

Bringing home the bacon

WHEN MOST MISSISSIPPI STATE alumni think about the ringing of cowbells on a bright fall Saturday afternoon, a scrimmage on Scott Field immediately comes to mind. CALS alumnus, **Ernie Barnes** says the sound reminds him of a swine barn.

“Back when I was in school, you could hear the cowbells ringing on a Saturday afternoon from South Farm (H.H. Leveck Animal Research Center).

We’d be in the swine barn and our judging coach would say, ‘That’s right. Get fired up. We are going to judge ten or 12 more classes, then you all can go to the football game.’ We usually got

to most games about the start of the fourth quarter.”

The 1974 animal and dairy sciences graduate recalls his time as part of the Mississippi State Livestock Judging Team as one of the fondest memories of his life.

“The experience expanded my horizons so much. I was a small-town kid from Union County, Mississippi who got to travel to nearly twenty-five states for competition that year. I got to know people from all over the country.”

The livestock judging team is what initially attracted Barnes to Mississippi State.

“I knew I was going to be on the livestock judging team. I’ve had a love for

animals and loved that particular program. Mississippi State’s new livestock judging coach, Dr. Howard Miller from Southern Illinois, was already well known in the pork industry. I knew him by reputation and I just had to be on his judging team.”

Barnes grew up in the West Union/New Albany area on a small farm with a small herd of Hereford cattle and a few Yorkshire sows.

“My dad was a Baptist minister. He liked livestock almost as much as my younger brother and I did. We showed both pigs and cattle.”

Barnes’ passion for livestock led him to the pork industry. For the past 30 years, Barnes has been with the National Pork Board. In his current position he serves as director of producer services. He’s a central figure in the execution of the annual World Pork Expo, which brings 25,000 pork producers to Des Moines, Iowa each year. He also oversees three regional staff members tasked with making sure state boards and producers have what they need for the national organization. Another project he is heavily invested in, he says, is Operation Main Street. The program trains 1,300 pork producers on how to give speeches to groups in their local communities, including civic organizations, high schools, county commissions, dietetic groups, and more.

“Our pork producers are out there showing customers they care about the environment, the health and safety of their employees, their animals, and, most importantly, their communities and families,” Barnes said.

Even though Barnes and his wife, Paula, have been in Iowa for 30 years, raising both of their children in the Hawkeye State, they all still have close ties to Mississippi State. Both of his children attended Mississippi State; his son in the PGA Golf Management Program and his daughter for a kinesiology internship.

