

# Honoring a Legacy

**Jensen announced as first Bob Norton Excellence Award winner.**

by *Sydnee Shive*

**M**entor. Friend. Humanitarian. No matter the connection; to know Bob Norton was to love him.

“Bob was a business man, but he was more than that; he was a people person. He loved people, and he loved relationships,” Amy Cowan, American Hereford Association (AHA) director of youth activities and foundation, says. “When you were around him, he just made you better, and you wanted to be better.”

Bob passed away suddenly on April 13, 2022. While his impact will be everlasting, the inaugural Bob Norton Excellence Award is just one way the National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) and Hereford Youth Foundation of America (HYFA) will continue to honor the late CEO of BioZyme® Inc., at an event that was near and dear to his heart.

“We really wanted to recognize somebody that had the same characteristics as Bob, someone who grew up in the NJHA, but now is making a difference in the industry and going to be a good leader,” Cowan says. “Someone who is going to go do big things.”

The 2022 Bob Norton Excellence Award went to its first honoree, Cody Jensen, Platte City, Mo., at the 2022 VitaFerm® Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) in Louisville, Ky. As a close friend of Bob and his wife, Lisa, and an employee at BioZyme, Jensen was the natural choice for the honor.

“Cody fit the mold for this first-time award,” Cowan says. “I remember several conversations between Bob and I about Cody Jensen and how proud he was of him. It just made sense.”



Cody Jensen, Bob Norton Excellence Award winner.

## Passion for Hereford cattle and people

A Courtland, Kan., native, fourth-generation Hereford breeder, 15-year member of the NJHA and former chairman of the NJHA board of directors, Jensen has been hooked on Herefords since attending his first JNHE in Billings, Mont., in 2001.

“I loved it,” Jensen says. “Between all of the activities, different events and meeting people, I met a whole bunch of people from all over the United States while showing.”

Jensen was the chairman of the NJHA board of directors from 2015 to 2016. He credits the relationships he’s cultivated and much of who he is to the NJHA and the Hereford breed.

“The NJHA shaped Cody,” Cowan says. “He really believes he’s where he’s at today because of his experiences in the NJHA and the opportunities it gave him. Cody’s just one of those NJHA superstars that will continue to be successful.”

“It’s not always about winning the show, it’s not always about getting first in class, but the impact you can make on other people outside of the showring.”

— Cody Jensen

strong advocate for youth livestock organizations.

“I’ve been off of the board for six years, and you don’t realize the people you impact, even though you don’t really talk to them,” Jensen explains. “Being on the board, a lot of people saw me doing different things, leading different events, and I still have kids today that come up and talk to me about when I was on the board.”

## Bob and Lisa’s impact

The orange and black of the VitaFerm logo, a branch of BioZyme, has been a mainstay at the JNHE for more than 15 years. VitaFerm is the event’s title sponsor, with a booth in the showring every year. Bob was the CEO of BioZyme for more than 20 years, and Lisa took over her husband’s responsibilities after he passed away.

While his days as a NJHA member are over, Jensen can commonly be found at the JNHE and other major livestock shows across the country with a set of clippers in hand, helping junior exhibitors and their families. Additionally, as a product of the NJHA, Jensen is a



The Bob Norton Excellence Award winner is a young leader and NJHA alumnus with Bob’s zest for life.



Lisa Norton, Bob’s widow, shares a hug with Cody Jensen after he was announced as the first Bob Norton Excellence Award winner.

“As the years go on, the junior exhibitors will not get to have a personal relationship with Bob, but through this award and his legacy, they will sure know about VitaFerm and what the company stands for,” Cowan says.

Programs like the NJHA Fed Steer Shootout can be traced back to Bob. However, the JNHE is a culmination of the year’s hard work and was one of the times Bob and Lisa could interact with the youth of the Hereford breed.

