

MEET JOHN RODGER— THE ROYAL'S TROPHY COORDINATOR

BY BOB KIRNER

John Rodger didn't interview to be trophy coordinator at the Royal Agricultural Winter Fair. In fact, he didn't even apply. He literally walked into the job.

From the age of 12, John Rodger, his brother, Ross, and their dad, Erskine Rodger, shared the spotlight at The Royal. Each November, father and sons would proudly show the Ayrshire cattle they'd raised on the family's farm in Lachute, Quebec. John Rodger stopped attending the Fair in 1964. Newly married and managing a career, he didn't return for another 27 years.

"I returned to donate a trophy in my dad's name," he explains. Erskine Rodger died in 1990 and the trophy was to honour the memory of the family patriarch. The Erskine Rodger Memorial Trophy is awarded to the annual champion Ayrshire calf in the 4-H open show. "My dad was one of the leaders to start up the 4-H in Lachute," says Rodger. "He was always keen on young people being recognized."

People in the offices recognized him from years past and asked him what he was doing in Toronto. "I told them I was retired," he says. "And they asked me if I wanted a job." The next thing he knew he was being led to the trophy room. "The elderly gentleman that was in there was struggling to tag the trophies. After we were introduced, he looked at me and said, 'Here. Take over.'"

That was in 1993. Today, Rodger works with an assistant to prepare each of The Royal's 220 trophies for the competitions. Computers help with the coordinating. Still, each award—valued at more than \$300,000 combined—needs to be catalogued, polished and engraved, not to mention delivered to the right event at the right time.

Winners don't get to take the silverware home. A framed photo with the prize and a memento is what's offered. "When the show has been presented, we go and get the trophies from the ring and bring them back to our room for safe keeping," says Rodger.

Among his favourite trophies is the Championship Clydesdale Cup. "It has the history of The Royal," he says. "It's been here since day one. And it looks a bit like the Stanley Cup."

And, there's no end to the pride Rodger feels as he readies his dad's trophy for another year.

