



# Family First

**Bruce Everhart, retiring AHA president, relishes the power of the Hereford family working together to achieve common goals.**

by *Wes Ishmael*

Imagine being an agricultural banker in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when the prime interest rate was 21%, commodity prices crawled through the gutter, many producers were leveraged beyond fiscal hope and bankruptcy was commonplace.

Now imagine being a young ag banker in the community where you were born and raised — Shelby County, Indiana. Those hard conversations occurred with friends and extended family.

Before each of those challenging visits, often in the wee hours of the morning, Bruce Everhart, would rehearse his side of the conversation. He wanted whoever was sitting across from him to understand financial fortune or misfortune had nothing to do with self-worth and value as a unique human being.

“It was really important to me for them to maintain their dignity through the financial hardships that were affecting all producers,” Bruce says.

That kind of care defines Bruce’s 40-year career in banking, his lifetime in the Hereford business and his time on the American Hereford Association (AHA) Board of Directors, which recently ended with his term as AHA president.

## **Multi-generational learning**

“We didn’t have a lot of money growing up, but my parents knew if they wanted to keep their kids out of trouble and teach them hard work and how to be part of a larger family, they could do that with polled Hereford cattle,” Bruce explains. “So, we all exhibited polled Hereford cattle.”

Keep in mind, Bruce is the second eldest of six kids. It’s a lot more when you count his Hereford family.

Bruce took a special interest in the cattle because his goal was to attend Purdue University and earn a spot on the school’s heralded livestock judging team, which was then coached by the legendary Roger Hunsley. He did that and more. He was top-10 in every contest but one; he missed winning the Kansas City contest by a single point. One of his teammates was former AHA field representative, John Meents.

Bruce and his older sister, Katrina, were the first in their family to attend college, both at Purdue University. Bruce made the most of his four years, pushing himself to degrees in agricultural economics and animal science. Bruce was also a

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member of the school's varsity Glee Club; he has some pipes. Even if you've never heard him sing, many are familiar with his explosive laugh, which seems to start at his toes.

When Bruce graduated Purdue in 1978, economics were tough in agriculture, as alluded to, so there was no opportunity to return to the home operation. Choosing a career in agricultural banking was a logical choice because he enjoys, "swimming in numbers." He inherited a gift for numbers from his mom, Betty Lou, who was a financial whiz. She always advised Bruce and his siblings, "Do the best you can with what God gave you."

Bruce also inherited a generous helping of his dad, Harry, an astute cattleman who never met a stranger and had a laugh bigger than the outdoors.

Banking also gave Bruce a platform to serve others, which is the obvious bedrock to how he lives.

Likewise, Shoshanna, his wife of 42 years, has a gift for serving. Currently, she is the state of Indiana's Ombudsman for Child Welfare. She has more than 40 years of child welfare experience in the public and private sector.

"She has always had a passion for protecting children," Bruce says, with more than a hint of pride. "I respect what she does, and she respects what I do. We make time to celebrate what each other does. She's the glue around here. She takes care of the cattle when I travel and runs the headgate when we work cattle."

Although Bruce retired from banking four years ago, he remains engaged with the profession through teaching and consulting, while continuing to hone the genetics in his herd.

### Building the herd

When Bruce and Shoshanna's kids were little, the family would go to Wiese and Sons in Manning, Iowa, every summer for 15 years to pick one or two of the best heifers they could afford to show and then add to the herd. Those genetics became the nucleus of Everhart Herefords as they were mated to polled or horned bulls the family believed would yield the optimum result.

Bruce and Shoshanna have a son, Blake, married to Ashley; and a daughter, Jordan, married to Brian England. Their kids grew up with the

chance to raise Hereford cattle and be part of the state and national junior organizations. Now, their six grandkids have the same opportunity.

Today, Everhart Herefords, Waldron, Ind., consists of 25 elite brood matrons, many of them home-grown, and many of which are show champions themselves or the dam of champions. However, Bruce emphasizes the cattle must be sound and productive, just like his dad always demanded since purchasing the family's first polled Hereford bull in 1968.

EF Mona 607 907, by MH Monument 3147 was their herd's game changer, according to Bruce.

"Yellow, bold, ton of power, foot and bone and pretty clean-fronted," he explains. Bruce partnered with Cody Beck, Bainbridge, Ind., on Mona, campaigning her to the Indiana State Fair grand championship in 2010. Mona's granddam was the Everhart's first Indiana State Fair grand champion in 1998.

Mona's first calf was EF Chevelle 3907, an eventual reserve grand champion heifer at the VitaFerm® Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE). Chevelle is the dam of EF Nova, a reserve grand champion in Denver.

Incidentally, go to the Indiana State Fair with Bruce only if you're prepared to spend some time getting from point A to point B. He knows lots of people and lots of

people know him. Part of it is because of his lifetime association with the event. But, it's also because he has been so deeply involved in its evolution. Bruce served as a state fair commissioner for 10 years. He was appointed by the Indiana governor at the time — former U.S. Vice President, Mike Pence.

