

MAKERS BEHIND THE JNHE

Artisans offer their skills to make JNHE memorable.

by *Katie Maupin Miller*

For 25 years, National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) members have displayed their cattle and skills at the Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) to vie for awards and accolades. Yet, those young people and their families might not know about the creators who craft integral parts of the event and the hours of work behind them.

From brushstrokes to backdrops

Rex Whiteman's paintings have set the stage for nearly every JNHE. The Maysville, Mo., artist was tapped to create a mural for the 2008 show in Kansas City, and for almost two decades, Whiteman's artistic flair has provided the backdrop for Hereford youth.

The process of creating these murals starts nearly a year in advance. Whiteman meets with the NJHA team months ahead of time to begin planning. He learns of the coming

year's theme, logo, colors and location, and he carefully folds these pieces into a concept for his art installation.

The conceptual process isn't limited to simple sketching though. Often, Whiteman makes site visits to the facility set to host the coming junior national to take measurements and plan how the mural will sit in the space. This year, in Grand Island, Neb., the art was created to go around the large LED screen in Five Points Bank Arena and careful notes were taken about the surrounding duct work, lights, etc.

While hours go into the planning and execution of each mural, it is nearly impossible to estimate because each concept varies widely. As Whiteman says, a very complex but organic concept might take less time to paint than a simple but very geometric painting. Whiteman, a professional painter for more than 35 years, feels at home with a variety of styles. He first

dabbled in art painting alongside his grandmother. Then, he cut his teeth as a sign painter in high school and used the funds he raised painting to pay his way through college to earn a degree as an art teacher. He never stepped into the classroom as planned, though, because his sign painting and mural business provided his livelihood since graduation. It was his knack for sign painting that landed him the mural job, as he often painted pedigree signs for cattle breeders' stall displays.

Today, Whiteman paints his murals for several breed associations, and he is grateful for the opportunity to work with these organizations, like the NJHA. Whiteman is also thankful for the help from his family and friends; without them, making these murals would be nearly impossible. When his crew, consisting of many of his family and friends, assembles each mural for the first



Since 2008, Rex Whiteman, Maysville, Mo., has hand painted the mural that goes in the JNHE showing. The process of creating these murals starts nearly a year in advance of the event.



Whiteman's paintings have served as the backdrop for JNHE exhibitors for nearly two decades.

time on site, it is the first time he sees the finished piece completely assembled.

“We don’t do it to get rich. We don’t do it for that. We do it to help others. We want to form memories,” he says. “I hope these young people realize how important they are and how much people care about what they are doing.”

Modeling tradition

The bronze bull and female statuettes are often among the most coveted prizes handed out during the JNHE. The bronzes have a storied tradition within the bald-faced breed, after being crafted in the 1970s as a reflection of the breed’s ideal. For more than 40 years, R.S. Owens Custom Awards of the St. Regis Group has created the bronze bulls and females, and the process they use has changed very little since the company was founded nearly 100 years ago.

Today, it still takes a team of 17 craftsmen between 15-20 hours to assemble the trophy, according to Mark Psaros, St. Regis Group senior vice president of operations. A couple of these skilled creators even worked on the very first bronzes created by the company.

Each bronze is cast from a zinc alloy, which is poured into three separate molds when the metal is molten. Once these hand-cast segments are hardened, the artisans solder them together before sanding, buffing, polishing and plating. Depending on the desired finish, a custom figurine might make several passes through this process to reach its desired color and shine. This same process is used by R.S. Owens to create the Golden Globe, Emmy and Oscar awards.

Even amid star-studded examples, the Hereford bronzes are such a standout that Psaros proudly displays one in his office, and he hopes that the recipients can see the care and quality of each piece.

“Hopefully, someone receiving that award will realize that someone really cared about the quality of the award. The value of the award needs to be equal to the amount of effort that goes into the award,” he says.



