



Herefords in Stone

Ruyana Fugitt commissioned a life-sized cattle drive statue set to honor her father Freddie Browne.

by **Sara Gugelmeyer**

When driving cross-country, people enjoy seeing cattle grazing in the pasture. But McAlester, Okla., with the help of Ruyana and Gary Fugitt, stands out because, there, Hereford cattle can be spotted right in town. They're actually not real Herefords but stone statues sporting her daddy's -XL brand and being driven by two cowboys and a blue heeler dog. And they make an impression on everybody who passes.

"Naturally, people who are in agriculture love it, but even people that have less to do in that line of work still absolutely enjoy

it. Young kids just love it," says Ruyana of the statues she and her husband commissioned in honor of her dad, Freddie Browne.

Curtis Curry, American Hereford Association director and McAlester Hereford breeder, says the statues are a great advertisement for the Hereford breed. "Everybody that drives between St. Louis and Dallas sees those Herefords and are reminded what a great breed it is. It's historical as well, prompting passers by to remember that Herefords were once nearly the only cattle in the West," Curry says.



Although Ruyana wishes her daddy's -XL brand was a little bigger so it was easier to see from the road, it is an important part of the statues.

Ruyana got the idea for the sculptures from friends Bob and Grace Wallace, who travel the country in their motorcoach. As part of the Pride in McAlester program, Ruyana was considering different ways to set McAlester apart from other small towns.

"I asked them what things you can do in a small town to put your town on the map so people remember it," Ruyana says. "So they brought me this portfolio of things that had caught their eyes and there was this picture of a cattle drive statue in Pendleton, Ore., that they had seen."

Ruyana knew it would be a great way to honor her father, lifelong cattleman Freddie Browne. Browne passed away in 1975 but left behind a legacy of raising commercial Hereford cattle and supporting his community.

"My father was a wonderful man," Ruyana says. "You could come ask anyone in McAlester and you could not find anybody that would say anything unkind about

Freddie Browne. He was a man of character and integrity. He was a quiet man, humble man, minded his own business. Didn't talk a lot. Never repeated anything. Outstanding person," she says.

Ruyana, now 72 years young, reminisces about her younger days spent trailing her daddy. "We really always lived in town, but as a young girl I was my dad's sidekick. I'd go to the stockyards with him. He taught me how to drive in a 1,000-acre pasture when I was really young."

And when looking at the picture of Pendleton, Ore., sculptor and art professor Michael Booth's work, Ruyana says she couldn't help but see the statue's resemblance to her daddy. So in early 2008, she, Gary and Booth worked out the details of what Booth would create.

"I contacted the artist and I wanted it to look a little bit different so it would look more like my father. We decided on nine cows, a blue heeler, because my daddy used a blue heeler gathering his cattle, then two horses with riders on them. Gary suggested he make the hair smoother to more accurately represent my father's cattle," she says.

The sculptures took about a year to complete, as Booth had to build each statue, first making a wire form, then covering it with dyed concrete.

In the meantime, Ruyana had to decide where to put it. "I really wanted it out south of town where there is a big area but could not get approval from the highway department," she says.

"You have to work with the government, and I did want it on the highway so it could have exposure, not only for our citizens' enjoyment but so it would also have exposure to travelers through McAlester."

Luckily Eastern Oklahoma State College has a campus in McAlester which is right where highways 270 and 69 cross.



Artist Michael Booth crafted each statue by hand at his studio in Oregon.



"I contacted the college and asked them if they would be interested in letting us put it on their property, right near where the highways cloverleaf," Ruyana says. "They were very happy, more than agreeable; so we basically gave it to them. They were just honored by it and thrilled."

The statues started spreading the Hereford message before they even made it to McAlester. Constructed by Booth in his studio in Oregon, they made the trek on a trailer halfway across the country. "When they hauled it down, some people followed it all the way from Tulsa, because they'd never seen anything like it," Ruyana says.

On June 12, 2009, there was a commemoration ceremony during which Ruyana spoke, as well as others



The statues got a lot of lookers on their cross-country trip from Oregon to Oklahoma.

from the college and community. Also, lights were installed so the statues can be seen at night.

Ruyana says she and her husband were happy to give this unique gift to the community, despite the hefty price tag of \$100,000 plus shipping and placement costs. "We only had one son, Garrison Browne Fugitt, and he was killed in a car accident in 1989," Ruyana says. "We don't really have any heirs but this community has been good to us. God's been good to us. So if we can do something to bless our community and bring pleasure to other people, why wouldn't you want to do that? And I think we have, people have appreciated it. **HW**"



Ruyana with one of the Hereford cows, fresh off the truck.