When it comes to breeding cattle, Bruce explains, "I'm trying to build a unicorn. One with outstanding EPDs that looks good enough to be competitive in a national show. That's extremely difficult to do." One of his strategies is seeking out choice embryo matings that could produce the next great heifer or bull.

As much as Bruce enjoys that challenge, you get the idea nothing beats helping juniors and his commercial customers achieve success.

"My goal is for a young kid to buy one of our heifers and have a good experience," Bruce says. "I also provide them with semen from any bull in my tank, so they will have a good result."



Retiring AHA president, Bruce Everhart has a lifelong association with the Indiana State Fair, from competing there in 4-H to serving 10 years on the 13-member Indiana State Fair Commission.

Payton Farmer, Brownstown, Ind., and her family serve as an example.

Bruce partnered with them on EF Louise 0523 ET, a daughter of WS Intense Duke 512. She was a reserve division champion at the 2011 JNHE and is the dam of EF PF Mae, EF PF Amaryliss and EF PF Meredith; all were JNHE division champions or reserve champions.

Bruce was commentating the 2022 JNHE in Louisville for Walton Broadcasting when Payton's owned polled heifer was named reserve grand champion. His emotion was obvious, just like one of his own family was at the halter, which she is.

### Achieving a dream

"A problem is not a problem. It's an opportunity to make something better," Bruce believes.

He is a longtime Hereford leader. He was president of the Indiana Junior Hereford Association. He was president of the Indiana Hereford Association. He was part of the state team that hosted three junior national shows when states were responsible for raising most of the required funds and provide most of the workforce. To this day, Indiana juniors organize and present their state junior show on their own, just like Bruce and his peers did way back.

"You do all of these things locally and then you get a chance to do more," Bruce says.

In his case, the opportunity to work nationally came with a phone call from Ray Ramsey, president of the Hereford Youth Foundation of America (HYFA), inviting Bruce to join its board of directors. Bruce served on the HYFA board 14 years, as chair of the finance committee for much of that time. During that span, HYFA's coffers grew from about \$300,000 to nearly \$5 million, due to the generosity of donors. HYFA awards nearly \$200,000 in scholarships each year.

Then a few years ago, former AHA Board member, Steve Lambert, called and asked Bruce to run for the AHA Board of Directors. "It meant a great deal to me. It's humbling for our family to have this opportunity," Bruce says.

Bruce was elected to the Board in 2018, along with Craig Beran, Claflin, Kan., and Andrew Matheny, Mays Lick, Ky. Today, he counts them among his closest friends.

Becoming AHA president was one of Bruce's longtime dreams because of his breed history and his respect for the AHA Board members and presidents he got to know over the years. That starts with fellow Hoosiers like Phil Ellis, Doug Gerber and Art Timberlake.

### The road ahead

"We're on the doorstep of greatness," Bruce believes, of Hereford. "The demand for bulls, the

breed's growing popularity, the extra heterosis and the extra income in the producer's pocket." Specifically, he notes the breed's advantages in fertility, feed efficiency, longevity and docility, while also having the ability to grade USDA Choice and higher. "Hereford cattle have improved significantly in the last 10-15 years," he says.

Bruce is proud of his time serving AHA as a director.

"I'm proud of the association's financial stability. Not only do we have strong investments, but year in and year out, we execute operations with excellence," Bruce explains. "Our customer service is second to none. And, when you serve as a director, you gain such an appreciation for the extent of the work the staff is involved in and also the work breeders are doing."

Bruce is also proud of the breed's consistent commitment to relevant breed research over time.

He mentions ongoing research with the University of Illinois to document the advantages of Hereford maternal heterosis and new research with Colorado State University characterizing advantages in environmental sustainability associated with Hereford efficiency.

Of his time on the Board, Bruce explains he is also proud of the friendships forged with fellow Board members and getting to meet so many AHA members across the country.

"It doesn't matter where you live or how many cattle you have, you matter to the Association. The relationships and your contributions matter. Genetic contributions to breed progress come from herds both large and small," Bruce emphasizes. "Be positive. Use the tools we have. Use the technology. Together, everyone achieves more."

Bruce knows he will miss being on the AHA Board, but he reckons, "I'm still on the Hereford Legacy Fund board, and hopefully HYFA will have me back."

Besides, he'll have a little more time for the grandkids he cherishes. Bruce and Shoshanna attend most every livestock or sporting event where they participate.

"It's supporting our kids and our grandkids," Bruce says. "It's about family." **HW**



Bruce Everhart (right) served as commentator of the 2022 VitaFerm® Junior National Hereford Expo for Walton Broadcasting. Kyle Pérez, Nara Visa, N.M. (center) joined him for one stretch of the show.