

NATIONAL

Livestock Marketeers Celebrate 50 Years

by Kim Wolfe, Livestock Marketeers

In 1965, three leaders in the livestock marketing industry — Harry Green, Ross Miller and Claud Willett — laid the foundation for an informal fraternity of livestock fieldmen, auctioneers, sale managers and related livestock business leaders. They called their organization The Livestock Marketeers.

The goal was to encourage new and young members of the industry to succeed in their chosen profession, and they established a Hall of Fame to recognize outstanding individuals at an annual banquet hosted in conjunction with the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) in Denver.

Fifty years later, the 2015 Livestock Marketeers Banquet celebrated that great tradition at the National Western Club Jan. 17. The 2015 honorees included Craig Conover, Mapleton, Iowa, and Ken Torr, Greencastle, Ind. Ed Meacham, formerly of Norman, Okla., was honored posthumously.

Master of ceremonies was Neil Orth, executive vice president of the American-International Charolais Association and a 1984 Hall of Fame inductee. The event is hosted by American Live Stock Insurance.

Craig Conover

Conover set a high standard with his attention to detail in the livestock marketing industry, and he maintained that pattern throughout his career.

“He graded every animal, with a note by every sire and dam,” explained Jim Shirley, 2001 Hall of Fame honoree. “His sale catalog was always full of markings, even though nobody else could read it. Craig Conover was always prepared!”

Born and raised on the fourth-generation Bonnie Acres Farm in Holstein, Iowa, Craig’s family was known for its international purebred Berkshire hog operation.

“At age 8, I started to learn the ‘auctioneer chant’ from my father’s hired man, while milking cows by hand,” says Craig. The year was 1955, and that hired man was Jim Baldrige, future Livestock Marketeers Hall of Fame honoree in 1983.

Craig graduated from Iowa State University in 1969, having been a member of the livestock, meats and wool judging teams and serving as president of the Block & Bridle



► The Livestock Marketeers inducted Craig Conover and Ken Torr into their Hall of Fame during the group’s 50th annual banquet, which was hosted in conjunction with the NWSS in Denver Jan. 17. Ed Meacham was honored posthumously.

Club. He’d attended the Superior School of Auctioneering in Decatur, Ill., a year earlier, working his first sale in Lincoln, Ill., with Col. Merrill Anderson (Hall of Fame 2013) and Neil Orth (Hall of Fame 1984).

The *Angus Journal* hired Craig as a fieldman in November 1969, assigning him to the territory of Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming, North Dakota, South Dakota and Minnesota. He later accepted a job with Jim Baldrige’s National Livestock Brokers of North Platte, Neb., and established his own auction business in 1974.

“No one cared more about the people and the livestock than Craig Conover,” declared Kirby Goetsch of *The Farm & Ranch Guide*. “His sincerity, judgment and work ethic are always 110%.”

From 1971-2010, Craig sold Angus cattle sales in some 30 states and three Canadian provinces. At one time, he was on the road 225 days a year with well over 100 purebred sales annually, selling for at least seven full-time sale managers. He also sold a large number of purebred hog sales of all breeds throughout North America.

“In my 42-year career, I sold nearly 2,500 purebred sales,” Craig recalled. “I had the privilege of selling with Roy Johnson, Paul Good, Ham James, Hugh James, Ray Sims, Jim Baldrige, Ralph Kuhr, LeRoy Van Dyke and Pat Goggins, to name a few.”

He sold his last sale in April 2010 at Prairie Pride Angus, Nome, N.D.

“This has been a great life for me. I was successful because of a lot of you people sitting in this room,” Craig addressed the Livestock Marketeers banquet. “Thank you. This is indeed a very humbling opportunity.”

Craig and his wife, Jean, married in 1970 and have two daughters, Christine and Catherine. They purchased their CJ Angus and Berkshire farm near Mapleton, Iowa, in 1976 and continue to reside there today. He has served nine years on the board of directors for the American Berkshire Association, including four as president. His brothers, Al and Grant Conover, are also auctioneers.

