

## feature story



# Herefords, Horses & Harvesting

*The Nixdorff's Expanding Influence in Alberta Agriculture*

By Brad Dubeau DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

→ **Five generations Canadian, the Nixdorff family is still reminded of its American roots by the so-called Yankee Valley region east of Airdrie, where their ancestors – natives of Illinois – first purchased land.** The Scott and Barb Nixdorff family reside in this area still today.

One of Scott's sons, Robbie, lives by a credo that might have been passed down to him from his relatives. He

**“Make contact with neighbours at first, and expand your circle as you grow, always following up on the performance of the cattle you sell.” - Robbie Nixdorff**

gives this advice to new Hereford breeders and others – to “make contact with neighbours at first, and expand your circle as you grow, always following up on the performance of the cattle you sell.” Robbie has additional advice: “Your best product is worth a lot,” he says.

“Don't undersell yourself or the breed.”

The Nixdorff family has stood by the Hereford breed throughout the generations, becoming an influential force in Alberta, Canadian & Worldwide cattle circles.

SNS Generator 28X, for example, had high sellers, repeatedly, in sales across the globe. There are traces of his lineage still today, across the world.

The Nixdorff legacy, intertwined with land, horses and cattle, begins in 1907 when Scott Nixdorff's parents, Charlie and Lila purchased one quarter section of land. Charlie and Lila had three children – Naomi, Bob and Paul. Naomi passed away in childhood while Bob and Paul eventually worked

with their parents to expand the farm until forming operations with families of their own.

Scott Nixdorff is the son of Paul and his bride Isabelle. Scott has a sister named Maxine and a brother named Marvin. The family ran what was largely a grain operation.

As adults, Maxine pursued her own career off the farm while Scott and Marvin continued to farm with their father, Paul, until 1979. At that point, Scott and Marvin split the land, cattle and machinery to take on their own operations as their respective families grew.

The late Marvin Nixdorff's family continues to farm and ranch just west of Scott Nixdorff's location.

In 1979, Scott and his wife Barb's portion comprised about four sections or 2,500 acres. Their large grain operation was complimented with about 150 cows of mostly Hereford influence. Bull power was represented in multiple colours, from Hereford to Charolais and Angus. Some of the Hereford cows were registered purebreds, which went on to form the

foundation of SNS Herefords, a herd name that is recognized nationally and internationally today.

The operation was recognized as Scott Nixdorff & Sons in the 1980s, which eventually became SNS Herefords in 1984. That is when Scott and his sons, Paul, Nels and Robbie, started an extensive A.I. and embryo transplant program. They also purchased about forty foundation females from Jim and "Auntie Jo" Hole (JoAnn is Barb's sister).

SNS continued to expand by purchasing and leasing farm and pastureland, growing the operation to today's size of 6,000 acres, of which 3,000 are deeded.

Cow numbers also grew to 500 breeding females, of which about 150 are registered Herefords. The balance of the herd consists of commercial cows, about half of which are straight Hereford. The remainder are a Hereford and Red Angus cross.

Cows are wintered at home on straw bunches. Calving starts around the first of February for the purebreds and all heifers, and about the first of April for the commercials. When weather permits, 250 head of the commercial cattle head to pasture at Rocky Mountain House, Alberta. The rest stay near home. Calves are weaned at the end of October.

All steer calves and heifers that are not retained for replacements – about 300 head – are marketed at Balog Auction Services in Lethbridge, Alberta, at the British Breeds #2 sale.

For the last two years, SNS has been awarded Grand Champion Overall Pen of Calves at this sale. The remainder of the calves are raised as bulls and replacement females. About 75 to 120 heifer calves are retained annually.

The Nixdorffs rarely sell any females but they market 25 to 30 Hereford bulls annually. In 1986, Jim Hole introduced Rob to Raymond Pearson who bought bulls that year and continues to buy many bulls each year to this day, being regarded by the Nixdorffs as both a loyal valued buyer

**Cow numbers grew to 500 breeding females, of which about 150 are registered Herefords. The balance of the herd consists of commercial cows, about half of which are straight Hereford. The remainder are a Hereford and Red Angus cross.**

and close family friend.

For the past four years, the majority of the Nixdorff bull calves have been sold privately off the ranch in the fall, with the exception of a few top bulls retained for the Calgary Bull Show and Sale.

