Cowboy Hall of Fame: Jack Reich

Par 1 of 2
By Kate Johnson

Editor’s note: This will be a two-part series as two individuals from Mercer County will be inducted into the Cowboy Hall of Fame this month. This story will be focused on Jack Reich and his life, while the next story will be about Ralph Murray.

“He was the best one of all of us,” a sentence that is often said by people who knew Jack Reich.

Jack Reich was known for a lot of things: a rancher, a cowboy, a family man, someone who was dedicated, hard working, passionate and always an eternal optimist.

The way people could describe who Jack was and how he lived is endless.

Recently Jack was nominated and awarded into the Cowboy Hall of Fame in the Leaders of Ranching and Rodeo category. He will now live on for eternity in not only the memories of an entire community but in history.

Jack grew up south of Zapol on a cattle ranch with his family. He was the oldest of three and always knew he wanted to grow up to be a cowboy. He was his father Delvin Reich’s right hand man and took responsibilities that came with being the oldest and helping his father.

As any rancher’s kid, rodeo was in the blood of the family. Jack followed in his father’s footsteps and into the arena. There was born a passion for bareback riding. He started to ride in local events riding calves but he continued to progress like in everything he did – Jack was the hardest worker in the room.

He was just naturally good at a lot of things but that was because of how much he worked at it. He competed in bareback riding in high school and earned his ticket to the National High School Rodeo Finals – a ticket he earned several times and claimed a Reserve Championship designation at the state level in 1987 and 1988.

Because of his work ethic and talent Jack was given a scholarship to Montana State University. This is where Jack saw more triumph in the arena and became part of the National Champion Team in 1991. Later he worked his way into the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association.

However, life started to pull him away from the ring. Jack married the love of his life, Mardee, in 1996, which in that same year the newlyweds purchased half of the family ranch from Jack’s uncle. Meanwhile Jack also had his own fencing company with partner Tom Mau – Knife River Feencing. Because of his work ethic and roots, in 1997 he decided to walk away from the arena and made his family and ranch his focus.

With the ranch now split between his father Delvin and Jack, he took on operations of his portion. Mardee said Jack had the best work ethic, “I can’t say a lot of things came easy for him but he worked his butt off until he mastered it,” said Mardee – which went for all things Jack did.

It was that strong work ethic that drove Jack and Mardee into the business of setting a standard for Angus. Because of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, Jack met a man from Idaho who was a purebred producer. This producer took a liking to Jack and they were able to take 20 head of his cows – which is where the Reich’s built their herd and reputation.

Growing up, Jack’s family operation was a combination of different cows but Jack had always taken a liking to black cattle and saw an opportunity in the Angus market and jumped right in. “He knew what his ideal cow was going to be and it was all about the girls,” said Mardee. Together they developed an Angus seedstock operation, which quickly earned prominence in the region. This was because of Jack’s high standard for maternal traits, functionality and structural correctness in his cowherd.

This standard went hand-in-hand with Jack’s morals of honesty and humility. Through the years Jack and Mardee continued to grow their herd and through time faced many obstacles and made many sacrifices. “We did without for the good of the ranch,” said Mardee of the tougher times their ranch saw. Things like upgrading equipment or vehicles, a producer just made do with what they had.

However, Mardee said the bonds you create and the people within the ranching and See Reich page 20

Jack Reich has many achievements in his Rodeo career from the high school competition to professional.

ACHIEVEMENTS

RODEO
• North Dakota High School Rodeo Bareback Riding Two-Time Reserve Champion
• National High School Rodeo Bareback Riding Competitor Multiple Years
• Montana State University Rodeo Team and Scholarship Recipient
• National Collegiate Rodeo Champion Team Member
• Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association Bareback Rider

RANCHING
• Reich Angus Owner, Operator and Founder – Developed a successful and highly regarded registered and commercial Angus operation
• North Dakota Stockmen’s Association Director, Vice President and President – During his tenure, led a disaster relief effort that delivered more than $50,000 to ranchers who were devastated by relentless blizzards and droughts and welcomed foreign investors to the state who were considering building a large-scale beef processing facility in the state. Jack also helped facilitate and trade between U.S. And Kazakhstan beef producers, making a trip to Kazakhstan himself to gauge opportunities and develop relationships
• National Cattlemen’s Beef Association Director and Member – Represented the nation’s beef industry in Washington, D.C., meeting with Congressional and agency leaders on issues impacting cattlemen and women around the country.
• North Dakota Angus Association Director

Jack Reich and his wife, Mardee and their three children, Vander, Kaydee and Will
Reich

Jack was the rancher that was always the mentor, even when he didn’t know he was mentoring someone. When someone else needed a hand, Jack would always find the time to go out and help them. Mardee said, especially with the younger ranchers coming up, he was always willing to share whatever knowledge he had.

Even if he didn’t know the answer to what they were asking he would tell them he didn’t know but he could find out.

This is something Jack saw through in his children as well. Mardee told a story of when Jack was artificially inseminating a cow, when their oldest son Vander was barely 5 years old. He asked his dad what they were doing. “Instead of dumbing it down, he would tell him step by step,” said Mardee with a laugh, which she remembers asking her husband why would you explain something like that so in depth to a child. Jack’s response was that he wanted to overload them with knowledge.

Like anyone in the agriculture field, a lot of elements are out of their hands and this was a hiccup Jack knew well. Jack’s coin phrase was, “It is what it is,” which Mardee said he was always the eternal optimist. “He always found the good in somebody...even though there are some people you have to look really long to find,” said Mardee with a laugh.

Jack was always a glass-half-full kind of person and wouldn’t spend a second being upset over things that were out of his control.

Just as any producer, they don’t stop for 15 minute breaks or clock out and get to go home for the night. Their work never stops, which meant the cab of the tractor was often the home of a car seat and the middle of a field became the dinner table.

Mardee said there were often times that her and the kids would bring a picnic out to Jack in the field and they would all eat together.

As an invested producer Jack saw the importance of being innovative in his community and had always been a member of the North Dakota Stockmen’s Association. He made his way through the ranks and was a director, and later was propositioned if he would be interested in presidency.

It was a position he had to speak to his wife about because he was unsure of. Being a guy who didn’t see himself in a position like that, Mardee reaffirmed he was just the guy for the job. “I said Jack, you got to do it, you are young and progressive and passionate about cattle; and you would get the younger generation in there,” Mardee said.

She said taking on that role was amazing to watch because of how much it pulled him out of his comfort zone. From when he started, having an unease for public speaking to becoming a seasoned and sound voice for the association. “Being a part of that organization really took him to the next level... it was amazing to watch him,” said Mardee.

Jack embodied all that it was to be a cowboy. He not only had a love for the cows themselves but the camaraderie of the people he met throughout his travels in the industry. It was because of his passion that he got involved and once he did, the opportunities came from that.