

# I AM ANGUS

## THE ART OF GREATNESS

*Five iconic, influential individuals of the Angus industry and cattle business discuss how they initiated change, sparked controversy, and how their individual and collaborative efforts contributed to society. They evaluate what it means to be great, and whether they consider themselves as such. Portrait artist Richard Halstead offers insight based on his time spent with each individual to paint a life-size portrait for their induction into the Saddle and Sirloin Portrait Gallery.*

*by Ali Luety*

## PORTRAYING AN OUTLIER

These five icons don't necessarily fit livestock industry "norms." They're outliers; exceptional people who deviate from society's normal understanding of achievement or greatness. That's how Malcom Gladwell, author of "Outliers; The Story of Success" defines an outlier. They operate at the extreme outer edge of what is statistically and physically plausible.

They're leaders chosen by their peers, the highest compliment one can receive, according to "Originals" by Adam Grant.

Richard Halstead painted each individual's portrait after they were selected to be inducted into the Saddle and Sirloin Portrait Gallery. The gallery is the crème de le crème of the livestock industry. Many see it as the ultimate honor, and only one individual is selected every year.

Halstead painted every person, putting scrupulous effort into each portrait. With meaning behind each painstaking detail, he aimed to portray each individual in their truest sense. He captured their energy, how each person held themselves, how they interacted with others, their personality. It's all there, in each stroke, if you look close enough.

## RANCHING MATRIARCH Minnie Lou Bradley

The Bradley 3 Ranch is tucked in the Texas panhandle about an hour east of Amarillo, down winding dirt roads that stain trucks a rusty red. It's big country, where ranchers ride horseback on cattle drives, everyone calls their father "daddy," and steaks are country fried. Minnie Lou Bradley still lives on the ranch she started with her husband more than 60 years ago.

As a young woman, Bradley saw the Saddle and Sirloin Portrait Gallery for the very first time the day before she won the Chicago International Livestock judging competition in the early 1950s. Her judging coach told the team the portraits represented the greatest bunch of men that there ever were in the livestock industry. Decades later, her portrait hangs



Artist Richard Halstead aimed to portray each Saddle and Sirloin Portrait Gallery inductee in their truest sense.

alongside the industry legends she admired as a young adult.

It's hard to put a finger on the many contributions Bradley has made to the cattle industry, but forging a path for women in ranching was a big one. Although she might deny it, Bradley's accomplishments inspired today's generation of women involved in agriculture to be heard, seen and, most importantly, respected.

Growing up, Bradley never felt different because of her gender. She spent countless hours in the barn and on the road looking at livestock with her dad and "granddaddy." But, she failed to realize that wasn't typical.

When her family got a shipment of 1,000 lambs in, her granddaddy let her pick 10 from the herd to feed and ready for the Junior livestock Show in Oklahoma. He told her she had to do the selecting as it was her project. Several months later, she and her granddaddy loaded them up and headed east to her first competition at the age of nine.

The judges were walking around inspecting each pen. "When the judges stopped at my pen, my granddaddy said, 'No you shouldn't go on any longer; I've looked around, and she already won it.' I was so embarrassed; I about died," Bradley laughs. But her granddaddy wasn't wrong. "It wasn't too long before the judges came back and gave me the blue ribbon."

That was just enough to hook Bradley. She then started in the Hampshire and Berkshire hog

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business. By 13, she owned her first Angus cow. “I had more stock than my dad did,” she recounts.

“My daddy always told me my limit was what I determined it was. He said, ‘If you wanted to get it done, go do it. Don’t depend on someone else.’”

In addition to the lives Bradley touches directly on a daily basis, she is also a role model for people who have never even met her. “I get a lot of letters from young ladies I don’t even know. They usually thank me for opening some doors,” she says, shaking her head. “I don’t know why I’m a mentor to them.”



MINNIE LOU  
BRADLEY

She continues to inspire even the youth of her community. Recently, she started Kids Crockin, a program to teach needy kids in her local community how to cook beef and other fresh ingredients to help get away from so many processed foods and becoming more independent. She jokes, “I don’t know if they like me or they like my cooking.” No matter, the program is growing every year and making a difference in young lives.

