

Just Doing His Job

2013 Hereford Herdsman of the Year Jay Creamer believes the title is a humbling recognition for simply doing his job.

by **Christy Couch Lee**



To many, being chosen as the Hereford Herdsman of the Year at the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) in Denver is an honor above them all. It's a symbol that a person's work has caught the attention of his peers. That he's respected. That he's doing things right.

This year, Jay Creamer, Waxahachie, Texas, caught that attention.

Jay was selected for the award by his peers — other Hereford herdsmen and breeders — and was honored prior to the selection of the NWSS supreme champion Hereford on Jan. 19.

He says to receive this award is humbling. And, to him, it's simply recognition for doing the job he was hired to do.

Getting his start

Jay has been active in the cattle industry since birth. Growing up in Whitney, Texas, he showed cattle through 4-H, FFA and junior organizations.

"My parents, Jack and Jan, were very hands on, and I couldn't have done it without them," Jay says. "We maybe didn't have the resources to do as much as we did, but we succeeded at a high level in the Texas shows."

He worked for Sullivan Ranches in Hillsboro, Texas, throughout high school and during his time attending fire academy and EMT school.



Gary Buchholz (left), GKB Cattle owner, and Craig Huffhines (right), American Hereford Association executive vice president, present Jay Creamer with the 2013 Hereford Herdsman of the Year award at the NWSS in Denver.

Soon after graduating, he began working for Talmo Ranch in Talmo, Ga., where he met his wife, Lindsey. They were married in 2005 and now have two sons: 4-year-old Grady and almost 1-year-old Gage.

In 2006 Jay began doing custom work for GKB Cattle in Waxahachie. He then transitioned to the role of herdsman, where he is responsible for the show cattle herd: halter breaking, feeding, clipping, transportation and hiring help. In addition, Lindsey assists with GKB office work.

Jay says he knew the cattle industry was his passion because he simply couldn't turn away from it.

"I paid my way through EMT school and the fire academy by working with cattle," he says. "It seemed like I kept falling back into it. I love the camaraderie and the thrill of winning. You have to love it to get up and do it every day of the week."

It also helps to have mentors on whom you can rely for guidance and advice, Jay says. And he believes he has been fortunate to have many.

Inspiration along the way

Topping the list of those providing inspiration are his parents, he says.

"I lost my dad last year," Jay says. "His involvement with me really got me to where I am today. The work ethic that he and my mom handed down to me and the things they instilled in me — I wouldn't be where I am today if it weren't for them."

His wife, Lindsey, has been a great support, as well.

"I told her when I went to work for GKB what would be expected, and she has always fully supported me," he says. "She's probably the most understanding wife in the world. She has raised our two boys, and I'm not sure what I'd do without her to keep me steady."

Justin Renfro, Extension agent; Dan Sullivan of Sullivan Ranch; and Jill Miller, owner/manager of Talmo Ranch, were also extremely influential in his life, Jay says.

"I learned through them to be myself and not to try to be who someone else wants me to be," he says. "I learned that people will respect me for being myself. And if they don't, they're not your true friends."

And, he says, Gary and Kathy Buchholz, GKB Cattle owners, have been incredible mentors in his life, as well.

"Gary and Kathy are true cattlemen, and the opportunity they've given me is very humbling," he says.

The feelings are mutual

The Buchholzes also have great respect for Jay, saying he is a true asset to their operation.

"He's a true herdsman, and he is able to maximize the cattle for show day," Gary says. "He's a hard worker, he never complains, and he'll do anything. And, he's the type of guy I completely trust. I've always said I can train a person to clip and pull calves. But I can't train honesty and morals. And you can't buy them. But Jay has them both."



Jay's responsibilities as herdsman for GKB are multi-faceted — from getting cattle ready at home and at the show to being at the halter in the showing.

Not only has Jay benefited their operation, Gary says, but he's also an asset to the Hereford breed.

"He respects what the Hereford breed has to offer, and he knows they are based with a commercial base," he says. "I think the Herefords have come to a strong point. Now, we need to keep the EPDs (expected progeny differences) in balance. Keep the females looking like females and the bulls looking like bulls. And never forget the commercial cattleman. Jay knows that we must stay in the real world, working for the commercial cattleman."

Jay says of all the breeds he's worked in, the Hereford breed excels in quality — both in people and in cattle.

"I've worked in probably every facet of the cattle industry, and by far the Hereford breed and its camaraderie, people and friends — there's none above them," he says. "It's a cut above the rest."

Erick Schmidt, GKB Cattle promotion tech, says Jay is also a cut above when it comes to his relations with Hereford youth.

"He really understands juniors and motivates them to do what needs to be done," Erick says. "His patience is one of his most vital attributes. He's been really good at slowing down and working with the individuals. He doesn't get mad very easily, and if he does, he's not going to let you see it — especially with the young kids."

In addition, Erick says, Jay understands how to get the most from the cattle in the herd.

"For the Herdsman of the Year award, you have to prove it to earn it," Erick says. "He's taken the GKB program to the national stage and has proven his abilities. He's consistently earned this recognition. And he's an overall great cattleman."

In fact, his focus on the cattle of the industry almost led to him missing the award announcement.

Standing ringside, discussing cattle with a fellow cattleman, Jay was focused on conversation as the award presentation began, just before the supreme champion Hereford contenders entered the NWSS showing.

"Erick kept elbowing me and telling me to listen," he says with a laugh.

But once he heard the announcement, his focus most definitely shifted.

"I just can't explain how it felt to hear my name announced," Jay says. "It's an honor above all honors. The

Tips from the Herdsman

Jay Creamer, Waxahachie, Texas, was recently named the 2013 Hereford Herdsman of the Year at the National Western Stock Show. He shares these tips for success in the industry.

- **Everyone starts somewhere.** "Nobody starts at the top," he says. "You have to work your way up."
- **Surround yourself with the best.** "You're only as good as the people you associate with," Jay says. "If I didn't have the crew I have working with me for GKB, this wouldn't have been possible. It means more to me than anything to have a crew behind me that I can trust."
- **Take every opportunity to learn.** "Try to spend more time listening instead of talking," he says. "You may learn something that you don't want to do. Or you may learn a new way to do something. But you have to listen."
- **It's all about respect.** "Respect the people that came before you," Jay says. "If it weren't for the people that have brought the Hereford industry to where it is today, none of us would have a job."
- **Open your eyes.** "Observation is probably one of the best tools you have," he says. "Whether it's learning something to do or not to do, if you're not learning, you're falling behind." **HW**



guys that have been before me are my friends and guys that I look up to. To be mentioned and to go after them is truly an honor."

Winning the Herdsman of the Year title wasn't something Jay sought to win, he says. It's simply recognition for doing his job to the best of his abilities.

"I wouldn't think anyone goes out to win the Herdsman of the Year award," he says. "But I just do the best I can. If you're doing the right things and surrounding yourself with the right people, good things will happen."

And, he's hopeful that good things will happen for years to come.

Jay says he's not sure what the future holds for his boys and their involvement in the cattle industry. But he would love to carry on the Hereford tradition with them.

"I truly hope it's their desire to show Hereford cattle, just to be able to spend the time with them," he says. "I know how much of a difference it made in my life, working with my mom and dad. There's no greater reward as a parent than to be able to share this with them." **HW**