

Opportunity is **EVERYTHING**

NJHA Advisors of the Year focus on helping members grow through participation.

by *Wes Ishmael*

“It matters to feel like you’ve touched the life of a kid,” says Crystal Mitchem, Vale, N.C.

She and her husband, Wayne, continue impacting the lives of many Hereford juniors as advisors of the North Carolina Junior Hereford Association. They were named the National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) Advisors of the Year during the 2023 VitaFerm® Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) in Madison, Wis.

“It’s very humbling. A lot of the kids wrote letters of support and that means so much to us,” Crystal says. But she’s quick to steer any credit to everyone else involved.

Deep-rooted experience

Crystal grew up with polled Herefords in eastern North Carolina. Her grandfather started a herd in the late 1950s. She and her two sisters were widely involved in the National Junior Polled Hereford Association — all three served on the National Polled Hereford Junior Council. Crystal (Kirby) was National Polled Hereford Queen in 1990.

“The Hereford Association gave me a lot, and our girls were seeing the same benefits,” Crystal says of the couple’s decision to become advisors in 2017. “We took it on as a mission to get as many kids involved as possible to take advantage of the opportunities.”

Wayne and Crystal are both sixth-generation farmers. Their daughters, Regan and Jordan, have long participated in the JNHE and other NJHA opportunities. The family owns and operates Mitchem 3C Farms in the foothills of western North Carolina.

Lessons beyond the cattle

“Every time we run into new kids, we encourage them to join the association. We want to show them the opportunities they may not be aware



Wayne and Crystal Mitchem, Vale, N.C., were named NJHA Advisors of the Year by the NJHA board of directors.

of. Everybody should be given the opportunity,” Crystal says.

Attending the JNHE and the Southeast Regional Hereford Show are top priorities for the North Carolina juniors, but Crystal says the shows make the top of the list as much for the opportunities beyond the showing.

“It’s good to get out and see the big pond,” Crystal says. “There is so much to be gained. Travel with the family, see and do, and learn about good cattle. The skills they can learn from the contests at JNHE are irreplaceable. It’s the whole opportunity — the people you meet, the friends you make and skills you learn.”

In fact, the JNHE is so important that Crystal scheduled a recent surgery around the event, unwilling to miss the opportunity.

“They have encouraged the youth to be involved with the NJHA, not just in showing, but with public speaking, photo contests, quiz bowls and other activities,” explains George Ward, past president of the North Carolina

Hereford Association (NCHA) and Tammy Ward, NCHA board member.

Crystal is proud of the junior organization and grateful for all of the families involved who pitch in.

“We’re blessed as a junior association. In North Carolina, the adult association and the breeders in the state are very supportive of our juniors,” Crystal explains.

“My parents’ priority of making sure that everyone feels included and welcome, no matter how long they have been involved, has become the association’s best quality,” Regan Mitchem says.

Crystal is quick to point out she and Wayne were originally co-advisors with Reggie and Patty Lookabill, whom she credits with helping lay the foundation of success for North Carolina juniors.

“We’re thankful to the Hereford Youth Foundation of America and the American Hereford Association for all that they do. We’re so thankful for all of the opportunities to teach the kids,” Crystal says. **HW**