

What I See



Al Warthen registers sellers before the auction. Warthen said he has worked at the Sale Barn a lot of years, through different owners.



Joey Nachtman works in the ring.



Clay Peska lifts his bidder card while purchasing several lots of cattle.



Accompanying their father, Andy White, from left, Jenavieve White, 11, Jack White, 9, Hank White, 5, Halee White, 3, watch cattle being brought into the sale ring.

Dave LaBelle • Staff Photos

An American tradition

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I heard an art critic say that there is no greater landscape than the human face. I couldn't agree more. And there are few places better for studying faces etched by life than a sale barn packed with generations of farmers.

Owners of the Cascade Livestock and Auction, Todd and Karen Bergfeld, said they hold a sale the first Saturday of the month, and a sale every Monday for feeder cattle, market cows and market bulls. On Jan 7, 1,140 head of cattle — bred cows, heifers and feeders — passed through the auction ring. But it was the faces of

those buying, selling, cooking, auctioning, working the ring and the pens behind the scenes, I found most interesting.

In many parts of the country, livestock auctions, once as popular as small-town baseball teams or dance halls for entertainment, have given way to television and other modern attention-getters. But for me the nostalgia of a sale barn atmosphere — the sounds, smells, faces and texture — still stirs my heart and reminds me of an American tradition I was raised with and I hope never leaves.

This is an occasional feature through the eyes of photographer Dave LaBelle.



Lynn Nienkark and Randy Dising tease each other while having lunch before the auction begins.



TJ Polk takes a brief moment of rest back in the holding pens while awaiting the next group of cows to be moved.



Mark Finnegan, owner of the Walker Sale Barn, enjoys himself during the Cascade cattle sale.



Mike Sahn, front, and Wayne Beringer move cows from holding pens toward the auction ring.



Jim Ihrig keeps an eye on cattle in the ring.



Mike Millenkamp, of Earlville, contemplates a bid during the Cascade Livestock Auction's Special Bred Cow and Feeder Sale, Jan. 7.