Halstead shares that Bradley is the kind of person who inspires confidence. “That’s very different from a person who is confident, which she is that as well,” he articulates. “She’s one of the most admirable people I’ve ever met in my life.”

But Bradley doesn’t consider herself great. “I just think I’m another person who’s just had a lot of good fortune.” As she spoke, you could feel her inner conflict. To Bradley, her success doesn’t necessarily correlate to her talent and hard work.

“I always worry about some of these things that’ve happened to me. I don’t know if I’m worthy of them or not,” Bradley pauses. “I don’t want anything that I’m not worthy of. I will do what I can tomorrow to make myself more worthy of this good life I’ve had.”

## GENE GENIUS Dave Nichols

A gigantic black bull with blinding letters, flashing “Welcome to Nichols Farms” greets guests as they turn down the gravel road to meet Dave Nichols. The iconic bull is a permanent fixture visitors have come to know and expect. It lights the way to Nichols Farms, no matter the time, day or night. And Dave Nichols is proud of that. He had to lay power lines about a quarter of a mile down the road to power the

figure, but it sure is eye-catching.

Step into the Nichols Farms' office, and Lillian Nichols, Dave's sister-in-law, long-time partner and employee, greets you with a smile. There are newspaper clippings hanging up, framed photos, old and new, and in the spot of honor, you'll find a portrait of Nichols. It's a replica, the original canvas hangs in Louisville, Ky., in the Saddle and Sirloin Portrait Gallery.

Halstead created the painting for Dave's induction into the Gallery in 2015. Study Halstead's painting, and you can pick up on subtleties that speak to Dave's life and character. He's sitting down, looking off into the distance, one hand on his suit jacket.

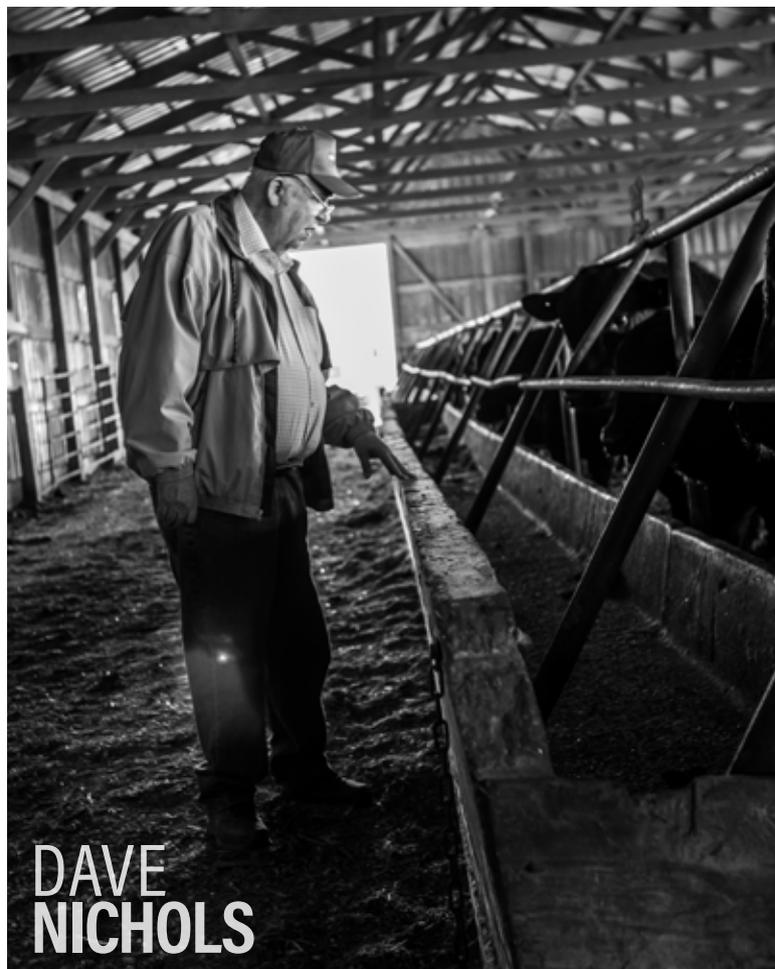
"You look at his eyes; they're dead serious," Halstead shares. "You can feel in his expression he's telling some kind of story to captivate you. He's aware that he's one step ahead of everybody, and he's proud of it. The whole game is being the first at everything."

