

HEREFORD WOMAN OF THE YEAR: SUPPORTIVE AND KIND

Gwen Oleen honored as the National Hereford Woman of the Year.

by *Katie Maupin Miller*

Gwen Oleen isn't found front and center. Instead, Gwen is a quiet supporter — setting up decorations, assisting with meals, helping organize fundraisers and events and chipping in on any task needed. But, she is always found with a kind, gracious smile. This no-frills, helpful spirit has helped steer the Kansas Hereford Women for more than four decades — serving as an exemplary model of leading by example.

While she was a country girl at heart, she married into a Hereford dynasty, when she wed Glenn Oleen in 1971. The couple had met while Glenn attended Kansas State University and after a handful of years managing Kramer Herefords, the pair returned to Falun, Kan., when they partnered with Glenn's brother, Chuck, on the family's operation, Oleen Cattle Co., in 1977. For the 46 years that the brothers have been at the helm of Oleen Cattle Co., Gwen could be found at Glenn's side at Hereford events around the nation.

Looking back, it seems like a no-brainer for Gwen to dive into the Kansas Hereford Women and support the National Hereford Women. She warmly recalls the countless people she has met through the Hereford business, and the positive impact those folks made in her family's life. From Hereford events in the Sunflower State to American Hereford Association Annual Meetings and junior Hereford shows, Glenn, Gwen and their two daughters, Kristi and Lori, made lasting friends and memories.

Decades of service

Gwen's contributions to the Kansas Hereford Women are nearly too numerous to list. Of her 40-plus years of service, she has been a director for nine of them, the association's

secretary for four and the historian/reporter for 10. Gwen has served on various Kansas Hereford Women committees, including the nominating committee. In the past, she coordinated several Kansas Hereford Queen Contests. There is scarcely a Kansas Hereford Women silent auction without Gwen and her trusty calculator. The Oleens have also hosted several Kansas Hereford Tour stops at their ranch over the years. Her years of service give Gwen the innate ability to look backward and to the future simultaneously.

With the help of her fellow Kansas Hereford Women, Kathy Geffert and Tracy Schlickau, Gwen cataloged every previous officer, director and Hereford queen from 1969 through present day, keeping an immaculate archive to share for generations to come. Thinking of future generations comes easily to Gwen who adores stepping back from the limelight to watch the young people step into it and shine.

In fact, Gwen listened over Facetime to National Hereford Women director Bridget Beran's moving speech touting Gwen's years of service during the award presentation. She and Glenn decided to stay back and watch the herd so their nephew and next generation of Oleen herdsman could attend the American Hereford Association Annual Meeting. While Gwen was not surprised with the award presentation in-person, she was certainly humbled, even from afar, to know her contributions had been noted by so many.



Gwen Oleen, Falun, Kan., was named National Hereford Woman of the Year.

"I was in complete shock when Bridget called me about this. I'm very humbled. It is quite an honor, and I appreciate it," Gwen says. "I also appreciate all the friendships we have in these organizations. It is just a good group of people to be around ... I like to work with those people and be a cooperative supporter."

As Kansas Hereford Women member Kathy Geffert notes, Gwen is deserving of the honor because she is always willing to help — unless any public speaking is required. And while Gwen is not a fan of speaking in front of a crowd, her contagious kindness and warmth are nonetheless noted as she mingles at events.

Perhaps Kansas Hereford Women president, Paula Acheson, best sums up what Gwen means to her fellow Hereford Women.

"She has a welcoming smile for everyone. She is team player ... She truly cares for those around her and always wants to catch up on family," she says. "Gwen has been another one of my blessings that I met through the Hereford family and is the true role model for National Hereford Woman of the Year."

And for all her years of hard work, her nearly immeasurable contributions to Kansas Hereford and the Oleen family's tireless dedication to the breed, Gwen simply hopes her legacy can be summed up with two words — supportive and kind. **HW**