

The Cox Closure

by JW Cox

Thinking back to three years ago when I first set out to run for the National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) board of directors, it seems like a lifetime ago. They say time flies when you are having fun, and it feels as if we have been on a rocket flying through time. As I look toward my board retirement, I would like to share the story of my election in 2020.

COVID-19 had just hit, and I was working in Tennessee for Burns Farms on my extended (or indefinite) spring break. The VitaFerm® Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) was supposed to take place in Louisville, Ky., and I thought there wouldn't be a better year to run than when I would

be on my own turf. However, the pandemic had other plans and, quite honestly, I didn't even know if I was going to be able to run for the board of directors if the JNHE did not happen. When the JNHE was moved to Kansas City, Mo., a place I had never been, full of people I did not know, I realized I would be running for a spot on the board where no one in the crowd would know me.

I am not your traditional Hereford junior choosing to run for the board. I am a first-generation Hereford breeder, and at the time I decided to run, I had exhibited at JNHE twice. I knew about five people on the list of delegates. What I did have, however, was a true friend and mentor, who serves as my business partner today. That friend previously served on the board representing Kentucky, and he advised me, "It is going to be tough, and you do not know that many people, but you can talk to a brick wall."

Determined, I called every delegate on the list before we got to Kansas City, to tell them who I was and to explain my passion for the breed and the Hereford family.

When we arrived in Kansas City, I made it my goal to talk to everyone face-to-face, even though I knew it was going to be hard with the limited time I had. However, I made my best effort to mingle with everyone I could between showing and fitting. It came down to the night of the speeches.

At the end of the night, I knew I had given it my all. I went into the night of the Maroon Jacket Ceremony with no regrets. I will never forget the feeling that I had when Brandt Downing came and gave me his jacket. It was a huge honor, and I was surrounded by my friends and family. I knew the work I had put in over the years had finally paid off.



JW Cox, retiring NJHA Chairman

Some may be wondering why I ran for the board. It was because at my first JNHE, I was just some kid showing Hereford cattle. I did not know anyone, but I met previous board members from Kentucky, who helped me that week and mentored me for years to come. These individuals had a great impact on me, and I wanted to help others in a similar way. I wanted to have an impact on juniors within the breed. That is what drove my passion to be someone to admire and inspire other juniors to run for the board one day. Even if they are not a multi-generational Hereford breeder, they still can make it and have an impact if they work hard and set their sights on it.

During my time on the board, I've served as a director, fundraising chair, and now I am retiring as the NJHA chairman. This breed and these people have had a huge impact on me and have become some of my lifelong friends. I owe a lot to the NJHA for introducing me to so many great cattlemen and women and shaping me into a better breeder and leader. I would encourage any youth out there to get involved and take a chance because the Hereford breed has a lot to offer. The NJHA can have a huge impact on your life, beyond your years as a junior.



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Just the Beginning

by *Ralston Ripp*

Time is a precious thing. Flashback 14 years ago and little did I know my first Hereford steer “Dufus” would play such a role in my showing career and life perspective. My first year, I had hoped it would be sunshine and rainbows, right? However, my steer certainly earned his name and set the tone for our challenging and educational journey. He was hard-headed and did not like the showring. That first year, I learned resilience, practice, patience and extra elbow grease does pay off. These life lessons I’ve continued to build on helped set me on the path I am on today.

Time is fast. Three years ago, I knew little about how the time would fly, how people would become family, and how the experiences would forever impact the person I am today. I think back to 11-year-old Ralston, sitting in a chair on the second floor of the American Royal Complex, listening to retiring board members give their farewell addresses. I was in awe and wondered how that could be me someday. “Could be,” were key words. It was not until the 2019 Faces of Leadership Conference, where I realized how real and reachable this dream was. I knew that the American Hereford Association (AHA) valued tradition, and it took being at this conference to learn I was all in on running for the National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) board of directors. I saw the value of our heritage firsthand, coupled with the openness and excitement of innovation and growth. And I knew I wanted to serve the junior membership and grow as an individual in an industry and breed I love.

Time is everchanging. Fast forward to the VitaFerm® Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) at Kansas City in July of 2020, a time unlike any other. The world’s status was nerve-racking and unknown, and I was nervous, excited and so



Ralston Ripp, retiring NJHA Vice Chairman

grateful all at the same time to be a candidate for the NJHA board. I had never been a delegate, I was not sure what my week as a candidate would entail, and I was mostly just acquaintances with the other individuals running. As the time for campaigning, giving speeches and visiting with juniors across the nation approached, I prayed for guidance, confidence and the insight to sincerely soak up every moment in the process.

A dear mentor reminded me often that you will not know if you like something, if you are good at it or if you are going to fail — unless you just start. That was my plan of action. I remember evenings sitting on my bedroom floor calling delegates beforehand. It was the sweetest feeling when I then got to meet these individuals in person, putting a face to the voice and picking up right where our phone conversations had ended the week or weeks leading up to JNHE. I shared laughs, stories, concerns, hopes and answered some challenging questions from juniors that I admire and am now so thankful to call friends.

Time is inevitable. I am a sincere believer that everything happens for a reason and in accordance to God’s plan. When it came to the morning of the NJHA annual membership meeting and voting day, my feet were sore, but my heart was full. The people I met, the friendships built and memories shared had made the experience all so worth it.

Downtown Kansas City slightly broke my step when boots, my campaign basket and an old phone with priceless pictures were stolen from our family’s pickup that same day. Now, I am an optimist through and through, but this did have me shaken up and disappointed in what I had lost. Arriving at the grounds that morning in Kansas City, it did not take long to be grateful for what I had. I know everything happens for a reason, no matter how upsetting it is in the moment. They were hidden under the backseat and dusted with some glass shards, but my black, square-toe boots had stayed with us, the only boots that I would need for the rest of JNHE. Ironic, I thought, but I knew it was no coincidence. It came time for speeches that evening, and I was full of gratitude, inspiration and contentment, knowing I had given the opportunity to be a candidate my all.

Everything happens for a purpose. My journey to being a director began back when I was 8 years old, and the most important thing was just not letting go of “Dufus” in the ring. My journey continued when I attended my first JNHE in Kansas City in 2011 and dreamed of wearing the maroon jacket. The determination to be a board member became concrete in 2019 at Faces of Leadership when I was all in on serving the NJHA. Back in Kansas City in 2020, my dream came to fruition as Hannah Williams (Grund), a dear friend I grew up with, passed on her jacket in the cedar shavings of Hale Arena. Now, it is 2023. My three years wearing the maroon jacket are coming to a close, but my time serving the breed continues and another adventure is just beginning.

Time is a precious thing; it is fast, everchanging, and in the end, always passing us by. Thank you, AHA and the NJHA, for allowing me to fulfill my purpose the last three years on the board, the last 14 years as a junior member and the next years to come as a Hereford breeder. This is only the beginning. **HW**