

AIJCA Experiences Lay Foundation For American Royal Chairman



Brant Laue in his Kansas City office overlooking Crown Center. The American Royal Complex is located just over the hill from his office.

By Linda Eck

Sharing a passion for agriculture instilled by growing up on a ranch in Hanover, Kansas and nurtured through early involvement in programs of the American International Junior Charolais Association, Brant Laue has taken the helm of the American Royal during this, its 113th anniversary year.

The new Chairman of the Board of Directors speaks proudly of the American Royal and its mission to educate urban youth of the importance of agriculture while also maintaining strong traditions within the livestock industry and enjoying a unique

foothold in the history of Kansas City. While the magnitude of this position speaks boldly of Laue's remarkable success story, he is quick to speak adamantly of his roots and the dedication his parents maintained in establishing the groundwork for the family's internationally known Laue Charolais Ranch.

Tallying a long list of accomplishments during his time as a member of the AIJCA, Laue remembers thoroughly his own experiences with his family while growing up in the purebred livestock business. From participating in the first Junior National Charolais Show in Lincoln, Nebraska and subsequent

Junior National Charolais Shows and Leadership Conferences across the country to serving as Area 5 director and then vice president of the association, he fondly remembers telling the story of his father's dream of building a purebred Hereford herd, turned Charolais, as part of a public speaking contest. The belt buckle he won for his presentation now takes its place in the trophy case at the Laue Ranch, along with numerous awards for championship Charolais cattle, memorabilia and photos depicting the family's trek to success.

"I've met so many people outside of the ranch," said Laue, remembering the many trips and contests he participated in as an AIJCA member. "The speaking competitions, socialization and special projects were all good for me." Laue went on to note that his contacts as a young cattleman have led him to lifelong friendships, business partners, investors and most importantly helped him make a good transition to the outside world.

But people contacts weren't the only ones to influence Laue. His hands on experience with cattle have also made a lasting impression.

"There's a tremendous amount of self confidence garnered from working with animals," said the 50-year-old Laue, noting that it's hard to be intimidated by people when you've reckoned with a herd sire that weighs well over a ton. Taking that attitude with him into conference and court rooms, Laue, a partner in the Kansas City regional law firm of Armstrong Teasdale LLP, is a hard hitting attorney handling complex commercial litigation for major corporate clients.

As a young Charolais breeder in the late 70s, Laue graduated as valedictorian of the Class of 1979 at Hanover High School, but "didn't really want to go to college." Encouragement from an acquaintance whose alliance quickly manifested itself as one of those "lifetime friendships" resulted in his attending Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where he graduated with honors in 1983. From that point in his life there were no barriers too big to stop his intentions of attending law school. Scholarships to Cornell University landed him in New York, where he checked in as a first year law student proclaiming

his off-campus activity as "working on the ranch"; hardly a common response from typical Ivy League students of the acclaimed institution.

While at Cornell he became a member of the respected Cornell Law Review during his second year and served as editor during his third and final year, again graduating with honors.

"Law school was an amazing intellectual experience," said Laue from his 14th floor Kansas City law office overlooking Crown Center and just over the hill from the American Royal complex. Making the most of his formal education, Laue was able to again make connections that will last a lifetime. College internships and post-graduation experiences included a stint with then Wyoming Congressman, and now former Vice President Dick Cheney; law clerk for Judge Roger L. Wollman of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 8th Circuit in Pierre, S.D., and special assistant to the Assistant Attorney General in the U.S. Department of Justice during the Reagan Administration.

But, during the remarkable journey which unfolded as seven years of higher education, while dedicated to his mission, he never strayed far from his Kansas roots and the ranch work at Laue Charolais. Before seeing his AIJCA membership end, Laue had one goal yet to materialize – winning the steer show at the county fair. Scouring the countryside for the perfect steer, Laue succeeded in attaining that award, adding to his long list of achievements as a junior cattleman, but more importantly fueling his intrigue of livestock genetics and laying another stone in his foundation for future leadership roles.



With my father when he judged the Charolais show at the Royal Winter Fair (Toronto, ON) in 1973 -- I was 11 years old.

“We have to work harder and harder to maintain position,” said Laue, speaking confidently of the American Royal’s impact on the Kansas City economy. “There’s so much competition.”

Viewing himself as the “beneficiary of a successful purebred business”, Laue takes seriously his role as Chairman of the Board of Directors of the American Royal and its mission “to promote and celebrate the excellence in agricultural progress and develop future generations of leaders through agrarian values, disciplines and expressions of skills.”

With the October 25, 2011 announcement by the American Royal and the Kemper Family to replace Kemper Arena with a new Agricultural Events Center, Laue’s year as chairman is destined to take him on yet another leadership journey filled with challenges. Representing the Board of Directors before city and industry officials, Laue is knee deep in building relationships to see the project through and take the American Royal to a new level.

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With that in mind, the American Royal recently presented the results of an Economic Impact Study to the Agricultural Business Council of Kansas City, city officials and other civic leaders showing growth potential from the proposed new facility, which would be designed purposely for animal and agricultural events. The new facility would eliminate expensive upkeep on Kemper Arena, which, since completion of the Sprint Center in 2007, is no longer being used to its full potential. The Board of Directors sees the new Agricultural Events Center as an opportunity to bring history “full circle” by providing the American Royal with the type of facility that was first envisioned prior to the construction of Kemper Arena. The Economic Impact Study revealed the American Royal Complex contributes a \$60 million impact to the city each year and that the new proposed facility would increase that amount by nearly \$15 million.

Staying abreast of this project alone will keep Laue busy during his time as chairman of the board, but he doesn’t flinch at the challenge. Instead, he focuses back on the heritage that has brought him to this point in his life, fondly remembering his younger days as an American Royal participant representing Laue Ranch; the strong leadership ethic he developed as an AIJCA member, and his more recent commitments to American Royal Rodeo and Livestock Committees.

Still very active in ranch duty, especially during calving season, Laue makes his way to as many Charolais events as are feasible, and for the past 10 years has been actively involved as a breeder and owner of Thoroughbred horses. Taking his experience in purebred livestock genetics into the racing industry, he has accomplished noted success having had four stakes winners out of eight horses since 2004. Laue’s horses have won at Keeneland, Churchill and Ellis Park in Kentucky; Gulfstream Park in Florida; Arlington and Hawthorne in Illinois, and Saratoga, Aqueduct and Belmont in New York.

My parents, Lester and LeAnna and I at an American Royal event.



Family and ranch photos dot the shelves and walls of Laue's office along with racing portraits of Thoroughbreds crossing the Finish Line and in the Winner's Circle. But, one portrait that has always dominated his office décor is that of "Beau Ivo", a French Charolais bull purchased by Laue's father in 1967. A constant reminder of the powerful influence the right individual can have on a purebred herd and even an entire industry, "Beau Ivo" set the world record for yearling weight with an astounding 1,579 pounds in 1968, and just a

few months later astonished the beef industry again with his auction valuation of \$250,000 when one-third interest netted \$85,000.

While "Beau Ivo" was noted for having added stability to the Charolais breed during a time of astounding change, maybe it is in a similar way that Brant Laue continues his passion for agriculture and the wonderful way of life that it represents by leading the American Royal into a new era of agricultural tradition. **■**



The watchful eye of "Beau Ivo" holds a distinctive position amidst the décor of Laue's Kansas City law office.

With my parents and champion female at the Tri-Rivers Fair (Salina, KS) in 1966 -- I was five years old.