*continued on page 32...*

"I'd be on the announcer stand and look up and see Bob and Lisa surrounded by kids wanting to shake his hand and thank him," Cowan says. "He was the kind of person you wanted to get to know. Bob and Lisa were just so supportive."

In addition to supporting the JNHE, the Nortons worked closely with the NJHA board of directors. At a post-board meeting dinner at the couple's home in 2014, Jensen connected with Bob and Lisa at their table.

"Bob was always asking questions, no matter who you were, getting to know you, while working with an association he truly cared about. I felt like he got just a little bit more involved," Jensen says.

It was Bob and Lisa's genuine kindness and willingness to give back that initially drew Jensen to BioZyme. Jensen graduated from Kansas State University with a bachelor's degree in feed science and management in 2015.

Currently, Jensen is the senior manager of blending at BioZyme, and he began his career with the company while he finished his final year on the NJHA board of directors as chairman.

During Jensen's first interview with BioZyme, he recalls being impressed by the cleanliness and functionally of the BioZyme production facility.

He had five job offers coming out of college, but it was BioZyme's quality of people, proximity to home and dedication to doing things right that solidified his decision.

"It was a lot of different things, but the people made the difference," Jensen says. "Knowing that the owners, president and vice president at the time were good people who cared and treated everyone as family."

While Bob and Lisa's relationship with Jensen started with the Hereford breed and further developed at BioZyme, their impact on Jensen goes beyond the company and the cattle. Bob truly lived by BioZyme's motto, 'Care that comes full circle.'

"He always asked about how you were doing as a person before asking how things were going on the floor," Jensen says. "He was a guy that truly cared about you as a person, not just as an employee. That's one of the things that always comes to mind."



Cody Jensen gives his retiring address during the 2016 JNHE maroon jacket ceremony.

### Winning the award

When the time came for the award to be announced, Jensen was standing ringside and taken completely by surprise.

"Amy went on the mic and said, 'The winner of the award is Cody Jensen,'" he says. "When that



Bob and Lisa Norton at their home with the 2014 NJHA board of directors.



KJ CJJ 618U Chevy 454Y, Cody Jensen's grand champion bred-and-owned bull at the 2012 JNHE.

happened, I remember looking down and being very humbled, honored and surprised all at the same time.”

The award joins a lineup of prestigious honors bestowed right before the owned female grand drive begins, including the announcement of the Junior Herdsman of the Year and the Walter and Joe Lewis High Point Senior Award.

“I was very humbled, because of how well I knew Bob and how much he meant to me and our company,” Jensen says. “It was quite the honor, and it kind of blew my mind.”

Bob is missed dearly and his legacy will last generations. Without his support, the JNHE wouldn't be the event it is today.

“I just can't imagine doing the junior national and a lot of these different junior programs and foundation work without the VitaFerm logo and BioZyme's support,” Cowan says. “It's one of the legacies he has left. It is going to continue on, because we've been able to start so many new programs with the support.”

Cowan and Jensen both feel the award honors Bob in a way he would love. His passion was people, and especially youth of the Hereford breed and the livestock industry.

“It definitely was a special moment at the junior national, and I feel like it honored Bob in a way that everyone that knew him was proud of,” Cowan says. “He would have been proud of Cody.”

Lisa was at the 2022 JNHE and presented the award to Jensen. Emotions were high that afternoon, as Bob would've been beaming.

“When I went to go give Lisa a hug after I received the award, I was about to tear up, and she was pretty emotional,” Jensen says. “And one of the things she said to me was, ‘It only took you six years to get to the top.’ That was very cool. I've had some pretty good leaders.”

Jensen says the person he is today is due in part to individuals like Cowan, Bob and Lisa. He is honored to be the first recipient of the inaugural award.

“I think Bob gave so much back and impacted so many people in the junior association,” Jensen says. “For whoever the next recipient is, it will really open their eyes and help them remember what actually matters while showing livestock. It's not always about winning the show, it's not always about getting first in class, but the impact you can make on other people outside of the showing.” **HW**

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