



Preparing for the Future

NJHA members attend the 2023 Faces of Leadership Conference in Columbus, Ohio.

by *Lauren Jones*

“Gift the world with your authentic self.” Eddie Slowikowski’s words echoed across the room filled with 67 National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) members during the 2023 Faces of Leadership Conference in Columbus, Ohio. Slowikowski, a former world-class runner and gold medal winner for the U.S. track and field team, shared a hands-on keynote experience like no other. We followed him through a roller coaster of emotions, as he encouraged us to be true to ourselves in everything we do. Little did we know how that message and excitement would carry through the conference.

“Prepare YOU for YOUR Future,” was the theme of the three-day leadership conference. That is exactly how we ended our first day with

Marlene Eick, a leadership development consultant and the director of marketing and communications for Ohio Corn and Wheat. From the art of the perfect introductory handshake to how to properly exit the dinner table, Eick prepared our Hereford juniors to stand out and authentically present themselves professionally.

Excitement remained high as the group made the trek to Ohio Stadium for the second day of the conference. High above the Ohio State University (OSU) football field, juniors practiced decision making and built self-confidence. The fun from the session carried into our Ohio Stadium tour. Views from both high and low were capped with a message from Gene Smith: “Leaders aren’t born, they emerge.” Smith is the OSU director of athletics. He takes pride in

the way his impact on youth influences them as individuals and leaders.

Select Sires Inc., Plain City, Ohio, welcomed us to an afternoon immersed in the beef industry. The Select Sire staff and the Buckeye Hereford Association joined together for lunch followed by a tour of the state-of-the-art facility, including the new distribution location, which showed the scope of the operation.

These industry experiences and tours made for a fulfilling day, yet one of the best moments was the evening spent together with attendees. Following an evening at the Columbus Zoo and Zoombezi Water Park, juniors gathered for a session about creating community. A panel of state junior Hereford association leaders led a discussion about lessons



Lauren Jones, NJHA communications chair, speaks at the 2023 Faces of Leadership Conference.

from Faces of Leadership that participants could take back to their states to help build future leaders, which is a priority of the American Hereford Association strategic plan. The panel included: Lydia Shaw, Caldwell, Idaho; Sara Beth Callicott, Only, Tenn.; Connor McArthur, Pittsford, Mich.; and Morgan Richardson,

Capron, Ill. Conference participants also joined the NJHA board at roundtables to discuss how to improve the association.

Moving from preparing ourselves to preparing food, we spent the final day of the conference in the OSU animal sciences meat lab. We blind taste-tested USDA meat quality grades, made our

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— Rick Malir, president and founder of City Barbeque



own brats for lunch and learned how a research lab tests meat quality. A pasture-to-plate career panel opened our minds to career avenues we may never have explored. The panel included representatives from the Doughhook Meat Market, OSU campus dining, City Barbeque and Ohio Cattlemen's Association.

Rick Malir, president and founder of City Barbeque and one of the names behind the Coley-Malir Leadership Endowment, alongside his wife, Bonnie Coley-Malir, closed out our afternoon.

Malir shared insights about entrepreneurship, his three rules for success and one of my personal favorite quotes of the week: "If you want to see your future, look at your friends." Looking at the old and new friends around us, it was clear that we were all part of the Hereford breed's and cattle industry's future.

We ended the event at Rick Malir and Bonnie Coley-Malir's beautiful home. Dinner and a dance were separated by inspirational closing comments from Tar Tut, NJHA chairman. Tut tied together every aspect we learned during the conference, from how to make connections to having confidence in creating a community. It was an emotional moment for Tut as he realized this was his final Faces of Leadership Conference. He noted the impact these events have on all participants as they prepare for their futures. With that, we danced the night away.

I couldn't think of a better way to end my Faces of Leadership journey than on the dance floor, surrounded by my Hereford family. As I reflect on my last Faces of Leadership Conference, I'd be lying if I said I wasn't getting a little emotional. My time in Columbus marked the sixth conference I have attended. Thanks to the NJHA, the Hereford Youth Foundation of America and the Coley-Malir Leadership Endowment, I have been able to travel to Kansas, California, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Montana and now Ohio. Each time I have been blessed by making new connections, learning new things, gaining new experiences and meeting new people. This conference has helped me grow into the leader and professional I am today, and I wish all juniors could experience it. Seeing all the bright young faces, including my own brother, beginning their Faces of Leadership journey this year, I know the association is in great hands for many years to come. **HW**