Participating in that particular sale has been an annual family tradition since 1986. Anywhere from 5-8 bulls are entered each year. Their bulls have earned many calf, junior and

senior championships at the Calgary Bull Show. While the family continues to strive for the Grand Championship prize, their bulls have been validated in the sale ring whenever they out-sell the champions of the show.

A production sale at the ranch was successful for seven years. However, growing families and complications due to BSE-affected markets changed the family's marketing plan. The Nixdorffs returned to private treaty sales, which is successful, in part, due to the patronage of repeat customers. The most influential bull in the SNS

Herefords program has been SNS Generator 28X. Other notable bulls are SNS Silver Prairie 50B, SNS Sky Lad 75K and Big Sky. One bull making an impact on the herd today is JHR 19L Volt Lad 5S.

Marketing plays a major role in any purebred operation and that is no different at SNS.

"Communication and good relationships with your customers is the key to keep them coming back,"



says Robbie Nixdorff.

The Nixdorffs subscribe to the THE (Total Herd Evaluation) program offered by the Canadian Hereford Association. They collect birth weights, weaning weights and yearling weights from the registered cattle. While yearling weights of sale bulls are recorded, yearling weights cannot be collected from the steered calves which are marketed each fall. Actual performance is valued highly but the Nixdorffs also realize that EPDs play a role in selection and marketing. They also know that EPD accuracy hinges on the data submitted so they submit as much of their own herd data as possible.

Sought-after visual traits, according to Paul and Robbie, are “fleshing ability, hair and hide, which creates hardiness for wintering; and cows with volume and of course, good feet and udders.”

Scott adds that “temperament ensures mothering ability.”

The entire Nixdorff family has a long history involved with the 4-H program. Scott participated in the Airdrie Calf Club as a boy and Barb participated in the Irricana Calf Club, prior to the inception of the 4-H program itself. All three of their boys – Robbie, Nels and Paul – were active in 4H and now the grandchildren are active in the program with Hereford and Hereford/Angus cross steers. Home-grown calves have won the rate-of-gain for four years in a row at 4-H on Parade at the Calgary

extra time riding in the mountains, hunting, fishing and following his kids’ activities.

Nels is married to Terri and they have three children – Hal, Adam and Coleman. In 2005, Nels and Terri ventured out on their own and now operate the successful YV Ranch, located west of the SNS operation.

While Scott and Barb have curled and skied over the years, today they enjoy joint family holidays to exotic locations and following the grandchildren to sporting and livestock events.

The Nixdorffs also have a passion for horse racing. In the early seventies, Scott and Barb, along with Scott’s sister and brother-in-law, owned race horses. The horse business subsided as the registered Hereford herd grew. In 2008, however, their interest in horses was revived with the help of a family friend, Amanda Bennett, who was working with top trainers at the time.

SNS claimed a mare by the name of Tirimisu, who went on to win for the farm and provide plenty of fun and exciting entertainment for friends and family. She now continues to provide a different sort of entertainment, having raised a beautiful big filly out of a top stallion.

In 2009, SNS partnered with Compass Ranch, Morrison Farms & Danny Hansen, investing in two yearlings at a fall thoroughbred sale. They are “Shifty Time” and “Cat Outa Hell”. “Cat Outa Hell” placed in a

## The most influential bull in the SNS Herefords program has been SNS Generator 28X.

Stampede. They have been proud to be in the top four or five placings for the past several years.

Scott and Barb’s grandchildren also participate in the Alberta Junior and Canadian Junior Hereford Associations.

Paul is now married to Cheryl and their children are Brady and Elise. Cheryl is still active participating competitively with success at ranch rodeos. Off the farm, the family enjoys skiing, trail riding, hunting and family holidays.

Robbie has three children, Jenna, Sarah and Chad. He spends his

big Stakes Race in 2010 and Shifty Time ultimately won three two-year-old stake races in a row, winning in excess of \$100,000 and was awarded the 2009 Champion Two-Year-Old Filly title and award. Once Shifty is done her racing career she will join Tirimisu in the SNS Broodmare Herd, fulfilling a fun and passionate hobby for the Nixdorff clan, while the grandchildren are ensuring a competitive place for the family’s Herefords.



SNS GENERATOR 28X



SNS SKY LAD 75K



JHR 19L VOLT LAD 55