

Brown named 2023 Cattleman of the Year

By: Taylor Riggins, NMCGA

Cattleman of the Year is the most prestigious honor given by New Mexico Cattle Growers' Association and is given to a well-rounded member of the ranching community.

Nominated by their peers, the Cattleman of the Year not only works on the ranch but is also a known advocate for agriculture whether in the form of education, legislative issues or both. A person that is always there to lend a willing hand in any situation, and someone who is present in their communities serving civically, often being noted as prominent members and supporters.

When asked where they are from, the 2023 Cattleman of the Year has often jokingly replied to others, "If you divide the state in quarters, I have lived in all corners of New Mexico."

Darrell Brown and his family have been involved with NMCGA since his dad served as Executive Secretary of the Association in 1969. Though he never owned a ranch of his own, he worked side by side with his mentor and grandfather on his grandfather's ranch in Durango, Colorado; later taking care of the cattle when they were moved to Mt. Taylor, west of Albuquerque.

Darrell graduated from West Mesa High School in Albuquerque and went on to attend and graduate from New Mexico State University in 1978 with a Bachelor's of Science in Animal Science. He then earned a Master's degree in Ag Business from NMSU in 1983.

He met his wife, Michelle, at NMSU and the two were married in 1978 while he was employed at the College Ranch. After graduating, the couple took a position in White Lakes, NM, south of Santa Fe, in 1983, where Darrell was employed building fences. That year, their first son was born; shortly thereafter, the young family moved to Sedalia, Colorado where Darrell traveled throughout the western United States showing Santa Gertrudis cattle for the Cherokee Ranch.

In 1985, Darrell moved his family to take a job in Artesia, NM. He began working as the ranch manager for Yates Petroleum on the Four Dinkus Ranch, west of Artesia. Here, the family welcomed a daughter and another son. As his children grew up in the community, Darrell fostered a positive working relationship with the local school system, going into the schools to bring about a favorable image of agriculture to the second graders at each of the school district's five elementary schools. The partnership began when his oldest son was in second grade and continued for approximately fifteen years.

This outreach included a partnership with the local CowBelles organization to perform a puppet show called "Going to the Grocery Store" after Darrell noticed that many of the children in the school system believed that their food was simply manufactured at the local grocery store. As a part of his in-class program, Darrell explained the functions of a working cattle ranch; teaching the children about cattle brands and their purpose, vaccinations and ear tags.

The program culminated with a daylong field trip that brought the second graders to the ranch, where they observed some of the things they had been taught in class. The students were brought onto the livestock scales by class and Darrell weighed them, and then they watched as a calf was branded, vaccinated, and tagged, before the kids themselves were loaded through the chute onto the back of their buses to complete the day. As they were being loaded onto the buses, the students received their own "brand," having their

cheeks painted with their school logo.

As a result of this partnership, Darrell can confidently say he had a positive impact on the perceptions of agriculture and ranching on an entire generation of children in the Artesia Public School System.

Darrell's dedication to children in the state didn't end with the local school district. For several years, he co-chaired the successful Stockmen Care About Kids promotion done in conjunction with KOB-TV, the University of New Mexico Children's Hospital and Children's Miracle Network Telethon. He has also been actively supportive of the popular Youth Ranch Management Camp, not only serving as an industry mentor to our youth attending the camp, but also securing scholarships for students who could not afford to attend the camps.

In 1999, after the death of his immediate boss, Darrell was promoted to the position of General Ranch Manager of all four of the ranches under the Yates Corporation. He spent many hours on the road, traveling to the Ojo Feliz, north of Las Vegas, NM; the Atarque, west of Albuquerque; and the Cross D at Mayhill, while still running the Four Dinkus. He eventually relinquished his duties at the Cross D but continued as general manager of the other three ranches.

In 2020, after the dissolution of Yates Petroleum, Darrell was hired by Mr. Yates to exclusively manage the Cross D Ranch at Piñon, NM; so, after 35 years in Artesia, he and his wife moved to the base of the Sacramento Mountains.

Some of Darrell's achievements include: 15 years as District Supervisor in the Peñasco and Central Valley Soil and Water Conservation District; New Mexico Wool Growers Amigo Award in 1994; New Mexico Department of Agriculture Pace Setter Award in 2009; New Mexico Cowbells Man of the Year in 1996; New Mexico Beef Council Director 2009-2015; NMCGA Outstanding Contribution Award 1994-1995 and Beef Council Beef Backer Award in 2017.

Darrell has been married to his wife, Michelle, for 44 years. Together they have 3 children, 8 grandsons, and 1 granddaughter.

Photo (L-R): 2022 Cattleman of the Year, Tom Sidwell and Darrell Brown. Darrell was awarded a Curtis Fort bronze entitled, "A Good Mount" and a wool pelt from New Mexico Wool Growers, Inc., both are customized with his cattle brand.