

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Ashlee Eatherton — NJHA Advisor of the Year — is a tireless advocate for Hereford and its juniors.

by *Wes Ishmael*

Dedicated, leader, mentor, selfless, true friend — those are some of the common brushstrokes painted by more than 20 adults and National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) members in letters recommending Ashlee Eatherton, Castle Rock, Wash., as the NJHA Advisor of the Year.

Keep in mind, many of them have known the six-year advisor of the Washington State Junior Hereford Association (WSJHA) since she was a member of the organization growing up in the Hereford breed. They speak to who she is over the long haul rather than who she is within a position.

“In a time when many other breed associations in our state have become totally inactive or barely surviving, the Washington State Junior Hereford Association is thriving, not only with second- and third-generation members but with families of other breeds who have purchased Hereford cattle in order to be part of the dynamic breed association Ashlee has sustained here in Washington,” writes Jennifer Harwood.

Eatherton and WSJHA co-advisors over time, work to provide WSJHA members with state and regional opportunities as well as national ones. For instance, Eatherton made arrangements for a semi to haul cattle and tack for WSJHA members to the VitaFerm® Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) in Madison, Wis., last year and the one in Grand Island, Neb., this year. The convenience and reduced cost of this strategy means more juniors and their families can attend.

“Ashlee is the sole reason that we, as an association, got to go to junior nationals. She organized and planned our whole trip, while adapting to the needs of our members. Managing the stops, food and hotels of our travels was a role that she took on.



Ashlee Eatherton, NJHA Advisor of the Year with retiring NJHA directors, Tar Tut (left) and Wesley Denton (right).

Fundraising and other sorts of funding all went through her,” says Edward Gould, WSJHA president. “She is the reason I was able to attend my first junior nationals, and it was an experience I will never forget.”

As a Hereford lifer, former Washington State Hereford Queen and NJHA member, Eatherton understands the many opportunities available to juniors, as well as the challenges families encounter as they help their children pursue them. She and her husband, Zack, are now giving their son, Brecken, and daughter, Mesa, a chance to discover these opportunities.

“Ashlee has never met a child from 1 day old to 21 years old that she doesn’t see potential in and want to see them succeed,” says Brenda Balmelli, Chehalis, Wash. “If being one of the advisors for the WSJHA isn’t enough, Ashlee also completely revamped our state’s queen program. The queen program is now something the girls truly look forward to being a part of. She encourages the queens to advocate for the Hereford breed at every show

and also helps them get to the JNHE, whenever possible, to participate in all the queen activities.”

“Ashlee is the epitome of a person committed to service, leadership and action. Often, I have described her as the greatest advocate for every child and member of her family and community,” says Katy Cavanagh, a lifetime educational professional. “Her thoughtful and positive support for people and causes is recognized across many community members in the state of Washington. She seeks to listen, recognize need and then volunteer to support and lead for successful completion of the goal.”

This year’s NJHA Advisor of the Year was recognized during the Hereford Youth Foundation of America scholarship, awards and maroon jacket ceremony at the JNHE on July 12.

“I was shocked and surprised,” Eatherton says. “This recognition means so much to me, but that’s not why we do it. I like seeing the kids flourish.” **HW**