Building Community, Developing Leaders

The 2026 NJHA Advisor of the Year leads through service.

by ***Christy Couch Lee***

Just minutes before the 2026 National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) Advisor of the Year's name was called, she was doing tie-outs with her state members.

"I still had a hat on," says Michigan Junior Hereford Association (MJHA) Advisor Heather Breasbois, Merrill, Mich. "I went up to the awards ceremony because I knew two of our kids were getting awards. Then they called my name, and I'm like, 'What just happened?' My MJHA kids were all laughing and so excited."

This servant leader received this honor July 9 during the Hereford Youth Foundation of America (HYFA) Scholarship, Awards and Maroon Jacket Ceremony held during the 2026 VitaFerm® Junior National Hereford Expo (JNHE) in Madison, Wis.

Serving from the start

Breasbois was raised in the Hereford industry. Her parents, Larry and Margaret Breasbois, began Breasbois Farms in 1972, and her mom was one of her first state advisors. Breasbois was active in the National Junior Polled Hereford Council and served on the board from 1996-1999. She went on to earn her doctorate degree in physical therapy and became an MJHA advisor in 2015 when her nephews, Andrew and Cole Johnston, became more involved in the MJHA and NJHA. Today, she, her mom and her sister, Christie Johnston, manage about 30 head of Hereford cattle.

Creating opportunities

Breasbois' approach to leadership is empowering junior members.

"I want the kids to feel comfortable in showing their Herefords and creating new opportunities," she says.

In fact, within the first two years of becoming advisor, she supported her young leaders with developing a junior show.

"When they step out of their bubble and try new things, they learn something, and they do better and better with each attempt," Breasbois says. "They become young leaders who will be the future, of not just the Hereford or beef industry, but of anything they want to do.

"I want them to continue for generations, so that kids will always have these opportunities to learn skills and to become amazing young adults and leaders," she adds.

Empowering youth

According to MJHA members, she is doing just that.

The Harfst family of Battle Creek, Mich., say Breasbois has left an incredible impact on them. Dad, Jonathan, says Breasbois has led the organization with a focus on support, encouragement and teamwork for state members and for his family, which includes wife, Jessica, and children: Kaytlyn, 12, Easton, 10, and Shawn, 2.

"As an advisor, Heather absolutely pours her whole heart into the kids," he says. "She has created a culture within the state of Michigan that is really unique to the industry. It is really a culture of encouragement, enthusiasm, teamwork and camaraderie."

He says when a Michigan member is competing in a contest or in the showring, she encourages others to provide support.

"She will circle the whole state, and she'll swoop them up under her wing, and they will go to cheer on their fellow exhibitors," Harfst says. "She encourages youth to be even the next step better, but yet she meets youth where they are."

Not only does Breasbois meet them where they are, but she also puts her full trust in her youth.

"Heather took cattle to the Cattlemen's Congress this past year," Harfst says. "She took a couple junior members with her as her fitting and daily help. She could have hired professional fitters, but she put her trust in the juniors instead."

Breasbois says she believes the youth are the true winners.

"If you hang out with these kids for a moment, you'll see they have great ideas, and they're a great group of kids," she says. "And I am fortunate to work with a team of advisors: Robin Bower and Ben Diekevers. They are the reason I got this award. I do a good job, but these people are amazing." HW