

2011 Active Master Breeder Award Winners - Bob and Steve Blessing

In 1936 a farmer had been seeing and reading about the Brown Swiss breed (which still had a reputation with some as a dual purpose breed). Liking what he saw, he asked his 10 year old son if he would like a Brown Swiss calf for a 4-H project. Being a wise young man he said sure and the first Brown Swiss came to a farm near Ft. Wayne, Indiana. 75 years later we as a breed were sure glad as it would be hard to imagine our Brown Swiss world without the Blessing family. The 2011 Historical Society Active Master Breeder Award went Milan F. "Bob" - the 1936 4-H'er and son of the very wise Fred Blessing - and his son, Steve.



Left to right: Bob and Helen Blessing; Leon N. Button, award sponsor in memory of his father, Leon W. Button; Roger Neitzel, Historical Society.



Bob with his first calf in 1936.

Bob showed at his first canton show in 1939 winning Junior Champion honors with Bernices Valentine 69136. Fred and sons exhibited at the 2nd Annual Indiana State Show in 1940 winning the 2 year old class with Valentine. Bob was also obviously reading his Brown Swiss Bulletin. In the Foxwood Farm ad in the late 30's they announced the top 3 winners of the contest where they invited boys and girls to name the first calf of their Foxwoods Golden Glory bull. Milan F. Blessing came in 3rd with the suggestion of Foxwood Glory Astral.

They were at the canton show again in 1942, but then aren't to be found in the exhibitors' list in canton show reports again until the 60's. During these years Bob and Helen were married and their family grew to five kids, Sandy, Steve, Sheryl, Shirley and Stan.

To help ends meet 61 years ago Bob began driving a milk truck and continued to do so for many years, adding to their fleet with additional trucks, a business they still maintain today. Bob credits being out on his milk route and visiting with other dairyman to leading to some of their success. He would pick up tips on feeding and breeding programs from these conversations which he could take home and use.

By the 60's the kids were growing and it was time to get back into showing. They were at the state show in 1964 and had the grand champion bull at the canton show in 1965. The five Blessing kids were exhibitors at the canton, state show and state fair for the next several years. At the 1969 Indiana State Fair they had their first Grand Champion with V.O.H. Taun Heather and traveled on to their first national show in 1970. The ball was rolling, and they were exhibitors throughout the midwest showing through the years in addition to their own state fair at Illinois, Kentucky, NAILE (southeast national) and of course World Dairy Expo. Today's show circuit includes the Indiana State Fair and World Dairy Expo.

All of Bob and Helen's grandchildren exhibited at the county and state fair as junior exhibitors for many years. Their youngest grandson is still showing.

Their first ad appeared in a 1971 Bulletin with consignments to the Midwest Sale - they've been a loyal supporter of the Bulletin advertising ever since.

At age 16 Steve began milking full time, joined the operation full time following high school graduation in 1968 and soon became the day-to-day manager of the herd. (Stan also joined the operation following his high school years, with his main responsibilities lying in the crop and raising feed side of the operation. He also is now in charge of the aforementioned milk truck business.)



Stan Blessing with Betta Vue Neva, National Total Performance Winner at the Centennial National Show in 1980. Also pictured left to right: Bernard Monson, Jill Armbruster, Donna Jordan, Lee Majeskie, associate judge, and Dave Dickson, judge.

A few purchases were made each year to bring in cows to become the foundation families for the herd. One such purchase by private treaty in 1975 was Betta Vue Neva. As with the other selections, she was chosen for her production and type . . . and they got the bonus of great transmitting ability. She founded one of the most successful families at Blessing Farms. In 1980 she was the National Total Performance Winner, taking the honor at the famous National Centennial show.

In 1983 her daughter, Blessing Elegant Neda, was named National Total Performance Winner, making them the first dam/daughter pair to do so. Both cows also won All American honors through the years. The Neva cow, along with Neda, was pictured along with her 7 natural milking offspring with their heads over the fence in a photo from 1984 and featured on the cover of the 1983 Annual Report. This family definitely helped put Blessings on the national and international map.

