Conscientious, meticulous, organized to an extreme, Hurlbut, 67, is the ultimate behind-the-scenes man who makes sure everything from banquets to livestock shows runs smoothly. In his role as activities director since 1973, he's organized and coordinated major exhibitions, Angus conferences and other events that breeders attend across the country. Whether he's talking on the telephone in his office, ironing out final arrangements with hotel staff or working side by side with a regional manager at a state fair, Hurlbut has a firm, knowledgeable handle on whatever he's overseeing.

"Dean's very good at what he does, and he follows up on details," says colleague Don Painter, director of member services. "It's no simple matter to make all those arrangements. Nothing just happens. You have to make it happen."

Prior to Hurlbut's position as activities director, he worked 16 years as director of junior activities. During that time, he made a lot happen for young people interested in the Angus business. In 1967 he established the National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest and, two years later, the National Junior Angus Heifer Show, which was the forerunner to the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS).

"He's nurtured the junior Angus association to become the largest junior beef breed association in the country and the world," says James Fisher, current director of junior activities. "You don't give a child one lesson. You teach and nurture him throughout his life. Dean's done that with the junior programs throughout his career."

Hurlbut’s early life

Hurlbut, the youngest of two sons, was born in 1933 to Lester and Mattie Hurlbut, who owned a small farm near Raymond, S.D. "That was during the Depression," Hurlbut relates.

"Working with some of the best people in the livestock industry has been a truly wonderful experience," Hurlbut says, seated behind his desk at the Association’s headquarters in Saint Joseph, Mo. “I’ve been fortunate to see so many changes in the Angus breed, and I can honestly say that this breed has never been in a better position than it is right now.”

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ithin the past 43 years, he's logged 1,501,217 air miles and spent 4,777 nights (equivalent to more than 13 years) away from home. He's worked with 42 Board presidents, 61 regional managers and 57 staff members. He's attended every American Royal and National Western Stock Show held since 1958, and he hasn't missed any Fort Worth or Houston stock shows, either. Who is this seemingly tireless man who's traveled the world, kept careful track of every mile and contact, and represented the American Angus Association for most of his life? He's Dean Hurlbut, the long-time director of activities who will retire this month to spend more time with his family and indulge in his favorite pastimes — hunting and fishing.

Though he looks forward to retirement, he's still going to miss the many friends he's made in the business through the years.

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“Those were tough times, and we were a poor family. Dad was on WPA, and Mother was a school teacher. In 1946 my father decided to add beef cattle to the operation. That’s when we bought a registered Angus heifer, Rosella A the 4th. She was the beginning of my father’s Angus program.”

Lester Hurlbut’s initial interest in Angus stemmed from his community’s strong attachment to the breed. For instance, Bar Marshall, the 1922 International Grand Champion, was shown by a breeder from Raymond. The senior Hurlbut also played the drums for the Raymond Angus Band, a 15-member group who performed locally. Buying an Angus heifer seemed a natural fit.

The decision proved to be a good one. A half-century later in 1996, Hurlbut Angus Farm — today run by elder son Jim Hurlbut — would be recognized as a Historic Angus Herd by the American Angus Association.

As an adolescent, Dean Hurlbut joined the Raymond 4-H Club. “My first project was an Angus steer named Pepper,” he recalls. “He was grand champion of the Clark County Fair. He weighed 1,200 pounds, and I got a dollar a pound for him. That was big money back then.”

Throughout his teen years, Hurlbut and his brother continued to show Angus heifers and steers in 4-H shows. When Hurlbut neared the end of his 4-H membership, Mattie encouraged him to enter college. “She told me that if I went to school, she’d give me half her check every month, which wasn’t much.”

Hurlbut took his mother’s advice and enrolled in South Dakota State College. He continued his education and earned an animal science degree from what is now South Dakota State University.

True to her word, Mattie faithfully shared her meager teacher’s salary — $180 a month — with Hurlbut for more than four years.

While at the university, Hurlbut was named “Best Aggie” of the Little International, an honor he received for capturing top wins in the beef cattle, poultry and potato divisions. In 1955 he was a...
Hurlbut says of his start with the associations across the country, "organize state junior Angus meeting with regional managers. Visiting with youngsters, and traveling to fairs and shows, on the road or in the air, Almost constantly, he was either career with the Association."

"I was in charge of the 4-H program, which was the beginning of my work with youth," he says.

