

People & Places

Auctioneer continues family legacy

By MATTHEW WEAVER Capital Press

COLFAX, Wash. — Cotton Booker competed for the first time in the International Auctioneer Championship in July, but he's been attending it almost his whole life.

Now 20 years old, he's attended the event every year since 2007 — the first year he can remember being there.

"It was something I've always dreamt of growing up," he said of competing.

Family tradition

Auctions run in the family. He was three months old in 2002, when his grandfather, D.L. Booker, was inducted into the National Auctioneers Association Hall of Fame.

Cotton Booker hopes to continue his family's legacy as an auctioneer, following in the footsteps of his grandfather, his father, C.D. "Butch" Booker, and his uncles and cousins.

"Everyone looks at their local auctioneer as someone who can help them in the right way and do the right thing for them," he said. "Auctioneers are looked at as those that are supposed to have an expertise on everything and be able to determine a price. (They have) the ability to help people and serve people in a way that no one else can."

In 2018, he won the International Junior Auctioneer Championship.

FFA experience

This year, Booker is a finalist for the national FFA's American Star award for agribusiness, citing his



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Cotton Booker is a finalist for the national FFA American Star award for agribusiness, co-owner with his father of their online auction business and a college junior studying agricultural business and pre-law.

six years of agricultural auctioneering during high school and college.

The award recognizes members who have gone "above and beyond" in their supervised agricultural experiences, or SAEs, and mastered their skills.

"It means a lot," he said. "It's a humbling experience."

Joining FFA boosted his self-confidence, he said.

It enabled him to "...grow as myself and grow what I was able to do behind a microphone, from the standpoint of public speaking and being in front of judges," he said.

Long-time friends

National FFA president Cole Baerlocher and Booker have known each other since preschool in Steptoe, Wash. They were two of six members of their eighth-grade class, before attending high school in Colfax.

"It's pretty dang cool" to

be able to say of Baerlocher, "I know that kid," Booker said. "I'm super proud of him."

Baerlocher is just as proud of Booker.

"Cotton represents just how far a little hard work can get you," he said. "He's experienced success in all that he's done because he's willing to put his head down and put in the time and dedication to see his goals come to fruition."

Baerlocher will oversee the national convention session this fall when American Star winners are presented.

Family business

With his father, Booker also co-owns Booker2Bid.com, an online auction platform.

Butch Booker's business, Kincaid Real Estate, had to pivot in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic as in-person events, including auctions, were impacted.

Cotton was a high school senior, just about to graduate.

"There was a lot of uncertainty," he said. "We didn't know what was going to happen."

So father helped son learn the business, and son helped father navigate the technical aspects of online actions.

The two businesses are separate but affiliated, with Butch Booker owning and brokering for both.

Kincaid primarily handles residential real estate, while Booker2Bid.com primarily handles agricultural land.

"He sees the big picture, but he also understands the small steps that have to be made in order to move things forward," office manager Abbie DeMeerleer said.

"Cotton has the opportunity to grow his family's legacy while helping it move forward into a more electronic age, and an age where the agriculture industry is shifting."



Western Innovator

COTTON BOOKER

Occupation: Co-owner, Booker2Bid.com

Age: 20

Hometown: Colfax, Wash.

Education: Junior at Oklahoma State University, studying agricultural business and pre-law

Family: Mom Jennifer, dad Butch

Website: https://www.booker2bid.com/

Looking ahead

Shifting to online auctions has allowed Cotton to help from 1,200 miles away, as he attends college in Stillwater, Okla. A junior at Oklahoma State University, he studies agricultural business and pre-law.

He sees an "extreme" need for agricultural attorneys, but hasn't made his final career decision yet.

He hopes to eventually return to live in the Whitman County area as a professional auctioneer, selling real estate and cattle.

"Eventually the end goal is to be here in this office at some point and continue the legacy of the family in terms of selling assets," he said. "Just continue on helping people in the ag industry. ... It does us great joy."

