

Sharing Family Traditions Volunteer Program

Sitting in the green seats in the Stadium Arena next to his father as they watched the various cattle shows is one of John Hiemer's fondest memories of the National Western Stock Show. It is those family traditions, love of the agricultural heritage and the desire to mentor and share that lifestyle with others that drives John to continue to be involved with this historic entity.



Visiting the Stock Show each January with his father was a highlight for this flatlander who grew up on a cow/calf operation in Nebraska. John was determined to get involved with the Stock Show as a tribute to his father, who passed away in 2009 after his final visit to Denver. He finally took the leap in 2013 to become a National Western volunteer and hasn't looked back. In fact, it has become a family affair with two more generations of his family now proud volunteers. John, Cori Geare and Lauren Wray are normally engulfed in the activity on grounds, helping in the horse show setting jumps, driving gators and opening gates so the pause this January offered us a chance to get to know them better. Of course, John's involvement continues to increase. He became a horse show volunteer lead only a couple years into volunteering and is now a current member of the NWSS Volunteer Committee, overseeing and supporting several service areas and promoting the vast volunteer program.



NWSS: Tell us how you found the National Western and how did you get involved in the volunteer program?

JH: It goes back to when Cori was a little kid her grandfather would take her to the Stock Show every year. They would come back with tons and tons of swag. So I started going down there and starting seeing the volunteers. I used to fly my dad out to go to the Stock Show and I would see the volunteers. I kept thinking it was so cool with the history of the Stock Show that I wanted to be a part of that and really to honor my father who died in 2009 which was the last year he came out for the Stock Show. I remember going down there for a whole week with my dad, sitting in the Stadium Arena, watching the cattle judging and the swine being judged and just how at 85 he could sit there in the stands and he was able to pick out 1, 2 and 3 – the top three steers and it would match with the three the judge would pick. I

would sit there and look at dad and say 'Dad, how can you do that? I can't even see that far let alone pick out 1, 2 and 3.' It got me excited about volunteering although it took me a few years before I pulled the trigger. I finally just said 'I've got to do it.'

LG: It looked fun after he had been doing it for two years and I just decided to pull the trigger. I wanted to be a part of that family. I think it's the animals that pulled me in.

NWSS: Did you grow up in Colorado?

CG: I was born and raised in Colorado. Yes, I showed locally at barns around Littleton area. I actually went to a few shows in Wyoming with my former trainer.

JH: I am a flatlander from Nebraska so don't hold that against me. But I did get a road map to Colorado with my diploma when I graduated, according to my father.

NWSS: Do you have a favorite event in the horse show or on grounds?

JH: Mine would have to be the Grand Prix only because the first year I volunteered I turned 60. The Grand Prix was on my birthday so Carol got everyone to sing happy birthday to me while I was working jump crew.

CG: I love jumping so I would have to say the Grand Prix as well.

LG: The big Clydesdales coming in that shake the ground.

CG: That gives me goosebumps.



NWSS: What is unique about volunteering for the NWSS?

JH: The opportunity to be up close and personal. It is fun to get to know the exhibitors and have an opportunity to get to know the ring steward and announcers which is cool. And working with royalty for handing out ribbons.

CG: I would agree. Being up close and personal. Getting to know the participants, the ring master and everyone who is a part of the show.

LG: Introducing the public and educating them about Stock Show and telling them something they probably didn't even know.

NWSS: And Lauren is the coolest person on campus because her grandpa is on a poster.

CG: That's right!

NWSS: What is one word or phrase describing what NWSS means to you?

JH: To me it would be family history. It is history about the livestock industry and the equine industry and how important and critical it is that we educate the kids out there. Like they say, it is our food source. So many kids go to the grocery store and think that is where their food comes from. To me, it is the history and it is great being a part of that history.

CG: Gosh, there are too many words. For me, I am always inspired. I love watching people show their animals and it inspires me to maybe think about getting back out there someday. I feel immensely proud watching people with their animals and the work that they do to be there. It takes a lot of work to show an animal.

LG: Family because there is something about Stock Show where it just feels so friendly and inviting. These families come together to show their animals to show what they do when they're not at Stock Show.

NWSS: Why do you keep returning to NWSS?

JH: It's the smell!

CG: It's a thing. It really is.

JH: I think it's all the people. They are the salt of the earth. They are genuine. It is fun to bond again with the volunteers you haven't seen all year. It's good to see the exhibitors who come back year after year.

CG: I like meeting new people, even if it's briefly. I like the interaction of being around people, talking and learning their story. Everyone has a story and it is interesting to be around them.

NWSS: What are you most proud of?

JH: Mentoring people, especially the urbanites who have no idea what they're seeing. It's fun to tell them what is going on in the Events Center or in the Stadium Arena and why they are doing what they're doing.

CG: For me, it would be being a team player. When I'm done with a shift and I have some time before the next shift I like helping out as much as I can.

LG: I am going to pull from these two's ideas. I like helping out if someone needs directions to the education center or if they need help to figure out where an event is.

JH: We are ambassadors. Walking around with a volunteer target on our back, we need to be able to answer questions or say 'let me take you there'. While you're walking, find out if they have questions or if they want to know what else they can see at the Stock Show. We are basically walking billboards. I remember one time walking down towards the yards and there was a couple with their little girl who had come in from Columbia. They were trying to find the International Room so I said 'I'm headed that way so I'll take you.' I learned they have a ranch where they raise and train Paso Fino's. He showed me a video of them riding. I thought, how cool is that. He taught me something I didn't know.

NWSS: What is your most memorable experience you have had at NWSS?

LG: When I first started, I volunteered for the Mounted Shooting. I was so excited but it was probably the worst time because I wore cowboy boots for that shift so I got blisters all over my feet.

CG: For me, it is anytime I get to volunteer side by side with my daughter.

JH: And Cori's first year, Lauren was the trainer and Cori was the trainee.

NWSS: What are you most looking forward to in 2022?

CG: Being back with the volunteers again and all of our friends. Being back down on the dirt with the exhibitors and horses and cows. I miss being down there and everything about it.

JH: It is going to be bigger, better and more exciting.

CG: With a whole year off, I think people are going to be really excited to get back to it. We will probably see record numbers of people.

JH: It will be exciting to have the new yards and Stockyards Events Center. There are going to be more head of cattle down there. They are going to love the new wash racks and have water and electricity there so they won't have to run their generators. It's going to be a whole new sound down there.

LG: Being able to smell the animals again.

For more information on the NWSS Volunteer Program, visit NationalWestern.com/Volunteers/