Meanwhile, Duane Clark, a long-time family friend and Angus producer who was also an Association Board member, attended a regular meeting in June 1957 in Saint Joseph. While there, he heard of a job opening with the Association — director of junior activities.

"So he called me and asked if I’d be interested, which I was," Hurlbut says. "I came to Saint Joe and interviewed in July, I was on the payroll by August 1."

The new position also meant a big raise for Hurlbut — from $4,800 a year as an assistant county agent to $6,000 with the Association.

"Unfortunately, he died before the show was held. I’ve been organizing it ever since."

"Two years later, Hurlbut organized the National Junior Angus Heifer Show [forerunner to the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS)] in conjunction with an annual Angus conference. "Today it is the largest single activity that the Association puts on," he says."

He made another contribution to junior activities when, in 1980, he helped establish the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) in Wichita, Kan., during the NJAS. Hurlbut oversaw the junior association until 1998.

All of the many junior programs are important, Hurlbut says, because they "promote the breed and leadership skills within members. It’s the greatest thing we have for building on the future of the Angus breed. The activities create enthusiasm among our 11,000 junior members and encourage them to get into the Angus business and stay there."

Of the young people he’s worked with, Hurlbut says, "I’ve watched them grow. The ones who started then are now in their own professions, and it’s been fun to see them grow and take on leadership roles. The future of the Angus breed is going to be in good hands.”

Richard Spader, executive vice president of the Association, agrees with Hurlbut but gives his colleague credit for steering young Angus breeders in a positive direction.

"The junior program is a great investment for the American Angus Association," Spader says. "Any time you invest in your young people, you invest in your future. Dean was on the ground floor of getting that started. It’s not the end of the journey; it’s the trip we’re on."

Marriage and family
Hurlbut’s own journey through life took a different turn when, in 1958, he met Gloria Pittman, a young woman who came to work in the Association’s Public Relations Department after graduating from high school.

"Dean would come to our office, and everybody got to know everybody," Gloria remembers. "He and I were friends, and he dated other friends of mine until he gave in and dated me."

The two married in October 1960. Gloria quit her job when the couple adopted the first of their two children, Stacy, in 1964. They adopted Tracy in 1968.

Hurlbut’s frequent traveling was hard on Gloria and the girls, but they adjusted. Most of the time, that is. In 1970, after Hurlbut returned from a six-
After 43 years with the Association, Dean Hurlbut (shown here with granddaughter, Kaitlyn Jenkins) will retire this month to spend more time with his family and indulge in his favorite pastimes—hunting and fishing.

Combined, Dean and Gloria Hurlbut have devoted 64 years of service to the American Angus Association. “We’re as close to our Angus family as we are to our own family,” says Gloria.

The Hurlbut family: Tracy Hurlbut; Dennis, Stacy and Kaitlyn Jenkins; Gloria and Dean Hurlbut.

week trip to Japan, 2-year-old Tracy didn’t remember her father. Still, “it was such a way of life that we didn’t know anything else,” Gloria says.

Summer vacations usually meant family trips to national junior Angus shows and other Angus-related events that Hurlbut oversaw.

After their daughters were grown, Gloria returned to work at the Association in 1982. Today she is head of the Performance Programs Department.

“It is totally our lives,” Gloria says of her and her husband’s combined 64 years with the Association. “We’re as close to our Angus family as we are to our own family.”

Director of activities

The walls and bookshelves in Hurlbut’s office display numerous mementos and awards he’s accumulated largely during his last 27 years as director of activities.

Plaques and framed certificates commemorate such honors as “1998 Marketeer of the Year,” his 1991 induction into the American Angus Association Heritage Foundation, and his “1993 Dr. Newel Hicks Visions Award,” given by the North American International Livestock Exposition (NAILE).

On a wooden bookcase, souvenirs from his many trips abroad include a stuffed toy koala bear from Australia, a small replica of the Eiffel Tower in France, a plaid ceramic mug from Scotland and a carved wooden bear from Japan. Four large frames exhibit more than 260 pins and badges Hurlbut collected from his college years as a judging team member and his long involvement with major livestock shows, such as the American Royal, Houston Livestock Show and the NJAS.

The show badges are a reminder of Hurlbut’s topmost task: to organize and coordinate dozens of shows, conferences and major events in which the Association participates.

