

Love for Heritage

You woke up, brushed your teeth, got ready, and helped your mom pack your lunch. You got on the bus, went to school and learned about math, English and science, and then went home. Other than completing homework, doing chores and eating supper, the day was practically over. For most children, this is a typical schedule during the school year. For Matt Brockman, however, after school is when the real work would just begin.

Little did he know at the young age of 14, Brockman's first job working for a local rancher and cattle buyer would teach him how to be a steward of the ranching industry. More importantly, he would learn how to preserve that industry through leading and directing the National Ranching Heritage Center (NRHC) at Texas Tech University.

Brockman sat and recalled his first days working with the rancher.

"I would get off the bus at his headquarters and go through the cattle we had on the yards," Brockman said, "and pulled the ones that were sick and doctored everything in the hospital pen."

After all the work was finished in the evening, the rancher would give Brockman a ride home.

"I lived about three miles from that place, so on the weekends, I would catch my horse and ride him across a couple of pastures back to the headquarters," Brockman said. "I would then work all day long and ride my horse back home in the evening."

Even though it was a part-time job, for Brockman, it felt as though it was full-time.

"I worked every day, every weekend," Brockman said. "There was always a lot of work to do."

Brockman also broke colts and showed steers and lambs at the county show, but always felt his calling was to be a cowboy.

After high school, he then attended Tarleton State University, where he stayed true to his ranching heritage. Putting himself through college meant that Brockman had to continue working on the side.

"I like to say I crammed four years of college into five-and-a-half," Brockman said with a chuckle. "Much of that extra year-and-a-half was spent working or tending to cattle."

On top of attending school and working cattle, Brockman was involved in many organizations that are still a large part of Tarleton today.

Brockman served two terms as the first president of Tarleton's men's spirit organization called the Plowboys. He described them to be much like Texas Tech's own



Photo Courtesy of Texas Tech University

Saddle Tramps.

"I was really fortunate for that experience," Brockman said. "My Tarleton years were very special."

Brockman attributes his excitement for the ranching industry to Tarleton's President at the time, Barry Thompson. When describing Thompson, Brockman believes the words "dynamic" and "inspiring" are the most fitting. He said Thompson always taught you that the sky was the limit.

"That attitude and spirit he instilled paid off for me in a big way when I took my first job out of college," Brockman said.

For Brockman, that first post-college job was working as the Legislative Assistant to Charles Stenholm in

Fueled by Passion

Washington, D.C. in the summer of 1985.

“It really broadened my perspective and gave me an even greater appreciation for academia and research,” Brockman said. He then spent three-and-a-half more years in Washington, D.C. as the Director of Legislative Affairs for the National Grain and Feed Association.

During Brockman’s years in D.C., he said he befriended Rick Perry, who, at the time, was a freshman member of the Texas legislature.

“When Mr. Perry got elected agriculture commissioner,” Brockman said, “I was fortunate enough to get hired by him and come to Austin to work for him at the Texas Department of Agriculture.”

Whether working or volunteering, the past 20 years have allowed Brockman to serve others while being tested by the challenges thrown his way.

“Working at the Fort Worth Stock Show is a tough job,” Brockman said. “It is not for the faint of heart.”

This is the experience that Dr. Steve Frazee, chairman of the Department of Agricultural Education and Communications at Texas Tech, believes will make Brockman successful as the executive director of the NRHC.

“The volunteering aspect of him having worked at the stock show is very important as far as the NRHC goes,” Frazee said. “I think he understands the importance and the need for volunteers in the workforce.”

Frazee also said that Brockman’s agriculture background helps him stand apart.

“I think the big thing is that he has a passion for the cowboy way of life,” Frazee said. “He has always been involved in activities that relate to agriculture and that shows in his excitement for the

ranching industry.”

Dr. Michael Galyean, dean of the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources, was head of the committee that was instrumental in suggesting Brockman for the role of executive director for the center.

“I liked Matt’s candidacy from the beginning,” Galyean said. “He really brings a lot to the table in terms of experience, and not only experience, but connections to the ranching industry.”

Galyean believes that Brockman’s connections will help propel the NRHC forward in terms of membership, funding, and overall success.

“I think the big thing is that he has a passion for the cowboy way of life.”

“He knows people and people know him,” Galyean said. “They are really comfortable with him and I think it’s working really well.”

According to Brockman, there were two things that attracted him to the NRHC: One, an opportunity to reconnect in a more direct, meaningful way with the ranching community, and two, the NRHC’s mission statement.

The center’s mission statement reads as follows: to preserve and interpret the history of ranching in North America and to address ranching’s contemporary issues.

“There’s definitely an important story to tell about ranchers past,” Brockman said, “but there is an equally important story to tell about ranchers present and ranchers of the future.”

Brockman believes that ranchers are stewards not only of their animals, natural resources, and their family, but also of their heritage.

“I think ranchers are passionate about what they do. They have to be. It’s a lifestyle that you’ve got to really love and embrace,” Brockman said.



Photo Courtesy of Texas Tech University

“The thing that gives me comfort is that it’s still an occupation and an industry that has a strong attraction to it.”

For Brockman, the two main goals he has in mind for the center is to landscape the exhibits with native plants as well as develop an app that will enhance the visitor’s overall experience at the center. One of the major features of the app will be a scavenger hunt that Brockman hopes will help engage the children.

An overall goal of the center, and for Brockman as well, is to implement any tactic that will help tell the story of ranching.

“It’s my job,” Brockman said. “It’s what I am passionate about and what I enjoy.” **T**

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