The bronze bulls and females awarded at national shows are a Hereford breed tradition. R.S. Owens, the bronze maker, also crafts the Golden Globe, Emmy and Oscar awards.

And, much like the American Hereford Association (AHA) and its commitment to a sustainable future, St. Regis focuses on sustainability so they can continue this time-honored tradition of excellence for decades to come.

“St. Regis values sustainability because it is essential for the long-term health of our planet and communities,” says Brianna Mazze, St. Regis Group vice president of compliance and sustainability.

Leatherworking

Sandy Crawford, Penrose, Colo., of Classic Leather Designs, has been making banners for national junior Hereford shows for 30 years. Her work predates the first JNHE, and so does her connection to the breed and its young people. Crawford served as an American Junior Hereford Association director from 1975-78, and her goal is always to make her awards as special as they can be. Each banner takes Crawford and her husband, Freeman, about six hours of handiwork.

The couple first sources the leather to create banners, which will match the theme of that year’s JNHE. Shopping for materials can be a challenge, as Crawford has to strike a balance between unique features

and affordability amid ever-increasing leather prices.

Once she has sourced leather and settled on a unique design with the NJHA team, the couple creates the leather tooling pattern for each piece. Her husband applies the pattern to the cut piece of tooling leather, and Crawford carefully carves the design into the hide. Next, the couple paints the tooled pieces before Freeman prepares all the colored pieces of leather for Crawford to stitch together. After the banner is sewn together, Crawford searches for unique finishes to give each piece some extra flair, like the long leather tassels featured this year, and Freeman carefully cuts dowels and hangs each banner.

With such a hands-on and time-consuming process, the Crawfords limit the number of junior national orders they take each year to ensure each banner is carefully crafted. Seeing their creations presented to hard-working young people makes it worthwhile.

“I am so honored to be a part of making these events special and memorable, and my whole heart goes into doing the best I know how,” Crawford says. “No matter what we are making, the recipient gets a little piece of my heart.”

Heartfelt

Chasing banners is a summer tradition for many show families, and making felt banners is Janice Fry's. The Roachdale, Ind., native pulls her car out of the garage each summer and fills its space with yards of felt, boxes of pre-cut letters and all the trimmings.

Fry first started making banners in 1987. She had been looking for a work-from-home business to balance with motherhood, and she found the perfect solution at the Indiana State Fair. When she noticed the banners hanging ringside, she thought to herself, "I could make those," and her business was born.

To perfect her designs, Fry spent time sifting through show photos and magazines to find inspiration for her now signature banner style. It's important to Fry that her banners are worthy of the hard work it takes to earn one.

Fry knows about all the time that goes into raising champion stock. Her three children showed cattle growing up, and as much as they enjoyed watching their mom sew banners, they really wanted to win one.

"They won a few, and we proudly displayed the banners in our dining room," Fry notes.

For those JNHE champions proudly displaying Fry's handiwork in their home or show barn, each banner takes 20-45 minutes to create. To prepare for



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the junior national, Fry orders 10-yard bolts of felt, spools of trim and boxes of letters after finalizing a design and color scheme with Bailey Clanton, AHA national shows coordinator and youth activities assistant.

"I really enjoy making the banners for the JNHE. Bailey is fearless about trying something new — new colors and a change in the style," Fry says. "The color combinations make it fun to put them together."

In all, creating the JNHE banners takes Fry a week and a half, and that work is well worth it to honor young people's achievements.

"It takes a lot to win a show," she says. "When they win a banner made by me, I hope my banner is worth all the hard work and time they put into raising and showing a champion."

Winning support

Regardless of whether a JNHE exhibitor leaves with a bronze bull, a banner or simply a picture of the stage, countless supporters, artisans and creators have been involved to ensure that their hard work was not only noted but appreciated. **HW**



Janice Fry, Roachdale, Ind., sews the felt banners that go to JNHE division winners. Each year, the color is customized to match the show's theme.