Dave has a very soft voice, almost a whisper at times. Halstead describes it as hypnotizing. He's not a fast talker; he's thoughtful. Dave's not someone who sounds authoritative. But his presence is just the opposite. As a well-known figure in the beef industry for decades, Dave commands any room he walks into.

The Iowa Beef Improvement Association worked with Dave to get his Angus performance records on a computer – the first Iowa herd to do so. That was in 1956, the very same year Dave won the national FFA speech competition where he discussed performance testing on cattle.

Soon after, Nichols joined a newly founded group, Performance Registration International, to track his herd's performance. In 1962, Nichols Farms was proud to have a Certified Meat Sire (CMS) registered by that group.

Then, when Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR®) was adopted at the American Angus Association, Dave moved his records over. Looking back, Dave reflected that, when past American Angus Association CEO John Crouch was hired, performance testing became a reality for many cattlemen and women across the country.



Dave can remember spearheading the Beef Improvement Federation (BIF) along with other industry leaders five decades ago. Dr. Robert de Baca, Iowa State University, drove out to the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) and took Dave with him; they were going to hear someone talk about performance testing in cattle.

The idea behind BIF stemmed from that meeting; industry leaders looking for an organization to focus on performance testing. Dave served on the first board of directors in 1967, and ever since, it's been incredibly impactful for his operation. In fact, BIF is inadvertently responsible for ultrasound technology.

Dave proudly recalls from his office chair, "The first cattle ultra-sounded were ultra-sounded a few feet from where I'm talking to you now." The research done at his farm provided a basis for cattlemen and women to increase *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB) brand qualifying cattle across the country.

"It isn't what you gather; it's what you scatter," Dave reflects on one of the most impactful nights of

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his life: induction into the Saddle and Sirloin Portrait Gallery. “I didn’t realize until I was walking up to that podium. There are not many monuments of people who made a lot of money or were just cheerleaders. Greatness means that everybody’s lives would have been less if it wasn’t for that person. That’s what I’m doing here.”

## ANGUS AMPLIFIER

### Tom Burke

The Angus Hall of Fame has Tom Burke written all over it. Literally.

Before you step inside the building, you see stones with quotes etched into them sprinkled across the lawn. One in particular says it all: “Happy Days!” For anyone who doesn’t know Burke, that’s his greeting to nearly everyone he encounters.

For 50 years, Burke has been the face of the Angus Hall of Fame. He started there in 1968. “I’m darn proud to have a job here; I like it very much, and I plan to stay here quite a bit longer,” Burke says,

radiating satisfaction.

Burke is eternally optimistic, and one might say he’s the breed’s number one fan. His relentless passion to promote and sell Angus cattle is unrivaled. Longtime acquaintance Julie French-McMahon put it best when she said, “Tom Burke — when he stands on an auction block and speaks for those cattle, he’s magic. Cattle sales can go south pretty quick; you can sell the first 10 lots, and then there’s not much left. But Tom Burke never stops; he never gives up. He stays on that block, and he continues asking for bids, making things happen.”

Burke knows just about everyone in the business. He exudes confidence; you can tell he’s comfortable with who he is. That self-assurance and composure are some of Burke’s most remarkable qualities.

“Tom Burke is a theater performer like I’ve never seen in my life,” Halstead remarks. “He has this voice that carries. One moment he is speaking like a circus ring master; the next moment he’s speaking in a quiet but rumbling, audible, confidential voice.”

