

A WOMAN WORTH LOOKING UP TO

The newest woman to wear the crown of Miss American Angus looks forward to representing the Angus breed.

by Megan Silveira, assistant editor

Less than 24 hours after hearing her name echo over the loudspeaker in the Fort Worth Convention Center, the 2021-2022 Miss American Angus finds herself kneeling down, donned in the iconic red jacket, already fulfilling the duties that come with her new title as she talks to two young girls about their favorite thing — Angus cattle.

“I want to be a role model to someone and inspire someone to maybe have the same passion I do,” says Mary Wood, wearing a sparkling crown and sash for the first time. “I always recognized the one woman in the ring wearing the red coat, and I always wanted to be that woman.”

The Willow Spring, N.C., Angus breeder will forever remember standing in front of the crowd at the 2021 National Angus Convention & Trade Show Nov. 7 for the first time as Miss American Angus, but it's the quiet moments behind the scenes Wood is eager to be a part of during her year of service.

“I have a lot to look forward to, which can kind of be a little overwhelming,” Wood says, “but I'm really excited to get the opportunity to meet a lot of new people and be someone that I was able to look up to when I was younger.”



BACK TO THE BEGINNING

Today, the 18-year-old has a passion for black-hided cattle, but Wood says it was her brother, Justin, who first introduced her family to the industry.

At age 8, Justin was exhibiting his first show heifer, and Mary counted down the days until she could follow in his footsteps.

“Looking back on it, it all seems so simple,” Justin says. “I was an 8-year-old kid whose grandparents went out

and bought him a show heifer. At the time, it didn't seem like much, but that investment was not only impactful for me, but for both of my sisters.”

He jokes that his younger self was jealous of how quickly his love for livestock became a passion he shared with his sisters, but he can now recognize how great of an industry this was to share with them. From the moment Mary first grabbed the end of a show halter, Justin knew she was going to make a splash in *the Business Breed*.

“As soon as I turned 8, I was showing at my local county shows. Then when I turned 9, I moved on to the national stage,” Mary explains. “I've been involved from the first chance I could get.”

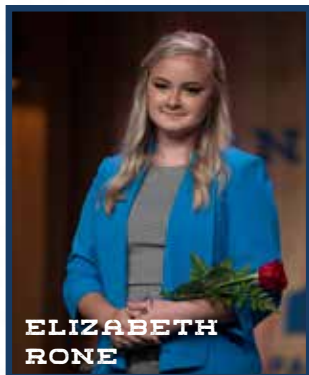
Every moment alongside the livestock and people of the Angus breed are memories Mary treasures. Still, she says it was her first National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) when she knew she had found the industry she wanted to call home.

It was 2013, and a 10-year-old Mary could be spotted weaving through the crowd gathered in Kansas City, Mo., to watch more than 1,100 head of Angus cattle parade through the show ring. Mary also led her own heifer, Rita, through

2021-2022 MISS AMERICAN ANGUS CANDIDATES



RACHEL SMITH



ELIZABETH RONE



JONWYN AYRES



AMELIA MILLER

the ring, proudly claiming third in class. However, it was more than the thrill of the competition that warmed Mary's heart.

"That memory and that week and the people I met, the connections I made, how I got started and just learning about the industry as a super young child was what really kicked it off for me, and what made me realize this is what I want to do and where I want to be," Mary says.

At the NJAS and other events, Mary says her eye was drawn to the constant figure positioned in the show ring. It wasn't the crown or the red jacket she was intrigued by — Mary says it was the meaning behind it all that drew her to the idea of running for Miss American Angus.

"I want to be that person for somebody else, for a young girl — maybe inspire them to want to get more involved in the Association and potentially maybe wear this crown one day," she says. "It's a time-honored symbol of the Association, the Auxiliary and just the Angus breed as a whole. To be able to represent the breed that I love so much and have that time to travel and get to make connections, I think that's the reason that I wanted to run."

Justin describes Mary as a professional, determined, polished woman who takes a great deal of pride in all she does. He says his sister is a natural-born leader with a drive and passion for the industry that cannot be rivaled — all qualities he is confident will help her succeed as Miss American Angus.

"To see her eyes light up with excitement as her name was called out was a big honor, not only for her, but our entire family," Justin says. "Family

is a big part of our lives, and we were all absolutely thrilled she was able to receive the honor. I can't wait to see where this journey takes her."

A CURRENT LOVE

Mary will balance her time wearing the crown with her time as a student at Oklahoma State University. She is a freshman double-majoring in agricultural communications and agribusiness. She hopes to open her own livestock marketing company

THE WINNING SPEECH - HANDLING DIFFERENCES

"Peace begins with a smile."

These simple but profound words are credited to Mother Teresa. My late mother, DeEtta, had one of those smiles that could light up a room. In my opinion, her smile could light up an entire city. She embodied the sentiment of that quote, "Peace begins with a smile."

I am my mother's daughter and believe that forming meaningful connections with others is our highest calling. We have learned over the past few years the devastation that occurs when we are disconnected and isolated. As a young woman, I have been fortunate to learn from mentors within my family, community and the Angus industry. Meeting people where they are, communicating with integrity and leading by example are the essential elements that have enabled me to create profound relationships along my journey.

