

CRAFTING THE FUTURE

National Hereford Queen artwork will benefit leadership scholarships.

by *Katie Maupin Miller*

The saying goes art imitates life, which is undoubtedly true for the National Hereford Queen Marie Prodell's service project. When the first-generation Hereford breeder turned breed royalty reflects on the countless people and experiences the breed has provided her, it only seemed right to give a nod to the diverse and supportive Hereford family, its young people and the opportunities the breed provides — thus, "The Next Gen Project" was born.

"The Next Gen Project" is a collage of coloring pages created by approximately 300 junior members. Each coloring page offers a snapshot of the Hereford industry rendered by Prodell's friend and graphic designer, Helena Bloohm, who visited Prodell's Hereford operation. Bloohm photographed Prodell's cattle and listened to her industry experiences to create coloring pages reflecting all sectors of the breed from pasture to plate and from youth leaders to breed changers.

Armed with Bloohm's illustrations, Prodell set up shop at the National Hereford Women (NHW) booth during the VitaFerm® Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) and encouraged junior members to color in these pages. After a week in Grand Island, Neb., Prodell had 300 original pieces of art from junior members, which she and her family will piece into "The Next Gen Project." The finished piece will be a mural made up of these colorings and framed in a custom barnwood frame handcrafted by Prodell's grandfather, Timothy Zastrow.

Diverse experiences

Much like Prodell's experience with the Hereford breed, the art piece will be finished with the support of her family but made unique by the countless young people who offered their

perspectives. This is what makes the project so special to Prodell.

"This is a project done by youth for the youth," she says. "We are the next generation, and if we, as youth exhibitors, can help encourage other youth to thrive in the Hereford breed, just like I did when I got started, the next generation to come will make history."

Through this project, Prodell was reminded of the diversity of the Hereford "family" and how this diversity creates opportunities for National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) members.

"That is the cool thing about the breed and industry. No matter where you come from, how you were brought up or the size of your farm, the passion, drive and determination for this breed is something all Hereford enthusiasts have in common," she says. "This is what makes this breed so special."

"The Next Gen Project" highlights that diversity while celebrating how the industry works together and how each viewpoint has a place.

Creating leaders

As a first-generation Hereford breeder, Prodell had worried about finding her place in the breed, only to be welcomed with open arms into the Hereford family. She credits Hereford leadership conferences, like Faces of Leadership and BOLD, with honing her leadership skills, sparking countless connections and setting her down her path as a future professional.

"I want to give youth the same opportunities I had that helped me find my path and create my story. This will give them the chance to create their story," Prodell says.

This is why "The Next Gen Project" will be offered at public auction, supported by NHW. The Queen's

Court Sale will be held leading up to the American Royal on the Sale Day app and will feature not only "The Next Gen Project" but also other original artwork created by Hereford enthusiasts. The proceeds of this artwork will go toward providing scholarships to NJHA leadership conferences so more young people can have these life-changing experiences.

"Being an individual who thought she was going to have a hard time finding her place in the industry being a first-generation Hereford breeder, attending these events provided me with the resources to learn how to make friends, become more knowledgeable about the Hereford breed, how to become a leader and how to realize where my place is in the industry," she says. "It is my path to help encourage other youth and individuals to start the same path I did. Take the chances, brave fear and trust the path that is made for you." **HW**



National Hereford Queen Marie Prodell hopes the sale of "The Next Gen Project," a collage created from junior members' artwork, will help others have the same life-changing experiences she had at NJHA leadership conferences.