

Among the visionary cowmen . . .

There is only one Pete Heffering

VISION. It was a sixth sense the gifted Pete Heffering had when it came to evaluating, developing, and breeding cows. His Hanover Hill Holstein herd has earned 144 All-American and 90 All-Canadian nominations which resulted in 31 All-American, 33 Reserve All-American, 23 All-Canadian, and 24 Reserve All-Canadian award winners. And for six consecutive years beginning in 1983, Hanover Hill was Premier Breeder at both World Dairy Expo and the Royal Winter Fair. Brookview Tony Charity, the cornerstone, was four times Grand Champion at both shows and four times Supreme Champion at World Dairy Expo. The herd also has proven an impressive 177 bulls in Canada — including Starbuck, Inspiration, and Raider.

Hoard's Dairyman visited with Pete to reflect on his 55-year career that has taken him from the pinnacle of dairy cattle breeding to a new profession as a very successful breeder and owner of standardbred horses.

When did you first realize you wanted to make a career in the dairy industry?

Growing up, I wasn't a farm boy. My father was a doctor. He had a couple brothers who were interested in agriculture. One had a dairy; another one was in the thoroughbred horse business.

Although I really didn't know much about the purebred game, I did start showing cattle during the summer in Vermont when I was 13. I did quite well in the 4-H aspect of showing in Hartland, Vt. I really enjoyed that. It really got into my



CHARITY WAS FOUR TIMES GRAND CHAMPION at the Royal Winter Fair and four times Supreme Champion at World Dairy Expo. In 1982, she became the first-ever cow to be Grand Champion at all three U.S. national shows in one year. That year, Hanover Hill traveled over 8,000 miles in 65 days to exhibit at the three U.S. national shows and the Royal Winter Fair.

blood and it kind of stayed in my blood all throughout my dairy career.

After high school, I enrolled at State University New York-Canton and graduated in 1951 with a degree in animal husbandry which turned out well for me. (In 2004, Pete was awarded the first-ever doctorate from the University.) Then I went to work for the Beacon Milling Company Research Farm which had a purebred Holstein herd.

How did your career develop?

In 1961, I leased Danboro Holstein Farm, Danboro, Pa., owned by Frank Goodyear. We were only there 15 months and he sold that place. Next I went to Tara Hill Farms in Millbrook, N.Y., in 1962. We stayed there until we had the sale in March 1968.

Then we leased what was the second Hanover Hill Farm that housed Holsteins in Amenia, N.Y. We were there until we sold out in 1972. Then I bought the farm here in Port Perry, Ontario, Canada in 1973. We've been residing here ever

since. We had sales in 1985, 1987, 1989, and then had a complete dispersal in 1998.

When you began your career at the Beacon Milling Research Farm, you developed daughters of Amcana Dictator Model that went on to become All-American Get of Sire. One of those cows, Maroy Model Abbekerk, was voted All-Time All-American 4-year-old in the early '60s. What do you recall from working with these first of many All-Americans?

I was lucky enough to get involved with the Amcana Dictator Models. They were the catalyst for my success. They were just super quality cows, tremendous dairy cows.

In that All-American Get of Sire, three of the four cows were individual All-Americans themselves in one year or another. Abbekerk, Postenhill Model Bubbles, and Crest Lane Model Faith were their names. Maroy Model Abbekerk was special . . . she was an exceptional cow for her day. I mean udder-wise, she was a tremendous uddered cow, especially going back that many years. Abbekerk was nominated for All-American seven times.

This year's National Dairy Shrine Guest of Honor, Dr. Lee Allenstein, called you a great cowman because of your "vision." Can you describe your vision?

I'm just one of many successful cowmen. Everybody talks about a sixth sense. I think the great athletes or whoever is extremely successful have a sixth sense. My God-given sixth sense is visualizing what a cow might look like after you've developed her for a year or so. Being able to say, I think in a year this cow that's 85 can really be a 93- or 94-point cow. That's done by visualizing, getting her fed and filled out, working with her feet and legs, and so forth.

The first time I saw the Charity cow, actually Dave Younger was with me, we went into the barnyard. She was stale and had a hock with a bump on it. I just took a look at her and said, "Dave, we have to get this cow."

