

► Software Engineer Marg Dreesmann celebrated 50 years with the American Angus Association this year. With no plans to retire, next year will be 51.



PHOTO BY SHELBY METTLER

A Clean, Well-lighted Place

Software engineer credits the Association's kindness and culture for 50 years of service.

by *Shelby Mettlen*, assistant editor

Marg Dreesmann sits quietly, speaking softly and articulately as she recounts the past 50 years, each of which she's spent with the American Angus Association. The 71-year-old insists she has nothing special or exciting to tell as she shifts in her chair and crosses her legs. Every move she makes is methodical; every word she speaks is carefully chosen.

In contrast, as her conversation flows, she's warm, friendly and forwardly confident. Dreesmann is soft-spoken, but sure.

"She's kind of indescribable," offers Lou Ann Adams, director of information systems for the American Angus Association. "She's, like, the best," she says, hesitating as she searches for the best way to describe her first mentor.

"She will get cranky with me," Adams admits, "but she's just the sweetest thing. She just has so much integrity and moral compass."

That seems to be the unanimous opinion of the Saint Joseph, Mo., native.

Dreesmann describes herself as a software engineer, and it sounds technical enough.

"Where did you go to school?" she's prompted.

"That's the thing," she begins. "How lucky I was. You will not believe the good fortune I've had."

A happy accident

Happstance set Dreesmann's career into motion. A high school friend was working for the Association when she decided to leave for

college to pursue a teaching degree. She recommended Dreesmann to take her place. At just 21 years old, Dreesmann embarked on what would become a 50-year journey with the Association.

"I had no computer experience at all," Dreesmann admits. Armed with a couple of years at the junior college in town and a can-do attitude, she jumped right in.

"All my education has been through Angus," she explains. "It would not happen to young people today."

The year was 1967, and it was the era of the mainframe computer. Massachusetts-based Honeywell furnished the giant machines and the training to operate them, and Dreesmann, along with career-maker/high school friend Jeanne Rost, were the only

two in attendance for Dreesmann's first educational course through the Association. "Iris Pankau was the director of Electronic Data Processing at the time and she was willing to take a chance on me. What an opportunity she gave me," she recalls. "It was amazing."

Of her first mentor with the Association, Marilyn Hischke, Dreesmann says, "She was so smart and so patient. I really had a great start."

Dreesmann began her career in computer technology with no experience, moved into punching program code onto 80-column Hollerith cards and, 50 years later, she's writing programs on a machine so compact she can fold it up and take it home.

Technology isn't the only thing that changed as Dreesmann has worked her way through the years. As part of one of the first groups to work in computer technology — now information systems (IS) — at the Association, she's been the first point of contact and mentor for new staff members as they begin their careers. Adams and Jason Kenyon, assistant director of IS, are two of her former mentees.

Driving force

In addition to working side-by-side with Dreesmann and calling her a "dear friend," Adams says: "What she's done has really pushed the breed forward. I truly believe that. She's programming and she's the reason we have EPDs (expected progeny differences); all that performance stuff — it's all her code. Other people have, too, but she's done a lot of work to keep it going and push it forward.

"She's very smart," she adds.

Austin-based Kenyon agrees.

"She's a dedicated, hard worker; smart; detailed; thorough — and her quality of work and testing abilities are the best I have seen in my 20-plus years in information systems," Kenyon says.

He's worked with Dreesmann for more



PHOTO BY SHELBY METTLEN

►The Association helped Marg Dreesman celebrate her half-century milestone with a gathering of family, friends and coworkers, past and present, at the Albrecht-Kemper Museum of Art in Saint Joseph, Mo. Pictured are (from left) Leslie Camp, daughter of boyfriend, Bob Camp (left of Dreesmann); Becky Miller, daughter-in-law of Leslie; and Dreesmann's cousin, Dick Schott.



►Dreesmann is pictured manning the machines in an early data-processing fact sheet.

than 11 years, since he started in 2005.

Kenyon describes his and Dreesmann's first project together as the conversion of technologies for the Association's internal software and websites — from PowerBuilder and Cold Fusion to .NET. They've worked together on projects from registrations to transfers to artificial insemination (AI) certificates, and everything in between.

Not to mention they've collaborated on processes like the national cattle evaluation (NCE) and, most recently, Angus Genetics Inc.'s (AGI) single-step methodology.

"Technology is always moving fast," Kenyon says. "When I started, we didn't have smartphones and mobile devices, nor the development technologies related to them — other than you might have a Palm Pilot."

The giant leap toward mobile is one of the biggest changes, he says.