It’s fitting because Burke’s been at his job, selling Angus cattle, for half a century. He’s worked sales in every continental state aside from Rhode Island, and his job has taken him overseas, too. Burke has probably been on more planes in a year than most people get on in their life. In 1994, USA Today recognized his extensive travel, dubbing him one of the most traveled people of the year. And with an average of 340 nights a year away from his home, it’s easy to see why. Despite so much time on the road, when Burke shows up to work a sale, he’s 100 percent present. It takes a special kind of person to thrive in such a demanding field of work.

“He is a world in himself,” Halstead says. “I literally have never met anyone like him. He is a presence, a real force of energy.”

No doubt, Burke is dedicated to the Angus breed.

“I don’t think I consider myself great; I consider myself lucky,” Burke says thoughtfully. “I think that I consider myself to have a passion for what I do. I consider myself to be committed.”



To Burke, greatness means you've accelerated at something you love to do, and ultimately, you've made life better for your fellow man.

"Once you leave this earth, all you have left is the tradition of what you did and the accomplishments in life," Burke concludes.

## BRAND BUILDER

### Mick Colvin

by Nicole Lane Erceg, Certified Angus Beef, LLC

It's been nearly two decades since the co-founder stepped down from that helm, but his presence and legacy still permeate the Certified Angus Beef® (CAB®) brand.

As you pull up to the Certified Angus Beef headquarters in Wooster, Ohio, you immediately feel Mick Colvin's impact on the company. Nearly every employee can tell you a story about Mick. And although he doesn't spend his days in the office anymore, he walks in the front door at the Wooster, Ohio, office like it's his home. Familiar, excited faces greet him, and he chats with scores of them, including many who joined the brand during his tenure. They've carried the torch he lit on the mission he began.

Today, the staff is bigger, the pounds and commissions break records like clockwork, and the computers tracking it all are newer. But 40 years ago when the brand was in its infancy, not many could've predicted its success.

In 1976, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) had just lowered its standards for the Choice quality grade. The industry that lobbied for the change was quickly moving toward a lean, commodity product. Angus cattle sold at a discount, and registration numbers were in steep decline as a result.

One Angus breeder had an idea to turn things around: create a high-quality, specification-based beef brand.

The American Angus Association producer board ran with it, placing an Association regional manager



from Ohio at the helm. Louis "Mick" Colvin was tasked with a project most said couldn't be done.

On Oct. 18, 1978, the first pound of Certified Angus Beef was sold in Columbus, Ohio. Two weeks later, USDA cancelled the program.

Most said that was the end. Nice try.

Most people aren't Mick Colvin.

For Colvin, launching the world's first brand of fresh beef was no easy feat.

"I wish I could say we had a plan, but we flew by the seat of our pants," he says. "We hired people for their people skills. We made people a part of the program, and it paid big dividends."

In the early days, he and wife Virginia were the driving force. While Colvin knocked on doors trying to sell the program to any who would listen, Virginia made folders, kept records and tracked how the pounds were used on the one to two carcasses certified each week.

Today, 2.2 carcasses are certified each minute.

"Looking back, it looks easy," Colvin says. "But it certainly wasn't."

He's humble, gentle and never takes the well-deserved credit.

"It's astronomical what we've done," he says. "I don't know what more I can say about the success we've had."

It's never I, always "we."

He earned multiple awards, banners and trophies throughout his career as herdsman, regional manager and brand president, but the one that meant the most to him was his induction into the Saddle and Sirloin Portrait Gallery in Louisville, Ky.

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“He was a farmer, always,” Halstead says. “A very brilliant man, and a visionary.”

Colvin is most unassuming and possesses a “tremendous” mind, the artist says. “This man is of enormous value to the entire livestock industry, but especially to the Angus breed for what he did in building the Certified Angus Beef brand.”

Modest and casual in nature, Colvin has been an enormous presence in that world. His emphasis on people, integrity and perseverance transitioned the beef industry—after its diversion to mere pounds of commodity—back to a sustaining focus on quality that performs for all sectors of the beef supply production chain.

“I had to hear from other people how important Mick Colvin was, because he would never say anything like that,” Halstead says. “He never spoke of himself or all his other accomplishments; he just spoke highly of other people. It was his staff and colleagues who emphasized his impact.”

