

# THE AX STORY

LEGACY LEADERS | BY KEVIN SPAFFORD

BEYOND A MARK of ownership, the AX brand is part of Montana's rich cowboy heritage. From a homesteader's humble beginnings in 1888 through Stan and Nancy Weaver today, the family traces their agrarian pedigree back five generations. And with a little luck and a good plan, AX will continue to personify the Weavers for generations.

A few months ago, I received a catalog for the 20th Weaver Quarter Horse production sale. It read, "2015 marks the 127th year the Weaver family has been raising horses in Montana." Though not unheard of, five generations in agriculture is rare. I wondered what it took to outlast Montana's brutal winters and how a family operation thrives in such an unforgiving environment.

With a little research, I learned the Weaver Ranch raises registered American quarter horses, runs cattle and farms grain on 15,000 acres in the Bear Paw Mountains. The ranch website says Stan's grandfather Elmer "made a notable Western heritage contribution by being a good businessman, horseman and cattleman." He "left a legacy by settling and improving the land that made it possible for those who came after" to continue ranching,



They say the apple doesn't fall far from the tree. Today, Stan continues this longstanding Weaver tradition. He and Nancy readily acknowledge that breeding champion horses takes hard work and dedication, and an uncanny level of risk-taking. The horse breeding world is rampant with stories of quick fortune and tales of devastating loss.

Success over the long haul requires a healthy dose of leadership traits:

- **Devotion.** As with any worthwhile objective, success in horse breeding requires dedication and loyalty. A leader must be devoted to achievement and be willing to do whatever it takes to succeed.
- **Perseverance.** Challenge is the rule, not the exception, success is borne of continued effort despite difficulties, failure or opposition. Leaders don't fail less often than others; leaders get up more

times than they fail.

- **Adaptability.** Change, improvement or development is part of adjusting to new realities. A leader expects to adjust and grow, based on what may be necessary to succeed in a given situation.
- **Goal orientation.** Goals are a destination toward which all effort is directed. They're key to success and signal commitment to a future bigger than the past.
- **Execution.** Otherwise known as good old-fashioned hard work, execution is the act of doing or performing something. A leader applies extra effort and does whatever it takes to achieve success.

national director for the American Quarter Horse Association, where he serves on the executive committee, and heads the Rancher's Heritage Council.

Nancy serves on the Central Montana Medical Center Advisory Board and is chairwoman of the Montana Cowboy Poetry Gathering and Western Music Rendezvous. She's also on the board of trustees for the Western Heritage Center. She owns Weaver Ranch Properties, a real estate brokerage in Lewistown.

Leadership isn't something you do. It's something you are, and it's exemplified in manner and methodology. It's recognized in the way

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As is evident in most leaders, Stan and Nancy's contribution to the industry and dedication to others aren't restricted to the show ring. They're both active in the community, contribute to the industry and strive for continual improvement. In 2014, the Weavers were chosen as the Montana Family Business of the year and were recognized for over 50 years in continuous operation. Stan is a

you do business and the way you treat others. It's acknowledged in your accomplishments and service to others.

Leadership isn't just behaviors; it's a way of life. **FF**

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