

Meet the Judge

By Erin Kalpin
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JAKE & SARA HEESACKER

Teamwork makes the dream work in the Heesacker household. What started as a curiosity to get into bird dogs quickly became a full-fledged family affair for Jake, Sara, and their two daughters, Makenzie and Kaytlyn.

Jake Heesacker went hunting with his dad and brother in the fall of 2006, shortly after he and Sara got married. By 2007, they got their first dog, a Shorthair named Ruger. It wasn't until 2013, when Jake and Sara got their second dog, Elsa, that they learned about NAVHDA. They decided they wanted to learn more about training, so they joined their local chapter, hungry to learn, and attended every single training day the Rocky Mountain Chapter offered.

Both Jake and Sara became very quickly involved with their NAVHDA chapter. After a lot of pushing from their mentors and local judges, they made the decision to become judges. At first, they wanted to wait until their daughters were grown up but were quickly convinced that was no reason to wait.

The Heesackers now own a total of 5 dogs, Elsa, Cruz, Faith, Laz, and Heidi. They also own Surefire Kennels, where they train client dogs and also help lead training days for the Rocky Mountain Chapter. Jake works for Chevron as a lead field specialist while Sara stays home and homeschools Makenzie and Kaytlyn. Jake works 7 days on and is then home for 7 days, so on the days he is away, Sara and the girls train dogs in-between school lessons. Sara says it's hard to see the progress she's making on the dog training while Jake is away, but whenever he comes home after a week of work, he's able to point out all of the progress the dogs have made and provides that reassurance for Sara.

Some of their favorite things about judging, besides getting to see all the dog work, share in the camaraderie between judges, and watching different chap-

ters put their hearts into the organization, Jake and Sara also love having the opportunities to help pour into others with training advice and insight into how everything applies to a hunting situation. They both agree a common theme they see throughout NAVHDA is high expectations out of puppies and not enough expectations in the dogs later on. They both like to encourage people to have patience with their puppies and to let the dog grow, mature, and cultivate through time.

The hunting memories for the Heesackers are abundant. This hunting season, the whole family was out on a Sage Grouse hunt, and watching their daughters work hard for their birds was a highlight for Jake and Sara. They also reflect on a particular hunt in Montana when they decided to put a couple of young dogs, both under a year, on the ground. They were already a half mile into their hunt and weren't seeing anything until they came to the crest of a hill, and the dogs went on point. As soon as they got to their pups, there were Sharptail and pheasants emerging everywhere, and by the time they got back to the truck they had their limit of birds.

When talking with the Heesacker family, you can't help but sense their love and commitment to their dogs, NAVHDA, and especially their family. They love to provide wonderful opportunities to their daughters by catering to their special interests, which just happen

to fall into the outdoors. Not only do both girls love being involved in the dog training and care, but they also have passions in drawing and photography of the dogs. Recently, the entire family attended the Iowa Invitational, where they ran several dogs and volunteered their time. Their daughter, Makenzie, also ran a dog and Kaytlyn took photos throughout the week. The Heesacker family is certainly a force to be reckoned with. 🐾

