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A Little About

Life, Livestock & Love

As the Governor's Charity Steer Show approaches, we want to acknowledge the importance of and show appreciation to the twenty-five sponsors of this wonderful event. Without their support, the event, the experience, and the outcome would be drastically different, and we thank them for their commitment to making this event great.

Many of our sponsors have been with the Governor's Charity Steer Show for years, but one of the most tenured and active is Don Foley, with the Iowa Bankers Association. The Iowa Bankers Association has been sponsoring since the beginning years, with Don as the go-to representative from the organization.

THE START

Don said he was part of a committee formed by Gov. Terry Branstad with several businesses to bring the Governor's Charity Steer Show concept to fruition, which happened in 1983. As a business with a strong customer base in agriculture, his leadership thought it would be a wonderful opportunity, and according to Don, it certainly has been.

"Right off the bat, it was very popular with the fans who were coming to see someone out showing a steer who is not a steer-showing person (the celebrity)," said Don. "Then you pair that with the wonderful place to exhibit agriculture, the Iowa State Fair, and it was the perfect blend of agriculture, young people, and business. It made a nice trio to get things rolling."

There was a real thrust at the beginning to keep the majority of what the event was able to generate within the state of Iowa. As the committee evaluated charitable organizations, the Ronald McDonald House Charities of Iowa rose to the top. As Don shared, everyone has had a child or knows a child who has needed help. The Ronald McDonald House Charities are there to step in and have been very prominent in a lot of people's lives.

Don said, "They have been great to the show, and I think the show has been great to them."

When we asked Don about his tenure as the Governor's Charity Steer Show representative for the Iowa Bankers Association, he said he got tapped on because he showed cattle as a young person and grew up on a farm. In his role, he was responsible for the association's agriculture portfolio, which made him a logical pick.

Iowa Bankers Association, and in his agricultural liaison role, Don worked and represented predominantly banks in rural communities in towns with less than 10,000 people, where a lot of the customer base was farmers. We uncovered that this has been a factor to his success of picking champion steers – a network of scouts across the state looking for a good one!

A MEMORABLE MOMENT

In the early years, the Iowa Bankers Association's celebrity was always Mark Pearson with WHO radio, until he passed away in 2012.

"Mark was a wonderful man, just a sweetheart of a man," said Don. "We became great friends. Mark's life was built around young people. He was great with kids. He was institutional at the State Fair and agriculture in general."

Don explained that Mark passed away in June, just a few short months before the Governor's Charity Steer Show that year. He didn't know exactly what to do. He met with Mark's wife, Eden, and asked her what they should do. He had gotten to know her well and wanted to honor Mark. Together, they agreed that they would ask Mark and Eden's son, Mike, and daughter, Betsy, to do the honor.



The team had a great youth exhibitor and steer that year. They were steer number seven! The Pavilion was packed. As Mike and Betsy came through the Pavilion door and were introduced, there was an instantaneous standing ovation. Tears were running down people's faces because of the love this state had for Mark.

"We won that year," said Don as tears filled his eyes. "It was a huge celebration and a kind of contentedness. That one means the most to me. However, that doesn't take anything away from any of the other ones that I've had that have won!"

A CHAMPION MINDSET

Seven times! That is how many times over the years that Don and the Iowa Bankers Association have won. Their current celebrity, Jeff Angelo, also with WHO, has won three of the last five years. They have also raised more than a quarter million dollars as a sponsor over the years. That is an incredible legacy.

Of course, we asked about his secret to success. According to Don, it is all about the family. He knows that he will be working closely with them throughout the process. Don is even a regular in the Cattle Barn at the Iowa State Fair the three days leading up to the show, offering pointers, getting to know the exhibitor, sharing tips from previous years, and getting the calf ready.

"That interaction has always been important to me," said Don. "I want them to know that they're going to have a wonderful experience and that their child is going to have a wonderful experience. And if there is something I can do to make it better, I'm going to do that."

While Don admits he thinks he has an eye for cattle, he said he's been pretty lucky!

So not really spilling his secret, but connection with the family and the exhibitor are definitely important. Don shared that he has been to eight high school graduations, three college graduations, and three weddings so far for his past youth exhibitors.

"They put a little soft spot in your heart," said Don. "None of them had to include me, but I truly think they did it because of how Iowa Bankers Association and even how I treated them and the memories that we had together."

THE CAUSE

Don understands why the tie to the Ronald McDonald House Charities is so important.

"Anybody in Iowa can have a child who needs medical help," said Don. "Maybe your local hospital isn't right or can't cover it, but somewhere in Des Moines or Iowa City could. Anyone can experience that need. The Ronald McDonald Houses try to make the situation more bearable by providing a place to stay, food, and camaraderie in those moments."

He also expressed his gratitude for how involved this charity is. He noted that each of the three Iowa House executives are in attendance and engaged throughout the whole process. They meet the kids who show, talk to them about what they do and how their contributions help others. Don shared that he feels this is a critical part of helping the youth exhibitors feel connected to the cause.

We asked Don what he thinks the Governor's Charity Steer Show means for the Ronald McDonald House Charities of Iowa. He said involvement.

"Involving people who may not think on a day-to-day basis that they need to reach into their pocket and hand some money over to the Ronald McDonald House," said Don. "But more truly, helping them understand the importance of the facilities in Iowa. I think a lot of those who participate have their eyes open to doing something for other people, especially the kids."

It was a pleasure to sit down and talk with Don about his experience. A humble presence with a deep passion for this event, the youth he interacts with, and the cause. We thank Don for his time and leave you with these final thoughts from him.

"I love the Iowa State Fair. I love the cattle shows. And I love young people. There are not many ways to combine those and build them better than the Governor's Charity Steer Show does. I think everybody learns a little about life, a little about young people, and a little about livestock. This event will forever hold one of the biggest places in my heart."

