, the goal has been to produce performance cattle that work under a variety of management systems and branded beef programs.

Bob was on the AHA Board of Directors from 2006 to 2010. The success of those years was largely driven by a strategic planning effort in 2005, which Bob helped lead. During that time, while chairing the Marketing Committee, he was at the center of the technology revolution, which included the explosive influence of the internet. AHA led the industry, delivering new online tools for producer data exchange. These years also brought about the advent of breeding system economic selection indexes and novel, economically relevant maternal traits. The discovery and disclosure of genetic abnormalities evolved during this time, as well as the very beginnings of genomic-enhanced expected progeny differences (GE-EPDs), which changed the game in terms of selection accuracy of younger seedstock prospects.

For years, Bob and his family at Harrell Hereford Ranch worked with industry partners to co-host cattlemen from across the western U.S. at their annual “Cattlemen Workshop.” He has been a leader willing to educate himself and share with others ways to remain economically successful and fundamentally sustainable in an ever-changing business environment. All these leadership qualities are what made Harrell Hereford Ranch a cornerstone Hereford seedstock operation in the western states. The genetic influence of the Harrell Hereford Ranch has been felt in commercial cowherds across the country. Bob’s contribution to the industry drove Harrell Hereford Ranch’s recognition as the 2009 Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) Seedstock Producer of the Year — one of the most prestigious recognitions bestowed upon a seedstock operation.



**Dale Micheli** was inducted into the Hereford Hall of Fame. Picture back row (l to r) are: Whitey Hunt, Wyatt Welper, Brian Welper, Amber Welper and Olivia Welper. Pictured front row (l to r) are: Abby Baird, Tyson Baird, Ashlyn Baird, Kaycee Cowley, Claire Cowley, Nicole Cowley, Terry Micheli, Dale Micheli, Alyson Micheli, Kyle Micheli, Audrey Baird, Nick Baird, Trevor Baird, Carter Baird and Mark St. Pierre.

## Dale Micheli

Rolling grasslands punctuated with sagebrush and the Uinta Mountains serve as the backdrop to Micheli Hereford Ranch in southwestern Wyoming. In 1917, Joseph Micheli bought the family’s first Hereford cattle. Dale Micheli learned to love the Hereford breed from his grandfather, Joseph. As a little boy, Dale accompanied his grandfather each day and watched as Joseph painstakingly fed each bull a “little handful” of grain. Dale never forgot the effort and care his grandfather gave to his treasured bulls.



For many years, the Micheli Family hauled their prized bulls to consignment sales. When Dale came home from college, he was determined to increase herd numbers and dramatically upgrade the genetics of the registered Herefords. He wanted to honor his grandfather by making the purebred cattle a major business on the ranch. Dale began to study pedigrees and work on adding dynamic females to the herd. He invested in prominent sires and implemented AI and then added an ET program. In 1989, the ranch held its first production sale. Thirty years later, Dale and his brother, Ron, and their sons, Kyle and Tony, who are the fifth generation, have been successfully selling up to 50 Hereford bulls each year.

Dale graduated with honors from

the University of Wyoming, where he was successful in both livestock and meat judging. He has continued to judge livestock throughout the years and has had the privilege of judging national Hereford shows at Fort Worth, Reno, The Cow Palace, San Antonio and the National Western Stock Show. For more than 25 years, Dale coached 4-H and FFA livestock and meat judging teams. His state champion teams consistently placed in the top tier nationally. Whether it is coaching state champion teams or helping a kid with a heifer project, Dale always focuses his efforts on the next generation of farmers and ranchers.

Beyond working with youth, Dale put in countless hours supporting the Hereford industry in Wyoming. Dale has always been engaged in promoting the Hereford breed and working with other breeders to promote the beef industry. He has been instrumental in hosting Hereford Field Days at his ranch, building the Hereford show at the Wyoming State Fair and finding ways to be active in all aspects of the Wyoming Hereford Association.

A major highlight in Dale's life was serving on the AHA Board of Directors. It was an honor and privilege to visit ranches across the country and see the diversity and ingenuity of many great Hereford breeders. For three years, he served as chairman of Certified Hereford Beef®, giving his leadership to impact the future.

Dale is a deeply religious man and volunteers and serves extensively in his church. The most important thing in Dale's life is his family. Dale and his wife, Terry, are the proud parents of six children — Mandy, Kyle, Audrey, Nikki, Amber and Cami — and the grandparents of 13 grandchildren. Dale is rarely without the company of his grandkids in the tractor, where they sing songs and make frequent stops for treats.

## Hall of Merit

Jim Birdwell, Fletcher, Okla., and John Meents, Jenera, Ohio, were honored by the AHA as the newest members of the Hereford Hall of Merit. This prestigious award commends those who have played an avid role in shaping the Hereford breed and cattle industry.

### Jim Birdwell

The Birdwell legacy started with a land drawing and a five-year commitment. The family made their home in Fletcher, Okla., by drawing a quarter section from a lottery for the land available for settlement. Thanks to the Homestead Act of 1862, the Birdwells just needed to live and work the land for five years before it became theirs. Jim continues to live and farm on the property originally gained by his great-grandfather. He still has the original deed, signed by President Theodore Roosevelt.

Jim attended Oklahoma State University (OSU) to study agricultural education. After graduation, he headed to Union City, Okla., to teach high school agriculture courses. Jim had a quick-kinded friendship with the owner of the local service station, as well as with those who frequented the gathering place for coffee and conversation.