The owner was willing to consign her. Thankfully, he wasn't as excited about her as I . . . and I was trying not to be excited outwardly. That was tough. We got her

consigned to the Designer Fashion Sale, and George Morgan and I bought her. I thought she had great potential. (At a later date, Pete bought out George's interest.) Not to say I haven't been wrong at times because nobody guesses right all the time.

I think it was a God-given gift to be able to see a cow in the rough. Who knows how many calls I ever had where someone said, "This is a great cow; come and take a look at her." You go look at 100 of them and 99 of them wouldn't be what you hoped they were going to be.

What is your favorite show-ring memory?

There are so many. Of course, Charity being four times Supreme Champion. She is the only cow to this day to be four times Grand Champion at the Royal Winter Fair and four times Supreme Champion at World Dairy Expo. In 1982, she also became the first cow to be Grand Champion at all three U.S. national shows in the same year.

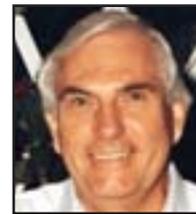
There were lots of highlights. Being Premier

Breeder always meant a lot to me. We were Premier Breeder six straight years at the Royal and World Dairy Expo. That was special.

There are other highlights. But those have to be at the top of the list.

You've worked with many great cows. Who's your favorite?

That's a tough one. It's not often you can say that you had five or six cows that developed families that became known worldwide. Of course there is the Roxy family. Today, the Roxy family may be more popular than it was 15 years ago. In our Hanover Hill Legacy sale that the boys put on this July, the first 20 lots in the catalog trace directly back to Roxy. That says quite a bit. (That sale on July 22 averaged \$20,079 on 67 lots.)



Heffering

Star Lulu, she had a lot of good daughters. John's Lucky Barb had a big influence early on. We had all kinds of family members. The Marq I Papoose family, that did lots of things for us.

But the purchase of Roxette, the daughter of Roxy, at the national convention sale turned out to be a momentous thing for us.

Your Hanover Hill Sale in 1972 was the first dispersal to bring more than \$1 million. That day, Tara-Hills Pride Lucky Barb set a world-record price of \$122,000. Then in 1985, the Hanover Hill herd brought over \$7 million with Brookview Tony Charity selling for \$1.45 million, still a Canadian record. There also was the record-setting 1983 Designer Fashion Sale which averaged \$145,000 on 62 lots on the red carpet at Madison Square Garden in New York, N.Y. What have you learned about having a successful sale?

1. You have got to have quality product.
2. You have to market them.

Of course, the market itself comes into play. We did enjoy some extremely good years with investment buyers. Unfortunately the Holstein Association really didn't do much to endear themselves to those people. Still they put a lot of money into the industry and I had the luxury of being involved with the investment era. This era made it possible to put on some first-class sales with good cattle. We were able to really do things up right.

The sale at Madison Square Garden in New York City was quite expensive. I remember the catering bill alone was \$157,000. That was more than the gross of many sales. The investment era is a time that we're never likely to see again.

What is your favorite memory from sales?

The aura created by good sales. Working those sales with outstanding auctioneers, ringmen, sales crews, and great cattle can be exhilarating.

The aura of the Charity cow selling was my favorite memory. That was a special sale. There were a lot of great cattle and great people here from all over the world. We were fortunate.

It was a lot of work but we always tried to do a complete package . . . having the cattle look right, having the farm look right, having strong auction crews, trying to have everything as good as we could have it, and doing a top job of advertising and marketing.

You bred many great bulls including Starbuck, Inspiration, Raider, Lieutenant, and Triple Threat. Who was your favorite?

Starbuck obviously . . . his worldwide impact is tremendous. There's an article in Canada which talks about Starbuck being in 93 percent of Canadian Holstein pedigrees. And, of course, many of his sons and grandsons have gone onto greatness.

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Starbuck not only contributed through his sons but his daughters, as well. Many of them have become great brood cows.

