

# Leaving a Legacy

Wilma Minix of Athens, Ga., purchases the first granite planter in the Angus Foundation's "Building an Angus legacy!" project to honor the legacy of her Black Witch Farm.

Story & photo by **Katie Allen** for the Angus Foundation

**S**he was barefoot and sweating from head to toe as she plowed behind the ox in the southern Georgia heat. It was the early 1940s prior to World War II, and the girl, taking a break from her high school classes, worked diligently in her family's 10-acre garden with no idea someone was watching.

The strapping young man at the edge of the field couldn't take his eyes off the barely 5-foot-tall young lady with so much determination to get the field plowed. When she turned to meet his gaze, she noticed he was grinning from ear to ear.

This scene led to the courtship of Ed and Wilma Minix, who eventually married in 1942.

"I was so embarrassed, but apparently, he thought I was pretty neat," Wilma says of the plowing experience. "I thought he was the most handsome guy I had ever seen. He was my hero."

Ed served in the military, based in Fort McPherson, Ga., while Wilma worked as secretary to the third Army signal officer on the military base, a position she was in for 25 years.

After retiring from the military, Ed made a career in the fast-food business in Atlanta as vice president and general manager of The Varsity, a popular restaurant in Georgia where customers are famously asked, "What'll ya have?" The Atlanta location, where Ed worked for 37 years, is the world's largest drive-in restaurant.

Aside from their careers, Ed and Wilma learned to enjoy horseback riding. In 1962, the couple bought a small 47-acre farm in Gwinnett County, 15 miles outside of Atlanta, for a place to keep horses. However, they soon realized they needed some additional grazers to keep the pastures in check. With the help of their county agent, Wayne Shackelford, they decided on Angus cattle.

## Starting from scratch

Neither Ed nor Wilma were raised as "farm kids," and they didn't have any experience with cattle. In 1966, six Angus cows with heifer calves at side found a home at the Minix farm. Ed and Wilma began halter-breaking each of them, only to find the task was not an easy one. They were stubborn, and Ed would often jokingly call them "little black witches" during those first stages of halter-breaking. This, coupled with the fact they were descendants of the Witch Angus family, led Wilma to think it would be best to name their operation Black Witch Farm. The name stuck.

Ed and Wilma later traveled to Mill Creek, Okla., to purchase their foundation females from Burch Angus Ranch. The showing sparked their interest at the 1968 Great Southland Futurity in Athens, where they watched one breeder win so many trophies he

couldn't carry them all.

"I wanted to be that person," Wilma says.

Nearly 10 years later, they took home supreme champion honors at the same futurity with Black Witch Emulous TN 512, a son of the first herd bull Ed and Wilma had ever raised.

Ed and Wilma raised popular sires Black Witch Corbinaire 95, known as "O.G.," and his half brother Black Witch Corbinaire 94, known as "Randy." The bulls, entered in test stations at the University of Georgia's Calhoun and Tifton locations, respectively, broke records in the 1970s. Lemmon Cattle Enterprises of Woodbury, Ga., purchased half interest in "O.G.," and he was leased to Select Sires.

The couple kept many of their own heifers as replacements and sold bulls to seedstock and commercial customers. Customers who came to the farm would soon realize its uniqueness.

Ed would get off work each day at The Varsity, and he and Wilma drove to the farm



where they would feed and take care of the cattle. Ed and Wilma halter-broke each animal on their farm themselves.

Wilma says the cattle operation took a lot of dedication and "moonlighting," as she called it. When putting up hay, she'd drive the tractor, and he would walk behind and load it.

Sometimes the county agent's daughter, Carolyn Shackelford, and her fellow judging team member David Gazda, would assist the Minixes in putting up hay. Carolyn and David, the current American Angus Association southeast regional manager covering Georgia, Florida and the Carolinas, eventually married and continued to be close friends with the Minixes.

"When the 4-H judging team would go to Black Witch to work out, Mrs. Minix would always have brownies to eat and Varsity Orange for us to drink," Carolyn says.

Judging teams from 4-H, FFA and the collegiate levels enjoyed coming out to Black Witch Farm, where they could view the cattle with ease because they were all on halters.

In addition to being halter-broke, the cattle also had nicknames. The nicknames would come from anywhere. They named cattle

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after their friends. They named cattle after their respective attitudes. They named cattle after the holidays they were born close to.

Ed, being in the restaurant business and always cleaning something, walked around with paper towels in his back pocket. One particular young bull was very fond of stealing those towels when Ed had his back turned. That bull's name? Pickpocket.

Want to look at a certain bull? Not a problem. Ed or Wilma would put a halter on him and lead him out for you. They developed a strong relationship with their customers and their cattle.

### **Visionaries for the Angus breed**

After Ed's retirement from The Varsity in 1985, the couple purchased 286 acres of land in Hoschton to expand the operation. Black Witch Farm eventually grew to 60 head. In Hoschton, they built the farm themselves, starting with the barn, then built the fences, lake and dam. It was completed in five years.

