

# Greg Deakin, *The Banner Sheep Magazine*

Greg Deakin began his career with sheep as a 4-H project in 1958 with five Hampshire ewes purchased from Deep Valley Farms in Fiatt, Illinois. They had a noted Hampshire flock, winning Chicago Championships with "Coal Dust" and "Coal Dust Laddie." Their Angus and Hereford herds were equally competitive in Chicago.

Sheep were always in the Deakin genetics, as the local FFA award records show a great uncle placing 3<sup>rd</sup> in a fat lamb class in the 1930s in Chicago.

As a teenager and through his college years, Greg showed sheep on the Western Illinois County Fair Circuit, carrying strings of Hampshires, Suffolks, Corriedales, and Oxfords. An Oxford ewe he showed for Jim Hanson of Wisconsin won back-to-back Grand Champion Ewe honors at both the 1971 and 1972 Chicago International.

Greg attended the University of Illinois from 1971-1973. At the end of his junior year in 1973, he had the opportunity to go to work for Larry Mead at the *Sheep Breeder Magazine* as Assistant Manager while taking classes at the University of Missouri. After a year and a half at the *Sheep Breeder*, the orange and blue in his blood took him back to Illinois where he completed his degree in Agricultural Sciences.

Greg next went to work for Production Credit Service in Watseka, Illinois after graduation from 1974-1978. Watseka is the county seat in Iroquois County, and the same county as Rollie Rosenboom and a host of other noted sheep breeders were from.

As the Suffolk breed was heading toward its pinnacle, demand was growing in the industry for the Suffolk breed to produce its own magazine. With the encouragement of Rollie Rosenboom and his experience learned from Larry Mead, Greg decided to pursue his dream of starting his own magazine. Knowing it would be a bigger project than one alone could handle, Greg started out with the help of childhood best friend Curt Overcash, a new ag teacher in Princeville, Illinois.

The *Suffolk Banner* was born in Watseka, Illinois on Sunday, January 15, 1978 while the Dallas Cowboys were beating the Denver Broncos 27-10. The two began their 3-year partnership by preparing a call list, knowing everyone would be around a phone before the game, at half time and after the game. Greg's call list was highly successful, relying on all the old contacts he made while working for *Sheep Breeder Magazine*. Many of the original advertisers are still working with *The Banner* today, and several in their second and third generations.

The first issue of *The Suffolk Banner* came out in March of 1978, and was an overwhelming success, causing Greg to leave PCA in October and move back to Cuba to the family farm to go full time in the magazine business. This move also allowed him to help his recently retired coal-mining father.

*The Suffolk Banner* grew and added Banner Sale Management Service, specializing primarily in Suffolk sales. Banner Sale Management Service built the most efficient sale clerking and management system in the sheep industry today. To this date, Banner Sale Management has managed sales in 37 different states.

As a result of his extensive sale experience, Greg has served as an expert witness in the courts, testifying on the value of Suffolk sheep in Oregon, Nevada, and California and has used sale records numerous times to verify the value of purebred sheep to insurance agents, attorneys and breeders.

Working with both the National Suffolk Sheep Association and American Suffolk Sheep Society was a real joy with all the sharp sheep-minds setting on both boards. To this day Greg feels it is the many friendships made with the Suffolk and other purebred breeders that has made his career so rewarding.

As the Suffolk breed registrations and transfers decreased, and with the success of the *The Suffolk Banner* riding on the back of Suffolk sheep, the decision was made in the fall of 1993 to expand the magazine to an all-breed format beginning in 1994. That move enabled Greg, wife Deb and *The Banner* staff to fully serve everyone in the purebred and registered sheep industry.

Greg has served as judge at a number of shows, but conscious of a conflict of interest between exhibitors and advertising, he has declined most. However, some of his judging highlights span from the Alaska State Fair in 2003 to the Fryeburg, Maine fair the past three years.

Another role he plays is that of a sheep photographer, serving as the official photographer for the North American International Livestock Exposition, Eastern States Exposition, and Keystone International Livestock Exposition, to name a few. Annually, he takes over 15,000 pictures, and has taken over 700,000 pictures the last 40 years. Also in *The Banner* office are the files of *The Sheep Breeder Magazine*, which include over 1 million photos of various breeds back to the 1950s. As a result, *The Banner* office contains the most comprehensive and accessible history of the purebred sheep industry in the United States. Doors are always open to those wanting to learn more about their breed, the industry, or even just a family members' involvement in the past.

Greg served four years as President of the American Border Leicester Association and currently is on the Board of Directors. He was also on the ASI Road Map Committee, whose purpose was to promote the sheep industry. Most recently, in 2017, Greg was appointed to the 13-member American Lamb Board by United States Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue to represent Seedstock producers.

The Deakin family still runs a flock of 75 sheep consisting of both Hampshires and Border Leicesters, and farms 400 acres, parts of which have been in the family for 150 years. Greg and Deb have two children, Tiffany and Colin, who both show sheep competitively across the country. Deb's strength has always been keeping the business, the kids and Greg in order, and she orchestrated much of the clerking system and operations for Banner Sale Management. She now spends much of her time between her new Subway restaurants. As she's stepped back, Greg and Deb have welcomed daughter Tiffany into the *Banner* and sale management operation, where she now handles a big share of the sale management responsibilities and is very involved with the magazine as well. Colin is very involved with the farming operation, taking care of the flock, plus a small herd of commercial cattle. He has a gift for mechanics which was certainly not inherited. The Deakin family all reside in Cuba, Illinois.