

Walter Owens

Walter Owens, Frederic, Wis., has been chosen as a 2023 recipient of the Distinguished Service Award of the American Jersey Cattle Association (AJCA).

The Distinguished Service Award is presented by the Board of Directors to as many living AJCA members and/or members' families, who, in their opinion have rendered outstanding and unselfish service for many years and thereby made a notable contribution to the advancement of the Jersey breed in the United States.

“For those who don't know Walter, his personality is probably the biggest asset to the Jersey breed,” write Bill and Marion Barlass, Janesville, Wis., past National All-Jersey Inc. (NAJ) board members and 2022 Distinguished Service Award recipients.

Walter is known for his inviting and caring persona, as well as his love for a good joke and conversation with his peers. When one observes Walter in a room, it is not uncommon to see him surrounded by individuals with large smiles and even larger laughs because his joy for life and passion for the Jersey breed is contagious. He has generously and willingly served as a mentor and friend to many throughout the dairy industry, always providing thoughtful advice and showing his true compassion for others.

Love and commitment to the Jersey cow is in Walter's pedigree. He grew up on Sunny Slope Jersey Farm owned by his parents, Harold and Agnes. Walter is following in his father's footsteps, as Harold also received the Distinguished Service Award from the AJCA in 1997. Walter was active in the family operation and quickly found his passion in life for the Jersey cow.

After obtaining an animal science degree from the University of Wisconsin-River Falls (UW-River Falls) in 1979, Walter returned to the family

farm. Always forward thinking, the Owens family had incorporated the farm as Owens Farms, Inc., in 1971 with the goal of expanding herd size, acreage, and to include the next generation.

This move was successful, as today, the Owens family has 750 milking cows with equivalent replacements



and farms around 1,800 acres of land. The herd has a 2022 AJCA lactation average of 21,283 lbs. milk, 1,082 lbs. fat and 824 lbs. protein on an m.e. basis on 692 lactations. They have an average final score of 82.3%. The herd also ranks in the top 25% of the breed with a herd average of +43 JPI.

The family's dedication to improving the business for future generations has paid dividends. Today the farm's member-owners consist of Walter, his two brothers, three children, and two nephews. All have their individual roles on the farm and work together to make it a successful operation.

Former AJCA President Chris Sorenson wrote in his letter of support, “Walter is dedicated to his family and takes great pride in seeing his children continue the Owens Farms, Inc. legacy.”

Walter and his family have been lifelong supporters of AJCA and NAJ programs and initiatives. Most notably, they have been extreme advocates of the NAJ Equity Program which promotes equity in milk pricing across the nation. They have also participated in REAP since its inception.

In 2011, Walter served as the co-chair of the National Heifer Sale when the AJCA-NAJ Annual Meetings were last held in Wisconsin. Graciously, Owens Farms Inc. donated a heifer for the all-donation sale which benefited the Jersey Youth Academy program. For the 2023 event, Walter has stepped into an even larger role and is serving as a co-chair of the event this June in Lacrosse.

Walter has committed time to both the AJCA and NAJ in many capacities. From 2012-2019, he served on the AJCA board with three of those years as the vice president. Throughout that time, he sat on the Finance, Development, Executive and Joint Operation Committees, as well as chair of the Finance Committee for three years.

In 2019, Walter was appointed to the NAJ board and he presently sits on the Investment Advisory Committee for AJCA. Always up for a new challenge, Walter will serve as the chair of the Junior Activities committee for the All American Show and events in Louisville, Ky., for 2023.

Another passion for Walter is advocating for the Jersey cow and dairymen and women around the world. He has twice traveled to Washington D.C. to speak with congressional representatives to lobby, educate and talk about solutions to issues facing today's dairy farmers. Walter has been the perfect

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candidate for these experiences with his extensive knowledge and lifelong passion for the Jersey cow.

At the state level, Walter has been a lifelong member and contributor to the Wisconsin Jersey Breeders Association (WJBA). He has been elected to the state board several times, as well as served as both president and vice president of the organization. For many years, he assisted with selection of cattle for the Wisconsin State Jersey Sale.

In addition to Jersey activities, Walter has dedicated time to various other organizations throughout his years. "Service has been well ingrained in Walter by the examples of his parents and grandparents," said Sydney Flick, WJBA Secretary, from Lodi, Wis., in her nomination letter.

Walter has also served on the Select Sires Jersey Sire Committee, UW-River Falls Ag Alumni Board, and the Polk-Burnett Counties DHIA board for over 25 years. An avid dairy cattle evaluator, Walter participated in both 4-H and collegiate dairy judging throughout his youth. After his youth career ended, he transitioned to coaching the Polk County dairy judging team for 37 years. He led the team to 10 nationally recognized competitions throughout that time.

Walter's greatest supporter is his wife, Joyce, whom he wed in 1983. They have three adult children, Brandon (Dawn), Jeff (Brianna), and Michelle (Derek Moore), who are all shareholders and work full-time on the family farm. Talking with Walter, one of his greatest sources of pride are his grandchildren, Marissa, April, Cole, Lane and Callie and seeing them start their involvement with the family farm and Jersey breed.

Walter and his family members have received many distinctions throughout the years. In 1989, he and Joyce received the AJCA Young Jersey Breeder Award. In fact, all three of his children have also received this award with Michelle being a recipient in 2023. Walter was also named the Wisconsin Senior Jersey Breeder by the WJBA in 2004 and received the 2017 Wisconsin Distinguished Service Award.