Some will say Colvin’s legacy is the brand, but those that know him realize it’s much more. He will always be known as a man of integrity—one who values doing the right thing above personal or commercial gain.

“That’s someone who’s a great personality, somebody with real character, somebody great,” Halstead says.

Colvin disagrees, however.

“Would I consider myself great – no,” Colvin says. “The staff of CAB – they’re the ones that deserve the credit. In terms of greatness, it means everyone at CAB is smiling. That’s my idea of greatness.”

## CATTLE CATALYST Dr. David Hawkins

The scent of old woodchips, dusty work boots and the lingering, musty odor of past livestock shows and class demonstrations meet you at the doors of the Michigan State Livestock Pavilion. Through those main doors, you’re greeted by four portraits of Michigan State professors — Dr. Ron Nelson, Dr. Harlan Ritchie, Dr. Dave Hawkins and Dr. Maynard Hogberg — signifying they were inducted into the Saddle and Sirloin Portrait Gallery. Hawkins is the second from the right. He’s smiling at you from the corner of his eye, reflecting an approving twinkle, almost as if he knows you. He looks familiar, comfortable, unassuming, yet stately. Hawkins is a Professor Emeritus at Michigan State University (MSU), and just to the left of his portrait is a door to one of four classrooms where he used to teach animal science courses.

Open the door to the classroom, and nostalgia floods in. Old black and white photographs of MSU’s champion bulls at the NWSS and first place heifers at the North American International Livestock Exposition (NAILE) fill the walls. But when Hawkins walks into the classroom, his presence lightens the mood. The teacher in him seeps out.

“I can remember teaching in this classroom,” Hawkins recalls. “It was a very interactive place where students were comfortable to ask questions about the topic being discussed.”

In his labs, he would incorporate as many techniques as he could. From multimedia presentations and powerpoints, to hands-on activities, Hawkins always wanted his students to





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## EXPLORE THE MEANING OF GREATNESS

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“I Am Angus: The Art of Greatness” aired Christmas Eve on RFD-TV. To read the full-length stories and further explore the meaning of greatness through the portraits of five icons in the Angus cattle industry, visit [Angus.org/iamangus](http://Angus.org/iamangus). The documentary can be viewed on the website or on the Angus TV YouTube channel.

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put the practices he taught to use.

However, Hawkins is no extrovert. He doesn’t command a room immediately upon entering it. His presence is different. When he enters a room, you feel safe, taken care of, almost at home.

Portrait artist Halstead remembers, “He was somebody who was good at meeting people. He was so good at working with people. He was unobtrusive, respectful, understood everyone’s particular areas of expertise and knew how to make it all work together. His greatest contribution has been more of a teacher, a mentor and consultant.”

Many who know Hawkins might be surprised to find out he’s an introvert. But perhaps that played to his advantage as a teacher. Although he prefers to be alone, reading and thinking his own thoughts, he deeply cares about people and their future and their needs, Halstead recounts.

“He asked me to include the globe in his portrait because of the students he had from all over the world,” Halstead says. “That sticks out to me as especially meaningful because of his impact all over the world. As quiet and unassuming as he is, he’s had a tremendous impact globally.” Hawkins coordinated animal science undergraduate program for two decades. He taught nine courses that impacted more than 7,000 students and advised more than 1,850 undergraduate students. His influence on thousands of lives can never be measured, but many students

still recall his lasting impact.

“My talent, if there is one, was that of being able to impact students through the classroom,” Hawkins says softly and with some hesitation, as if it pained him to talk about his personal accomplishments.

But talking about team victories is a bit easier for him. Reflecting back on his tenure at MSU, he says, “Looking back on it now and with four inductees into the Saddle and Sirloin Portrait Gallery, why, maybe we did some of the right things.”

To Hawkins, “Greatness is achieved by one’s actions serving others.” The recipe for success has to include sharing expertise to inspire, and mentor others. Without the service component, the good can’t rise to become great.

“I think I’m good,” Hawkins articulates. “It’s up to others whether I’m great or not.” 

*Editor’s note: Ali Luety is a freelance writer from Clinton, Wis.*