Ken Torr

After purchasing his first Angus heifer at 13 years of age in 1948, Ken Torr started his auction career in 1952 and never looked back.

Ken is the sixth generation to live on the home farm in Greencastle, Ind., He graduated from Purdue University, where he worked at the beef barn and was a member of the 1955 dairy and 1956 livestock judging teams. Joining the staff of the First Citizens Bank as a farm representative, he worked his way up to assistant trust officer and earned a real-estate broker’s license.

Returning to his roots, Ken left the bank in March 1963 to go to work as a livestock fieldman for *The Indiana Farmer*, which sold to *Prairie Farmer* later that same year. He wrote the first livestock display ad for that magazine. The publication’s growth eventually caused them to add 1993 Hall of Fame honoree Lyle Eiten to work the west side of the Indiana/Illinois line, with Ken claiming the eastern territory. They shared livestock display advertising responsibilities for 17 years before Lyle’s retirement. His son, Don Eiten, came on board at that time. Ken retired in 1995 after a “short” 32 years with *Prairie Farmer*.

Ken attended Superior Auction School in Decatur, Ill. He trained with legendary auctioneers like Ham James, Paul Good, Ike Hamilton and Ray Sims, and continued auctioneering sales for 40 years. He passed on

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that knowledge for decades, training the next generation of marketeers.

The Ken Torr Classic golf tournament was a highlight of the summer season for many livestock professionals, paving the way for other industry competitions that take place away from the barn and out on the green.

He also bred and raced Standardbred horses for 35 years, rebuilt his Angus cow herd, continued his lifelong work in photography, and developed a woodworking hobby that is housed in a two-story shop known as “Ken’s Workshop & This ’N That Museum.” The facility is home to his woodshop, as well as a collection of photos and memorabilia from his extensive career. Featured photographs include nearly 800 framed pictures of old barns, all from within Ken’s home county.

“This is one tough cowboy,” said Jay Carlson of *BEEF* magazine, as he listed all the reasons why Ken is an outstanding addition to the Livestock Marketeers Hall of Fame. “Congratulations, you’ve earned this honor.”

“There’s no greater gentleman in this business that I have had the opportunity to learn from and work for than Ken Torr,” said Kent Jaecke of Focus Marketing Group.

Ken accepted his award in Denver,

thanking the Marketeers for the honor and noting that he worked with 66 of the 112 members of the Hall of Fame.

“This is a people business,” Ken said. “It’s a unique set of people; we’re all competitors, but we share a great camaraderie. I never met an auctioneer I didn’t like! I love livestock, and I love the people in the livestock industry. I had a ball, it was a fun trip.”

Ken married Beverly Huller in 1956; they have twin sons, John and Gerald Torr, as well as a daughter, Janet.

Ed Meacham

A lifelong teacher, Ed Meacham left a successful career as a vocational agriculture instructor to enter the livestock marketing field. He continued to be a mentor to young people until his death.

Ed served in the U.S. Army as a paratrooper in World War II, specifically in the Battle of the Bulge and other areas of combat. He came home to graduate from Oklahoma A&M College (now Oklahoma State University), and went on to teach at Balko and Jet, Okla., before establishing the Future Farmers of America (FFA) chapter at Miami, Okla.

“Ed treated our FFA livestock judging team like a collegiate team,” recalls former student, auctioneer and 2009 Hall of Fame honoree C.K. “Sonny” Booth. “We went on to win the national contest. He deserves this honor.”

Following his teaching career, Ed moved to Kansas City to join the staff of the American Polled Hereford Association as director of field staff for the Western region. He also worked for *The Record Stockman*. In 1973, he formed his own company, Meacham & Associates, and traveled the United States and Canada, working with registered cattle breeders. The American Hereford Association inducted him into their Hall of Merit in 2011.

“He was a great judge of livestock, and traveled in our business for more than 50 years,” said 2006 Hall of Fame auctioneer Eddie Sims. “It’s appropriate that we honor Ed Meacham.”

Ed was married to Alice Gene Stratton for 66 years before his passing in June 2014; they had two daughters, Cathey Snell and Christi Weidling.



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