Volunteers backbone of county fairs but are getting harder to find

By MATTHEW WEAVER Capital Press

MOSES LAKE, Wash. — Dawna Sandmann lives in her camper during the week of the Grant County Fair.

"I do not go home," she said. "You're pretty much on call if there's something going wrong. ... I'm here Monday at noon when we do check-in to Sunday morning."

Sandmann has volunteered at the fair in Moses Lake, Wash., for 15 years. She started as a 4-H leader, and then became sheep superintendent, a role she's filled for eight years.

It's getting harder to find volunteers, she said.

"People are so busy with just life, and I get it, I was that mom, too," she said. "Nobody's stepping up to put the time in. No volunteer group works with the same four people — we need new blood."

Volunteers are the "backbone" of fairs, said Andrea Thayer, president of the Washington State Fairs Association board and chief experience officer for the Washington State Fair in Puyallup.

Thayer believes the total number of volunteers is fairly stable, but the ease of finding them varies by location. Some fairs have good, well-developed systems for volunteers, while others are competing for volunteers' time.

In 2019, roughly 5,600 people volunteered at fairs across the state, according to an economic impact study from the association and state



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Volunteer sheep superintendent Dawna Sandmann and assistant Jana Raymond watch as a class of youths and their sheep are judged Aug. 18 during the Grant County Fair in Moses Lake, Wash.

Department of Agriculture.

About 35% of Washington's agricultural fairs rely solely on volunteers. Other fairs have a combination of paid staff and volunteers.

Finding paid staff can be a struggle, too, she said.

"We're all temporary events that people take time off from their normal routines to participate in," she said.

Jim McKiernan, director of the Grant County Fairgrounds in Moses Lake, said the number of volunteers has gone down in recent years. It reflects the difficulty civic organiza-

tions and volunteer fire departments also face in attracting volunteers, he said.

He thinks it might be a "generational thing."

"I think in the technology age, people just don't interact with each other as much as they used to," McKiernan said. "That was part of being a volunteer, was the social aspect to it. That's how you met people, that's how you met your neighbors."

It used to be more "innate" that someone would volunteer their time at the fair because they were show-

ing animals or entering a competition, Thayer said.

But as one generation of volunteers begins to retire, she believes the next generation coming in has great potential.

"They want to be connected to organizations and events that they believe in, that they authentically feel connected to," she said.

The opportunity lies in speaking to that generation "in their language," Thayer said. That includes emphasizing how fairs raise donations for the community food bank or to educate youth.

"Just rethinking how we gather our volunteers is probably our next step," she said. "We are very proactive in the fair world. ... We have a purpose to serve. We need to make sure we're relevant to that purpose for the next generation."

Sandmann, the Grant County Fair sheep superintendent, urges people to just go ahead and volunteer.

"If you think you can't do it, you're wrong," she said. "If you're at all interested, at least try it."

"People still have a yearning to get back to some basic, family-style roots and a fair kind of gets you back to that," McKiernan said.

"The fair is the fabric of our communities," Thayer said. "It's a gathering point. ... Whether or not they have day-to-day commonalities, they can come during the fair and really connect together in a different way, and your volunteers are at the heart of that."

CALENDAR

Submit upcoming ag-related events on www.capitalpress.com or by email to newsroom@capitalpress.com. All times reflect the local time zone unless otherwise noted.