In 2019, Walter and his brothers, Wilfred and Roger, were presented with the elite AJCA Master Breeder Award. To learn more about the trio and a more in-depth history of the farm, reference the May 2019 *Jersey*

Journal.

In a true act of selflessness and dedication to giving back, Walter and Joyce established the Walter and Joyce Owens Family Scholarship through the AJCA in 2019. So far, two recipients have benefited from their generosity.

Former AJCA President Jonathan Merriam, Hickman, Calif., said it best. "The AJCA is a better organization because of Walter and other breeders like him. He always has the best interest of the association at heart."

Distinguished Service Awards

1954	W. W. Trout, Springfield, Ohio*
1955	Harold J. Turner, Bethel, Vt.*
1956	Judge Peter J. Shields, Sacramento, Calif.*
1957	R. C. Calloway, Baton Rouge, La.*
1958	Lynn Copeland, Nashville, Tenn.*
1959	Chester Folck, Springfield, Ohio*
1960	Ernest Greenough, Merced, Calif.*
1961	Paul Jackson, Wilmington, Ohio*
1962	Harriet J. Groos, Vancouver, Wash.*
1963	R. K. Stout, Lansing, Mich.*
1964	Herbert G. Myers, Boise, Idaho*
1965	Charles S. Kelly, Hudson, Wis.*
1966	Joseph F. Sawyer, Galt, Calif.*
1967	Henry P. Knolle, Sandia, Texas*
1968	H. I. Sawyer, Hughson, Calif.*
1969	M. L. Baird, Springfield, Ohio*
1970	E. Lea Marsh, Jr., Old Lyme, Conn.*
1971	Stanley N. Chittenden, New Lebanon, N.Y.*
1972	Arthur Dieterich, Sherman, Texas*
1973	Amzi Rankin, Jr., Faunsdale, Ala.*
1974	Capt. T. J. and Elizabeth Bay, Lynden, Wash.*
1975	Mrs. Thomas H. Carruthers, III, Glendale, Ohio*
1975	Paul Sparrow, Athens, Tenn.*
1976	Wyatt A. Williams, Orange, Va.*
1977	Dr. J. H. Arnold, Newnan, Ga.*
1977	Reuben R. Cowles, Statesville, N.C.*
1978	Jean E. Lemmermen, Tiffin, Ohio*
1979	John Weir Jr., Geuda Springs, Kan.*
1980	Clyde K. Chappell, Knoxville, Tenn.*
1980	Newell Mills, Fallon, Nev.*
1981	Harold Wright, White River Junction, Vt.*
1982	C. L. Collins, Jr., Sylacauga, Ala.*
1983	Ray Chamberlain, Wyoming, N.Y.*
1984	Dr. C. A. Ernstrom, Logan, Utah*
1985	J. F. Cavanaugh, Columbus, Ohio*
1986	W. Charles McGinnis, Mountville, S.C.*
1987	G. Joe Lyon, Toledo, Iowa*
1988	Dr. John Wilk, Raleigh, N.C.
1989	Robert Lord, Woodstock, Vt.*
1990	Dr. H. Duane Norman, Fulton, Md.
1991	Edwin L. Crotty, Trenton, N.J.*
1992	Richard A. Riggs, Evansville, Ind.*
1993	Maurice E. Core, Columbus, Ohio*
1994	John Giacomini, Eureka, Calif.*
1995	W. R. Lutz, Newton, N.C.*
1996	Max Gordon, Winchester, Ind.*
1997	Harold Owens, Frederic, Wis.*
1998	Richard Clauss, Hilmar, Calif.
1999	Elmer D. Larson, Burlington, Wash.*
2000	Dr. J. J. Malnati, Newberry, S.C.*
2001	Harold W. Roller, Weyers Cave, Va.*
2002	Ray R. Schooley, Marshfield, Mo.
2003	D.L. Strandberg, D.V.M., Alma Center, Wis.*
2004	Neal F. Schirm, Canal Winchester, Ohio*
2005	J. Lawrence Benson, New Lebanon, N.Y.
2006	Ted Luther, Mount Ulla, N.C.*
2007	Alvin Moss, Litchfield Park, Ariz.*
2008	David W. Spahr, Findlay, Ohio
2009	Dr. Robert C. and Helene C. Dreisbach, Mercer, Pa.
2010	Paul Chittenden, Schodack Landing, N.Y.
2011	Donald Sherman, Hilmar, Calif.*
2012	John Palmer, Cornish, Maine*
2013	James Ahlem, Hilmar, Calif.
2014	Glen and Marilyn Easter, Laurens, S.C.
2015	George and Shirley Barlass, Janesville, Wis.
2016	Charles D. "Chuck" Ahlem, Hilmar, Calif.
2017	Craig Rhein, Pine Grove, Pa.
2018	David Endres, Lodi, Wis. Chris Sorenson, Pine River, Wis.
2019	David Norman, Liberty, Pa.
2020	Clint Collins, III, Gulf Shores, Ala.
2021	Calvin Graber, Parker, S.D.
2022	Bill and Marion Barlass, Janesville, Wis.
2023	James S. Huffard III, Crockett, Va. Walter Owens, Frederic, Wis.

* deceased