"We also have other big changes around

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►Dreesmann sits with members of the Association's Information Systems (IS) Department in June 2000. Pictured are (back row, from left) Teresa Steele, Gayle Billups, Cody Combs, Janice Blair, Lori Sticken, (front row, from left) Phyllis Breckenridge, Chris Stallo, Dreesmann and Lou Ann Adams.



►Dreesmann, with others celebrating 30-34 years of service to the Association in 2000, is recognized for 33 years. Pictured are (from left) Fred Pepple, Dreesmann, Janet Shackelford, Loretta Wheeler, Rich Wilson and Richard Spader.

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DNA technology and integration of that into our NCE process,” he adds. “There is always a ton of information to keep up to date on in this industry.”

Dreesmann agrees. She describes using 80-column cards to translate information into executable code during her first few years.

“It was quite a deal to keep them in order — you didn’t want to drop the deck,” she laughs.

Dreesmann started out translating handwritten formulas into code that could be run on computers for the Association.

Things have changed “immensely,” she explains.

“That’s one of the reasons I’ve been able to stay with this job — not only has it been a really, really good place to work in so many different ways, [but] this kind of industry changes so much that you don’t get bored. You’re always learning something.”

She gives credit to the fresh wave of IS professionals, like Kenyon.

“He brings in new knowledge,” she says. “I’ve always had people like that around me where I could learn new things, or we had educators come in. It’s been an amazing opportunity.”

New things are always on the horizon for the Association’s IS Department. Dreesmann offers single step as her primary focus, as well as movement on EPDs. Kenyon adds updates

for mobile devices and consolidation, updated credit card processing options and upgrades to current Angus Information Management Software (AIMS) technologies.

Through the years

“Years ago, Lou Ann and I had this little black-and-white television, and on our half-hour lunch we would plug it in and watch *All My Children*,” Dreesmann recalls, “and if either one of us had pizza that week, we’d bring it in and reheat our pizza in the oven downstairs, and eat pizza while we watched.”

“That was the only time I ever watched a soap opera, ever in my life,” she says, grinning, “just with Lou Ann. I’ve never seen it in anything but black and white on this teeny, tiny television.”

Judging by the smile on Dreesmann’s face, it seems that 50 years of hard work doesn’t come without good times.

Adams confirms this. She began her career in IS under Dreesmann in 1983 — the first time she used that expensive sheet of paper we call a college degree.

“I was fresh out of college,” she says, “and really, I had a programming degree, but I didn’t really know how to program in the real world,” she admits. “[The Association] hired and trained me.”

“[Dreesmann] taught me everything I know,” she says.

Now, the two have worked together for 34 years. Adams took a couple of brief hiatuses from the Association for other opportunities, but she returned both times.

“She’s given me two going-away parties,” Adams says of Dreesmann, “and she refuses to do that again,” she jokes. “I’ve left her twice, and I’ve come back twice.”

Some places — or perhaps, friendships — just keep calling you back.



PHOTO BY JOSH COMINELLI

► Marg Dreesmann was recognized for her 50 years of service to the American Angus Association at the February Board meeting. She was presented by coworkers with 50 roses.

“For some reason, I always thought of this as my clean, well-lighted place, because I always felt safe here.”

— Marg Dreesmann

More than just a job

“For the foreseeable future, I will be here,” Dreesmann confirms, adding that retirement isn’t part of the plan yet.

She gives a nod to Ernest Hemingway as she recalls her affinity for the old man in the American author’s short story, “A Clean, Well-lighted Place.”

“For some reason, I always thought of this as my clean, well-lighted place,” she says, “because I always felt safe here.”

In Hemingway’s style, he describes two waiters at a small café, observing an old man who prefers to stay past closing. As they watch him, the older waiter realizes that while it’s just a café to him and his coworker, it’s something more to the old man. It’s a safe place. It’s consistent. It offers him something. It’s a place to go to escape the world and the noise outside.

“We are of two different kinds,” the older waiter said. He was now dressed to go home. “It is not only a question of youth and confidence, although those things are very beautiful. Each night I am reluctant to close up because there may be someone who needs the café.”

There are plenty of places to go for a drink, just like there are plenty of places to spend half a century building a career. Some places make you feel comfortable and safe. Some are clean, well-lighted places.

Those are the places to which you return. Those are the places you stay.



PHOTO BY SHELBY METTLEN

► Dreesmann greets former coworker Carol Waller with a hug at her 50-year celebration at the Albrecht-Kemper Museum of Art in Saint Joseph, Mo., earlier this year.