THROUGH SEPT. 5 Oregon State Fair: 10 a.m. Oregon State Fair & Exposition Center, 2330 17th St. NE, Salem. The Oregon State Fair continues through Sept. 5. Website: https://oregon-statefair.org/

SEPT. 2-10 Eastern Idaho State Fair: Eastern Idaho Fairgrounds, 97 Park St., Blackfoot, Idaho. It's fair time in Idaho. Website: https://funatthefair.com/general-info/

SEPT. 2-25 Washington State Fair: 10:30 a.m. Puyallup Fairgrounds, 110 9th Ave. SW, Puyallup, Wash. The Washington State Fair is the largest single attraction held annually in the state of Washington. Closed Tuesdays and Sept. 7. Website: https://www.thefair.com/

THURSDAY SEPT. 8 Farm & Ranch Succession Planning and Working Lands Easements: 12:30- 4 p.m. OSU Malheur County Extension, 710 Southwest 5th Ave., Ontario, Ore. Attorney June Flores will present on the topics of succession and estate planning, and how to prepare your operation to be resilient for future generations. Easement specialist Marc Hudson will answer your questions about working lands conservation easements —what they are, what they aren't, and how they may be helpful in executing your agricultural business plans. These in-person events are part of a free 6-workshop series in Lake, Harney and Malheur counties. All are welcome, and the events are free. RSVP for these or any of OAT's other events and refer any questions about the event to diane@oregon-nagtrust.org 503-858-2683

FRIDAY SEPT. 9 Farm & Ranch Succession Planning and Working Lands Easements: 12:30- 4 p.m. Burns Elks Lodge, 18 N. Broadway Ave., Burns, Ore. Attorney June Flores will pres-

ent on the topics of succession and estate planning, and how to prepare your operation to be resilient for future generations. Easement specialist Marc Hudson will answer your questions about working lands conservation easements —what they are, what they aren't, and how they may be helpful in executing your agricultural business plans. These in-person events are part of a free 6-workshop series in Lake, Harney and Malheur counties. All are welcome, and the events are free. RSVP for these or any of OAT's other events and refer any questions about the event to diane@oregon-nagtrust.org 503-858-2683

SATURDAY OCT. 1 Free Waste Pesticide Collection Event in White City: Rogue Transfer and Recycling, 8001 Table Rock Road, White City, Ore. The Oregon Department of Agriculture through the Pesticide Stewardship Partnership is sponsoring a Free Waste Pesticide Collection Event. This event is an opportunity for landowners, farmers and other commercial pesticide users to rid storage facilities of unwanted or

unused pesticide products. Contact: Kathryn Rifenburg, 971-600-5073, kathryn.rifenburg@oda.oregon.gov Registration for this event is required by Sept. 16. Website: https://bit.ly/3FloyFE

SUNDAY-FRIDAY OCT. 2-7 World Dairy Expo: Alliant Energy Center, Madison, Wis. The expo is the world's largest dairy-focused trade show. Website: https://www.worlddairyexpo.com

WEDNESDAY-THURSDAY OCT. 5-6 National Cooperative Business Association IMPACT Conference (in person and online): National Press Club, Washington, D.C. The conference provides a platform to re-energize the cooperative movement. Website: http://ncba-cmla.coop

WEDNESDAY-SUNDAY OCT. 5-9 Trailing of the Sheep Festival: Ketchum, Idaho. The five-day festival includes activities in multiple venues and culminates with the

big sheep parade down Main Street in Ketchum. Website: https://www.trailingofthesheep.org

FRIDAY OCT. 14 Federal Milk Marketing Order Forum: 12:30 p.m. local time Kansas City Marriott Downtown, Kansas City, Mo. Hosted by American Farm Bureau Federation, the forum will explore solutions to FMMO shortfalls. Registration closes at noon on Sept. 23. Website: https://bit.ly/3QC08XP

SATURDAY OCT. 15 Free Waste Pesticide Collection Event in Roseburg: Douglas County Fairgrounds, 2110 Frear St., Roseburg, Ore. The Oregon Department of Agriculture through the Pesticide Stewardship Partnership is sponsoring a Free Waste Pesticide Collection Event. This event is an opportunity for landowners, farmers and other commercial pesticide users to rid storage facilities of unwanted or unused pesticide products. Contact: Kathryn Rifenburg, 971-600-5073, kathryn.rifenburg@oda.oregon.gov Registration for this event is required by Sept. 16.



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