The couple had no children. Wilma says the cattle and the people they knew in the cattle business filled that role.

When Black Witch Farm had a winner in the showring, cattle exhibitors at the show would fill the wounds from not winning with the expectation of a big Black Witch party, complete, of course, with hot dogs and hamburgers from The Varsity.

Ed's career at The Varsity made him realize the need to "breed a better burger" for the future.

"We hope we had a little part in improving the Angus breed," Wilma says.

To make that better burger, Ed and Wilma aimed to be progressive in terms of performance and realized the need to be involved. Ed and Wilma saw early on that docility and high genetic performance are a necessity in the Angus breed.

They entered their cattle in the Association's Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR®) program and Georgia's Beef Cattle Improvement Association (BCIA). This, and a "never give up" attitude, helped them in all of their achievements at bull test stations.

"The first bull we entered failed the test, and that made us more aware we had to do better," Wilma says.

Ed and Wilma bred all of their cattle using artificial insemination (AI), and each of them attended AI school. Although they normally had specialists come to the farm to do the AI, Ed and Wilma did the heat detection. They tried to educate themselves about the Angus breed as much as possible.

Both Ed and Wilma were active in the Georgia Angus Association and for several years attended the American Angus Association's annual meetings in Louisville, where Ed served as a voting delegate. Ed was also a director and president of the Georgia Angus Association. Both Ed and Wilma served on the board of The All-American Angus Breeders' Futurity and were members of the Piedmont Beef Cattlemen's Association.

Wilma says Ed was a great promoter for their farm. People would always remember him standing up at meetings introducing himself as Ed Minix from Black Witch Farm, and "this is the witch," he would say while pointing at Wilma. Everyone, including Wilma, got a chuckle out of the joke.

Eventually they were honored with the 1983 Georgia Purebred Breeder Award and most recently, in 2010, were inducted into the Georgia Angus Association Hall of Fame.

### **Continuing the legacy**

In 1990, Ed and Wilma were able to visit and tour the American Angus Association's headquarters in Saint Joseph, Mo. Wilma says she and her husband enjoyed that visit, and she was so glad her husband had the opportunity to see it. Just one year later, Ed passed away. Wilma kept Black Witch Farm running until 1992, when she dispersed, selling all of the Black Witch Farm cattle to Richard Childress of Yadkin River Angus Farm, Clemmons, N.C.

Six months after Ed passed away, Black Witch Farm had the highest-indexing and top-selling bull at the University of Georgia's Calhoun test station. Wilma had to accept the award alone.

"The hardest thing I ever had to do was accepting this honor," Wilma says. "It was something I should have been real proud of, but the fact that Ed couldn't share it with me was hard."

Both Ed and Wilma decided to donate their bodies to science at Emory University at their passing and will not have burial markers in their memory. So when Wilma saw the opportunity to purchase recognition on a granite planter as part of the Angus Foundation's "Building an Angus legacy!" fundraiser, she jumped at the chance.

"I couldn't think of a better way for our being remembered than by something that we love so much," Wilma says.

With this purchase — a \$7,500 donation to the Angus Foundation — Ed and Wilma and their Black Witch Farm will be recognized permanently, along with other farms, ranches and Angus enthusiasts, who contributed to the project to be recognized on a granite paver or planter. The project is planned for completion by the fall of 2014.

Wilma says Ed would be so proud of her for doing this in their memory.

The now 89-year-old Wilma lives in Athens, Ga. One look in her home, aligned with numerous art pieces, including many Angus drawings and photos, shows how much the

Angus business has meant to her. A sign in her home with the saying, "She who leaves a trail of glitter is never forgotten," describes her fun personality that allowed her to gain so many Angus friends over the years.

Wilma tries to attend Georgia Angus Association meetings whenever she has the opportunity. She says she misses the people and friends she made in the Angus business the most, but she is filled with pride each time she runs into a young person she watched grow up in the Angus business, or picks up an *Angus Journal* and reads a story about an achievement of someone she knows.

Ed and Wilma Minix are examples that you don't have to grow up in the cattle business to be a cattle producer. You simply have to love it and work hard for it.

Wilma says belonging to the Angus business has been rewarding beyond measure. To her, that granite planter, engraved with her and Ed's names and the Black Witch Farm logo, means much more than letters and a logo etched in granite.

It represents the ox and plow that led to a love and marriage between two people who learned to also love the Angus business. It means progression and determination to breed a better burger or steak for generations to come. It means giving back to the breed that has blessed an Angus farm in Georgia beyond measure.

It represents history and a legacy that will now be carried on forever outside the American Angus Association's headquarters. It represents, as Wilma says, "a great journey, a wonderful life."



**Editor's Note:** Katie Allen was the director of marketing and public relations of the Angus Foundation.