Jim would go to the station after school, and all the farmers would be there. Not only did Jim befriend

the owner of the station, but he also taught his son in school. Little did he know, he would soon be introduced to someone new: his future wife, the station owner's daughter Jeanne. Jim and Jeanne married, and in 1972, they made the move from Union City to Fletcher to buy the land across from the family's homestead. The couple has been there since.



Jim taught high school students for five years, but the Lord had other plans for his future. Ed Meacham was the head of the Western field staff of the American Polled Hereford Association (APHA). He called Jim about an opening on the field staff, which Jim accepted. Jim had to sell \$20,000 worth of advertising. The drawback was you could buy a page of advertising for about \$300 at that time.

Jim served APHA members in Oklahoma and Kansas from 1972 to 1975 before he found his true calling. Jim travelled with Eddie Sims, auctioneer and owner of National Cattle Services, Inc. Eddie gave Jim a new appreciation for the auction business. Fortunately for Jim, Eddie's business expanded at an opportune time, and he was able to begin work with National Cattle Services, Inc., in 1975.

Jim didn't attend an official auctioneering school, but he learned the business and listened to several different auctioneers. He would



**Jim Birdwell** was inducted into the Hereford Hall of Merit. Pictured back row (l to r) are: Trevor White, Pete White, Jhett Birdwell and Jud Birdwell. Pictured front row (l to r) are: Whitey Hunt, Halli Pearson, Jamie White, Jeanne Birdwell, Jim Birdwell, Bridget Birdwell, Joel Birdwell and Mark St. Pierre.



practice while traveling up and down the road and developed a chant that didn't run people out of the barn. Just three years after joining National Cattle Services, Jim decided to use his cattle marketing skills to launch his own auction business in the summer of '78. Between Jim's contacts in the registered cattle business and advertising efforts, he was able to auction at a variety of sales until his retirement in the fall of 2020. His many years of service to the livestock industry across the United States and Canada will not be soon forgotten.

The cattle business has always been a stronghold for the Birdwell family. Joel and Jamie, the two Birdwell children, both attended OSU, just like Jim and Jeanne, and stayed connected to the cattle business upon graduation. The Birdwell children also maintain a close connection with the Hereford breed. With the five Birdwell grandchildren growing up around the business, the legacy of the family lives on.

**John Meents**

Col. Kevin Wendt, Ohio auctioneer and longtime friend, worked many auctions with John Meents over the years. Kevin learned from John to be honest and tell the truth; have faith that things will work out, but always be honest.

After turning his tassel at Purdue University, John landed his first livestock marketing job as a fieldman

for the American Yorkshire Club (AYC) in 1978. The first sale he worked was the record-shattering McGraw Yorkshire production sale that sold more than 760 head for \$283,195 — a record that still stands as the most breeding hogs sold in a single production sale.

Before the sale, John received the best advice a young ringman can receive from legendary swine auctioneers, Col. Mark Pickel and Col. Dan Baker — remember who bid and what they bid. Armed with these words of wisdom, John traveled 98,000 miles in his 11 months of AYC employment. Then he was tapped by another livestock legend, Neil Orth, to join the *Drovers Journal* fieldstaff.

At the time John joined, the publication was hoping to create a swine-specific sister publication. John dove in, driving many miles, visiting with producers about their stock for sale and learning about effective ways to use print advertisements.

John cut his teeth in the industry with livestock merchandising legends such as Wade Houser, Jay George, Jay Carlson, Lyle Eiten and Ken Torr.

Although John's role at *Drovers* changed to be cattle-centric rather than swine-focused, his dedication to helping producers find ways to sell stock never wavered. For 12 years, John did just that until the *Drovers* fieldstaff dissolved in 1991.

After *Drovers*, John worked briefly for the APHA before the many nights away from his young family called him home to Ohio, where he joined a local country store called, Hochstettlers.

At Hochstettlers, he peddled pet feed, and at home, he and his wife Peg raised their children, Jay, MaeLyda and Emily. The livestock industry didn't forget John's marketing talents, though. Previous AHA executive vice president Craig Huffhines called to see if he would work the ring at one sale. But, that one sale turned into another, then another, then another before John was offered a role as the AHA Upper Midwest Region field representative. On Aug. 1, 2000, he officially started with the Association.

Every state newsletter column John penned ends with the sentence, "Make your cattle better today because you have to market them tomorrow," a sentiment John believed throughout his entire livestock marketing career. Whether a breeder registered two calves a year or 200 with the Association, John made himself available as a resource, sounding board and friend to AHA members. He worked hard to sell their animals both in the sale ring and privately, offered industry insights for advertising and breeding decisions and cheered on multiple generations of Hereford showmen and women.

Today, John's home is in Jenera, Ohio. He and Peg live across the road from her parents, and the couple run a few crossbred cows and bale hay.

Looking back over his years as a field representative, often putting 50,000 to 60,000 miles on his car each year, he hopes to be remembered for one thing: fairness. No matter the number of animals registered, John wanted to treat everyone equally. The qualities John embodied as a member of the fieldstaff, are those worthy of his induction into the AHA Hall of Merit. **HW**



**John Meents** was inducted into the Hereford Hall of Merit. Pictured (l to r) are: Whitey Hunt, Jay Meents, Cassandra Meents, Peg Meents, John Meents, MaeLyda Meents, Pete Fagan and Mark St. Pierre.