Triple Threat ranks right up there. Number one, he was the first recessive Red Holstein that ever got any notoriety. Of course, it was early in the Red game. His influence around the world was great. Doug Maddox of Ruann Dairy in California traveled in Europe a great deal. He said Triple Threat was the one bull that could take cows whose dams scored in the 60s then make a daughter Good Plus or even Very Good. He could raise the level of conformation that much.

And, of course, Triple Threat daughters made some great brood cows. I have had more than one person say, "My success in breeding cattle was because of the great daughters of Triple Threat that I had in my herd."

Obviously, a lot of bulls had influence. But if you're just picking one or two, it has to be Starbuck and Triple Threat in my mind.

Ken Travena was a working partner for 48 years. How did you work as a team to achieve this success?

Ken is still with me. We couldn't have had our success without him. He was probably more important than I when you consider the success of our cows. To this day, we're working together, and we've been together since he came to Beacon in 1958. Ken is a great



Travena

cowman. Most good cowmen aren't good with machinery, but he can do it all. He is an exceptional cowman and farm manager.

Obviously, I had to be on the road quite a bit the further we got into this thing. I was on the road finding cattle, buying cattle, and going to sales and shows. I always felt that if there was a problem at the farm and Ken couldn't figure it out, I sure couldn't be of help.

It's still that way today. We're not milking cows anymore. We're in the horse game now. He's still doing everything that he always did. We really complement each other. His strengths and my strengths matched up quite well. I'm sales- and marketing-orientated, and he was about keeping the cattle healthy. You can't have successful show cows unless they're getting year-round care. It doesn't all happen the week before a show.

What advice would you offer to young people who want to develop a quality herd?

I'd rather have one good cow, one good heifer, or one good family and develop them as best I can with embryo transfer. One good cow can make you successful financially and get you known worldwide. Meanwhile, 100 mediocres can do nothing for you really — they'll produce cash flow through milk.

You take a fellow like Matt

Nunes, of Chippewa Falls, Wis., who bought Tony Rae in our sale for \$15,000 as a calf. That one cow has literally made him more money than he ever thought of making with all the other cows he's owned in his life. She flushed, the daughters and granddaughters flushed, and the family has gone on and developed. From that \$15,000, I wouldn't know the total number of dollars he's grossed from that family since he bought her as a heifer. But I can guarantee it's between \$1 million and \$1-1/2 million, if not more. That's saying quite a bit.

It doesn't all happen in a day. But like I say, one good cow, I'd be putting the embryos in all the mediocre ones that you have.

What are you doing now?

Still working full-time. We're in the standardbred business with my youngest son. We race pacers and trotters. We have a stud farm which my son, David, runs. We bred 1,100 mares with 12 stallions this year. Some stallions we lease, some we are part owners, and some we own 100 percent. We use fresh-chilled semen. We ship all over North America — the East and West Coast of Canada and in the U.S. We're the largest stud farm in Canada now. We bred more mares than anybody in Canada this year. And I think we're in the top three in North America . . . now we're probably second. We have brood mares. We've bred a couple world champions, and we sell yearlings.

So we do it all basically like we did in the cow business except we didn't have a stud farm. Then we sold our bulls to the A.I. units. There's lots of parallels in the breeding of horses that there were in cattle. We do a good job marketing and use all the tools available to us.

At the 1981 World Dairy Expo, Hanover Hill Holsteins had the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 7th place Aged Cows. Do you remember those five cows?

The seventh place was the Gaydale Fury cow. Then there was Monitor Rachael, Standout Kandy, Triple Threat Lulu, and Ormsby Prilly. Rachael was named Grand and Kandy was Reserve. That was something . . . I must say it was quite a thrill. I don't believe it has ever been duplicated by any one herd again.

How did you find five showmen for them?

It's never too hard to find good showmen for good cows. Lowell Lindsey and Mack Logan always helped us. There were others. Back in those days, we'd help show each others' cattle. We always had good comradery. Guys were always more than willing to help each other.

I'd say it's a different ball game today. I always hear these boys who get on a strap and charge \$200 to \$300 or more to show one. In all the years that I ever showed cattle, I never took a dollar from anybody. I showed them because I wanted to show them. I wanted to help somebody. If I thought I could help somebody, I would. I never ever took a dollar for showing cattle for anybody. 🐄

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