Some of the most influential leaders in the livestock industry never set out chasing titles or recognition. Instead, they spend decades investing in people, strengthening programs, and working behind the scenes to ensure the industry is better tomorrow than it is today. That perfectly describes Jack Ward, Executive Vice President of the American Hereford Association, who has been named the 2025 Best of the Barns Industry Leader.



Ward's journey in agriculture began long before he stepped into a leadership role. Growing up in Indiana on a family cattle operation, agriculture wasn't simply a career path—it was a way of life. His parents laid the foundation by encouraging him and his siblings to become involved in the livestock industry, while influential mentors helped shape the direction of his future.

Through 4-H, FFA, and livestock judging, Ward found people who believed in him and challenged him to grow. He credits individuals like Dan Hoge with having a tremendous impact on both his personal and professional development.

"Those people invested their time in me," Ward said. "Looking back, I'm incredibly grateful for the opportunities they gave me and the lessons they taught."

Today, Ward has spent years helping guide one of the nation's most recognized breed associations while also serving as a respected judge at livestock shows across the United

States and several foreign countries. Yet despite his impressive résumé, he points to family as his greatest accomplishment.

"The best part of my life has been getting married, raising our boys, and having my wife, MaryAnn, alongside me through all of it," he said.

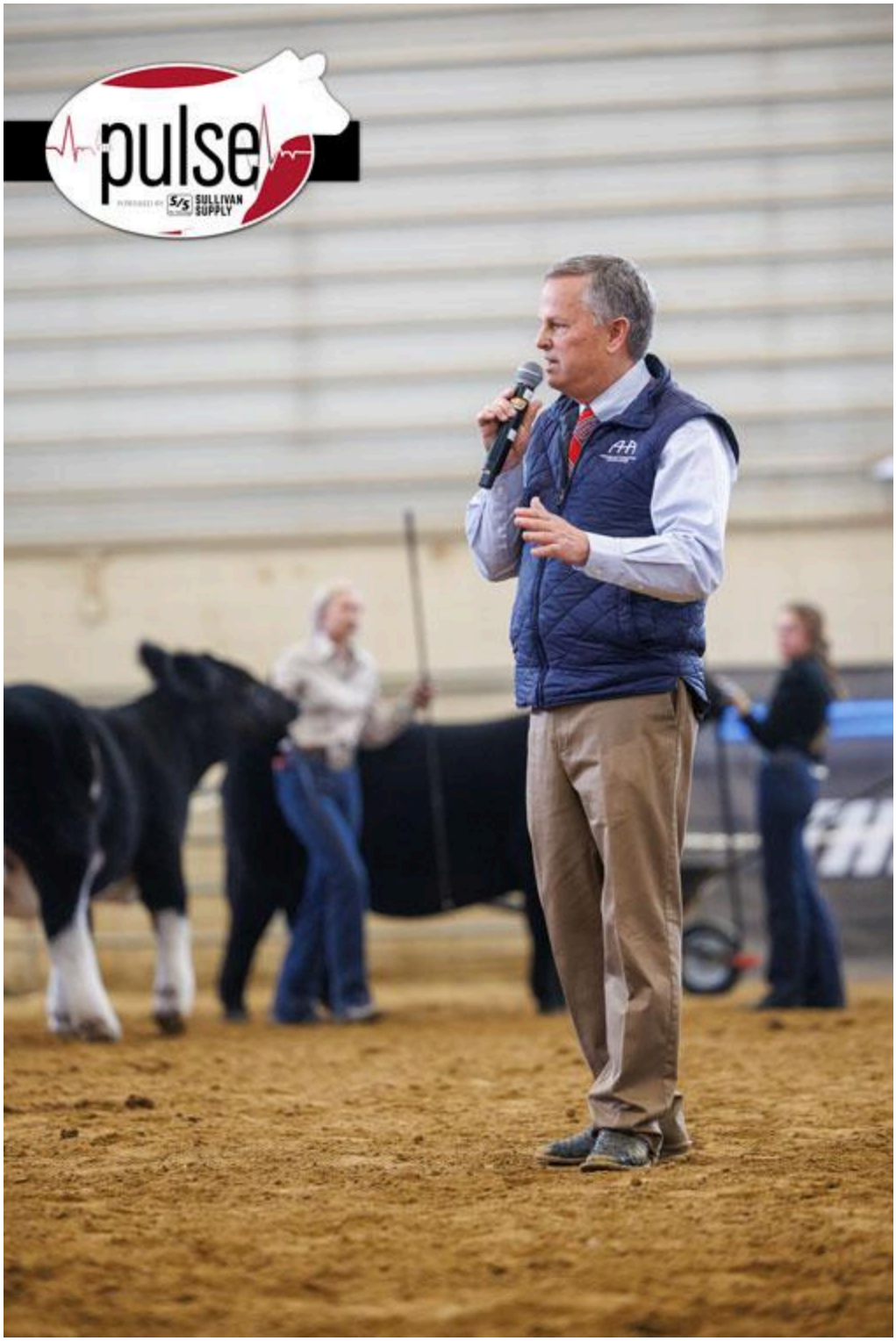


Throughout his career, Ward has remained passionate about one thing above all else—developing people.

Standing ringside at junior nationals across the country, he sees far more than champions being selected. He sees future leaders learning responsibility, discipline, and confidence.

"What we're really doing is creating opportunities for young people to become good adults," Ward explained. "If we can help them become productive members of society who contribute to their communities, then we're doing exactly what this industry is supposed to do."

While the quality of livestock continues to improve year after year, Ward believes the industry's greatest success will always be measured by the people it produces. As someone who now mentors employees, exhibitors, and young professionals, Ward often reflects on the people who once invested in him. That perspective has inspired him to pay those lessons forward.



"I've reached a point where I feel like I have the opportunity to help mentor others," he said. "Whether it's youth, employees, or anyone with a passion for agriculture, that's an important responsibility."

One lesson he shares repeatedly is simple, but powerful.

"Always do your best because you never know who's watching."

Ward recalls a moment early in his career when something as ordinary as helping move cattle caught the attention of a veterinarian. That seemingly small act opened doors to new opportunities, eventually introducing him to Craig Huffhines, who later hired him at the American Hereford Association.

"It all started by simply doing my job," Ward said. "You never know when your work ethic is going to create your next opportunity."

When asked what advice he would offer someone hoping to leave a lasting mark on the livestock industry, Ward returned to the same principles that have guided his own life.

"Work hard. Challenge yourself. There will be setbacks, and there will be times when you're discouraged, but keep doing your best. Somebody will recognize your effort, and you never know where that path will lead."

Those words perfectly summarize a career built not on seeking recognition, but on serving others with consistency, humility, and purpose.



For decades, Jack Ward has helped shape the Hereford breed, mentor countless young people, and strengthen an industry he has loved since childhood. His leadership has reached far beyond the showring, leaving a lasting impact on families, breeders, and future generations across the livestock community. That commitment to people, progress, and agriculture makes Jack Ward a truly deserving recipient of the 2025 Best of the Barns Industry Leader award.