The Karen family was also one of their important cow families during the 70's and 80's. Most Notable Member was Blessing Performer Kara, a 3x All American, milking form. Her mother, Kava, was an Honor Roll Cow.

Things really came together for the Blessings at the 1983 Central National at Madison. Neda was Total Performance Winner, Kara was Grand Champion, they won the coveted Norman E. Magnussen Best 3 Females Award and Steve and Stan received the Premier Breeder and Exhibitor Banners.



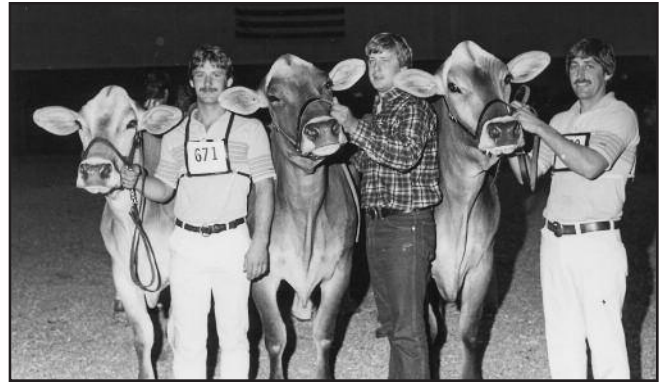
Grand Champion Blessing Performer Kara (cow on right) with Steve at the halter at the 1983 Central National Show in Madison.



Steve and Stan (center) with the Premier Breeder and Exhibitor banners in 1983.



Rosy, Brian and Steve at the Indiana State Fair. Rosy and Helen were a vital part of the work force and could be found in the parlor at milking time.



Winning Best 3 Females.

Success in the show ring has continued with many state fair grand champions and class winners at the national shows which has lead to many, many All American honors (bred and/or owned over 90 nominees and close to 50 honorees to date).

In the mid-70's Blessings were milking at two locations, the original farmstead and at the new farm where Steve and his wife Rosy lived. When looking through the cow sheets the herd was just as successful on the production side, but they were only on DHIA so no one else knew! The herd was eventually consolidated into one unit at Steve's and went on PTPR in 1982. It would probably be trite to say "and the rest is history".

In 1985 they won their first PTPR award. Then in 1988 the streak began. They have won the large herd award (group 3 until 1993 when group 4 was added) for 23 consecutive years (through 2011). In June 2011 the rolling herd average on 138 cows was 24,654 pounds milk, 4.2%, 1045 pounds fat, 3.3%, 816 pounds protein.

Blessing Sensation Bria was the first ever Cow for All Seasons winning it in 1996. (Another of the noteworthy cow families at Blessings). They've had two more winners in 1998 and 2000. They bred the 2000 National Total Performance Winner, Blessing PR Shirlan (yes Steve has been savvy enough to market some very good ones through the years!) In 2002 Mort Tower Frisky (owned with Rex Mort) won the National Total Performance Award, another successful family developed at Blessings.



Steve was a judge at state and national shows.

From 1982-1988 Bob served the Association as a National Board of Director. Steve was a sought-after state and national show judge for several years until work with the herd kept him at home. In fact other than being spotted at an occasional sale the only time Steve is gone for more than a day nowadays is World Dairy Expo. In 1991 he and Stan won the Whitie Thompson Herdsmanship Award at Expo. In 2001 Steve received the presti-



National Director Carl Keltner present Helen and Bob Blessing with one of the many PTPR Trophys they've received through the years.



Bob (bottom center) served on the National Board of Directors.



Blessings' booth at World Dairy Expo.



Steve won the Klussendorf Trophy in 2001.

gious Klussendorf Trophy.

In today's world, buyers at sales seek the Blessing bloodlines to take home for their key purchases to serve as a foundation in their herd. The herd is a "top of the list" stop for international visitors. The All Americans and PTPR winnings continue to mount. A.I. bulls from Blessings are making their mark (Banker, Agenda, Legacy to name a few).

Blessing Farms, truly an all-round breeding program.



Neva and Neda and their 7 natural offspring in 1984.