

Artist finds home in cattle industry

By Codi Vallery-Mills

This year's cover art is courtesy of Michelle Weber of Lake Benton, Minn. It is a culmination of photographs she took while visiting friends in the Badlands of South Dakota.

Weber has found recent success with her paintings thanks to commission work from breed associations and cattle producers. A native of Windom, Minn. she was brought up on a crop farm where the family raised consignment hogs. It wasn't until she met and married her husband Jesse that she became involved in the cattle industry.

The couple raises cattle with Jesse's parents, Joe and Jodi Weber, and holds a registered Red Angus female sale every fall.

She is a 2010 graduate of South Dakota State University. But it isn't art she holds a degree in. Michelle started as an art major but changed over to advertising and marketing in hopes to secure a solid career path.

"Everyone thinks of a starving artist when they think about pursuing art full-time and I did too. I didn't give myself enough credit or listen to myself," says Michelle about why she switched majors. "The whole time I was getting my advertising degree I was hoping that in the future I would be able to use it to promote my art work."

In high school she was a fixture in the art classroom but she didn't fall back into that habit until her senior year at SDSU when she took a few art classes and found herself really enjoying painting.

"After completing my first painting I spent every moment I could in the art room there," she says.

After graduation she began working as a graphic designer. "It gave me a different way to use my advertising major and was a creative outlet for me also."

Then she was commissioned by the Maine Anjou Association to complete a painting for a silent auction fundraiser. It was followed by another request by the association to paint its

Hall of Fame portraits.

"I give credit to my husband, Jesse, because he has connected me to a lot of people in the cattle industry who I have done paintings for," says Michelle of how her art portfolio has grown.

Michelle completed a few more paintings as she split her time between her graphic design job and helping on the ranch. It was during this time that she discovered a desk job wasn't for her. She was missing time spent outdoors or in the art studio.

In the fall of 2011 she exited her graphic design job to focus on her painting and helping her family with harvest, driving the grain cart, and getting ready for the heifer sale.

A few months later Michelle partnered up with agriculture writer, Amanda Radke, to illustrate the children's book *Amanda* was working on.

"It was a little stressful because I had gone from painting when I had spare time to suddenly needing to get 21 paintings done in a month," says Michelle.

Working from photographs and ideas submitted by Amanda, Michelle soon had the 21 illustrations knocked out and the story of *Levi's Lost Calf* was brought to life through images.

Since then Michelle has completed various projects including oils, watercolor and some pencil sketches. She still helps on the ranch when needed and she became a new mom this summer to son, Wacey.

Even with her time a little more divided now she continues to paint – mostly livestock because it is the cornerstone of the family operation and what her customers are interested in.

Current projects she is working on include a state fair lineup of dairy cattle; a special memorial piece of a ranch founder; and she is wading through a few more potential book deals.

New for 2012 is the opportunity to purchase prints of Michelle's paintings. In fact Michelle has the cover of this magazine available as a print.

You can see more of Michelle's paintings online at Webercustompainting.com, on Facebook or email her at webercustompainting@gmail.com.

Cover art photograph taken by Melby Photography of Brookings, SD