Explaining his role at the shows, Hurlbut says he organizes a work schedule for Association employees attending the show. Once at the show, he oversees that the jobs — from
“The neighbors accuse Dean and [me] of trying to outdo the other when it comes to mowing our lawns. I don’t like him to get ahead of me. If I see him mow, then I go mow because I don’t want my yard to look ratty next to his. He usually waits until dark to mow, too. I’ve asked him, ‘When you retire, is the night mowing going to stop?’”

—Richard Guy, long-time neighbor on Emerald Lane

checking animal identification to splitting classes to disbursing premium monies — are carried out efficiently.

“I have taken pride in making these shows run smoothly,” Hurlbut says. “It can only be done with the cooperation of staff and regional managers. One of the hardest things I have to do is make the work schedules. You have to spread out the responsibilities. I work closely with the regional managers, the PR department, the Angus Journal staff and the office manager and his staff.”

Hurlbut also works closely with people outside the Association, like Harold Workman, president and CEO of the Kentucky State Fair Board and the NAILE.

“Dean is a good friend and a professional in the industry who has always had the heart of the Angus Association in his mind,” Workman says. “He’s done a tremendous job at promoting the breed. He goes beyond the position he has — he promotes the breed. He goes beyond the typical, ‘just the Roll of Victory program and 14 ROV shows.’”

In his diverse job as director of activities, Hurlbut also coordinates the Roll of Victory (ROV) program and 14 ROV shows. “The Roll of Victory honor helps breeders promote their business in merchandising and enhances the number of entries at shows,” he says. “I try to attend every ROV show and as many state fairs as I can, too. The shows have been my life.”

He also:

- Talks by phone with breeders wanting show information or having trouble getting an animal entered.
- Travels to meeting and conference sites to find hotels and restaurants.
- Arranges the Association’s annual meeting and Banquet in November in Louisville at the NAILE and the annual Herdsmen Dinner at the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) in Denver.
- Keeps all the information he gathers meticulously filed.
- Coordinates the nomination process of the Angus Heritage Foundation, which honors people who have contributed to the success of the Association and the Angus breed.
- In his joint position as director of foreign marketing, Hurlbut also coordinates a cooperative program with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS).

Life ahead

An eye-catching accessory on Hurlbut’s desk represents another part of his life — his love of hunting and fishing. The pair of mounted turkey legs were taken from two wild turkeys he harvested in 1981 and 1984. Engraved with the birds’ vitals and the apt title of “Foot Notes,” the scrawny legs hold Hurlbut’s urgent notes and memos. They also bring back a few good memories and assure Hurlbut that there’s more to come when he bids farewell to his many colleagues and friends at the Association.

“Angus has been my life,” he says. “I’m still here after all these years because of the organization itself and the great people. And also because Angus is a great breed of cattle. The best in the world. Surround that with the best people, and that has a lot of influence.”

Dean’s cards

“You’re my hero.”

Julie Dameron, vice chairman of the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA), smiles when she repeats the three words Dean Hurlbut handwrote on a congratulatory letter to her two years ago. Then 19, she had just won the National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest in Indianapolis, Ind.

“It meant a lot,” she says of Dean’s thoughtfulness. Amy Dyar, a former NJAA board member, treasures a collection of cards and letters she’s received from Dean through the years. “It makes you know he cares when he follows up with them,” she says.

In the industry Dean has become well-known for his old-fashioned way of patting people on the back.

“I write a lot of thank-you notes,” he says. “I learned that from my mother. I do it when credit is due. If people are doing a good job, then they like to hear about it. In today’s society, that doesn’t happen very often. [Writing a thank-you note] makes for a great working relationship when you let people know you appreciate them.”

He appreciates a lot of folks, Linda Campbell, his administrative assistant, says. “He thanks hotel staff, people at shows, judges, our staff, anyone who has helped. He also sends congratulatory letters to winners.”

To those who’ve played a part at the major shows, Linda types the thank-you letters, and he signs them. But to the rest — people who have birthdays, a new baby, or a death in the family — Dean handwrites messages on special cards.

“He picks them out himself, too,” Linda confides. “Sometimes he’ll say, ‘I’m going to be gone for a little bit,’ and then he’ll come back with cards.”

Now and then his youngest daughter, Tracy Hurlbut of Kansas City, Mo., supplies him with samples from the company where she works as a sales trainer. It just happens to be Hallmark Cards.

—Sheryl Smith-Rodgers