

# TUGging at HEARTSTRINGS

National Hereford Queen raises money for mental health.

by *Katie Maupin Miller*

Just like spare change, kindness adds up. It certainly did during National Hereford Queen Madison Katzenberger's service project held during the 2023 VitaFerm® Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) in Madison, Wis.

Exhibitors, parents and industry members rifled through their pockets, emptied their truck cupholders and even scanned the fundraiser's QR code to give to Katzenberger's change drive, or "Penny War." The premise of the Penny War was simple. Participants used every cent they donated to count as a vote toward one of five Hereford "celebrities" to be crowned with a Wisconsin cheesehead. American Hereford Association (AHA) upper-Midwest field representative Noah Benedict, AHA chief operating officer and director of breed improvement Shane Bedwell, AHA national shows coordinator and youth activities assistant Bailey Clanton, National Hereford Women president Briley Miller and National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) director Lauren Jones all vied for their chance to wear the cheese-inspired crown.

Katzenberger was honored to serve as the National Hereford Queen during JNHE in her home state. So, she felt it was only fitting to add some Wisconsin flair to her change drive through the cheese crown. The custom-made cheesehead was crafted specifically for her service project by the same artisan who sculpts the cheeseheads for Green Bay Packers games on the famed Lambeau Field.

## Raising awareness

Perhaps more important than her nod to one of Wisconsin's favorite pastimes is the Wisconsin-based organization Katzenberger chose to support. She donated all the funds raised during the Penny War to TUGS: Talking,



Cents counted as votes for five Hereford "celebrities" in the "Penny War" that raised funds for mental health.

Understanding, Growing, Supporting, a non-profit aimed at overcoming the mental health stigma among farmers, rural Americans and teens. TUGS' mission is very important to Katzenberger, who used her role as National Hereford Queen to raise funds for and open conversations about the importance of mental health.

"No one wants to talk about or discuss mental health because it is a heavy topic," Katzenberger says. "But, it's OK to not be OK. Mental health problems can happen to anyone."

TUGS' logo includes a tugboat, which Katzenberger says is by design, noting that even the biggest ships need a little help sometimes. In many ways, the Penny War itself also modeled her message, showing that small kindnesses can add up in a big way. At the end of the Penny War Katzenberger raised \$2,127.63 for TUGS and inspired the NJHA to donate an additional \$1,420 raised during the Cornhole for a Cause tournament.

TUGS founder and president Jeff Ditzenberger was utterly blown away by the generosity of the Hereford showmen, families and breeders.

"Jeff's exact quote was 'Holy snikey,' when I told him how much money we raised," Katzenberger says. "Needless to say, TUGS is very grateful for all the funds raised, and he loves all the support he received from Hereford families."

At the conclusion of the Penny War, Benedict barely eked out Bedwell by less than \$10 to be crowned with the custom "Mad Dash to the Hereford Bash" cheesehead. Most importantly, JNHE participants helped raise funds, awareness and conversation surrounding mental health among agriculturalists.

"The support that I had received from Hereford families was just tremendous," Katzenberger says. "I really wanted to raise awareness. Ultimately, it is so important to treat people with kindness and respect because you never know what someone is going through."

Giving back in such a fashion is important to Katzenberger, who purposefully modeled her Queen activities around mental health awareness. As she says, she wanted to raise awareness as well as dollars. Even the Queen's Tea touched on mental health when participants created stuffed animals as reminders that they're never alone.

Regardless of what cause a young leader chooses to champion, Katzenberger notes giving back is imperative.

"We, as young leaders, have so much to be thankful for," she explains. "By giving back to communities, we are allowing a spot for younger generations to take our place." **HW**