In *To Kill A Mockingbird*, Harper Lee writes, "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view... until you climb into his skin and walk around in it."

There is far too much division in the world in which we live. We must meet people where they are, diffusing opposition with a kind word, with empathy, with a smile. When we take a step back from the situation and put ourselves in another person's shoes, we better understand and appreciate their unique experience.

As a young junior member, I struggled to get involved



Continued on page 138

after graduation, staying involved in the Angus breed.

“I’m really into photography, writing and potentially videography,” Mary says. “I want to be able to give back to the Angus breed and find a new, different way to market cattle that not everybody else is doing. That’s exciting to me.”

Mary says the Angus breed has a powerful position in the agriculture industry as a whole, and she hopes during her time as Miss American Angus, she can grow both as an individual Angus breeder and in her understanding of the rich history of these black-hided cattle.

Her excitement to serve the breed translates clearly to those around her and will continue to serve as the driving force of both her life and her time as Miss American Angus.

In the red jacket, the show ring or the classroom, standing on stage with a smile or stooping to the height of young Angus enthusiasts for a conversation, there is no doubt Mary will continue to positively represent the Angus breed and its members.

SPONSORS

Diamond Level \$1000 or greater

American Angus Association
Certified Angus Beef

Emerald \$300-399

All American Angus Breeders' Futurity Committee
 American Angus Hall of Fame
 The Atlantic National Angus Show
 Brock Family Farms
 Details by Design Diane Johnson
 Becky Tiedeman
 Hinkson Angus
 Terri Dorran

Ruby \$200-299

Futurama Farms, The Steve Trosper Family
 Conley Angus, Bill Conley
 Sunrise Sunset Farm, Tyler, Courtney & Piper Cates, Robert Hill & Marlene Dukehart
 Mark & Gerry McCully
 Wagon Hammer Ranches
 Harward Sisters
 David and Carolyn Gazda
 Nigro's Western Store, David Nigro Jr., Amy Lyons Langvardt
 Hinrichsen Ranch, Ron, Lynne, Cale &

Eva Hinrichsen
 Charlie & Paula Boyd
 Turner Meadow Ranch, Mark & Cindy Ahearn

Pearl \$100-199

Seldom Rest Farms, The Lois Foster Family, Crown Sponsors
 Madison Butler
 Yon Family Farms
 Weaver Show Cattle
 Gordon & Anne Patton Schubert
 Wallace Cattle Co., Ernie & Tammy Wallace Family

Jill (Sommers) Harker, Janelle (Sommers) Deatsman, Sharon Sommers
 Harry H. Bachman, Auctioneer
 Connealy Angus
 Eberlee Farms, Bill & Jane Ebert
 McCabe Genetics, Randel & Varee McCabe
 Clearwater, Jim and Joann Pipkin
 Kallie Anne Knott
 2021 Miss American Angus, Ellie Kidwell
 AAAUX Executive Committee 2021
 Rogen Angus

in the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) activities. In 2013 at my first junior nationals in Kansas City, I was hesitant to participate in the Cook-Off competition because I would be working with individuals I did not know. An advisor from my state, Jamie, encouraged me to get involved in the Cook-Off competition. She saw in me the insecurity that was holding me back. She met me where I was and provided the compassion and support that I needed. From that situation, I made new friends and became more active in my state association.

By meeting people where they are, we establish relationships. Through these relationships, I recognize that diversity enriches our lives and our moments with others.

Words have the power to unite or destroy. In our society, there seems to be a need to share every thought that comes to mind with little worry of how it might affect others. Our cultural landscape would look different if every single person communicated with integrity.

From the leadership opportunities of my teen years and transitioning into college life, I have learned that it is best to express my values honestly and respectfully to others. This practice builds trust so that both parties can work together to resolve differences. While others may not agree with our thoughts or beliefs, they are at least allowed to witness the transparent communication of our convictions. Communication also involves listening to others with an open heart and purpose.

The *Certified Angus Beef*™ (CAB)® brand is a well-known brand that has created a reputation by being honest about its purpose and product through truthful communication with consumers. While market demands fluctuate, CAB has not wavered from its consistent mission to promote registered Angus cattle through offering a high-quality Angus beef product. As a result, the brand has now seen six consecutive years surpassing 1 billion pounds of sales. We share our vision and create a dialogue that averts conflict and promotes successful collaboration by communicating

with integrity.

As we meet people where they are and communicate with integrity, we display purposeful leadership to conquer problems as they arise. Leaders who lead by example are next-level problem-solvers committed to their personal growth and the benefit of others in their community.

My brother, Justin, is one of my greatest role models who retired from the NJAA board of directors this year. It was exciting to see him achieve this accomplishment that he had set as a goal early in his youth. However, his time on the board turned out to be more challenging than expected for the reason that no one could have imagined.

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the rules for so much of junior Angus operations. As the leadership director, I saw Justin deal with the obstacles of virtual rather than in-person events, the disappointment of canceled events and the struggle with finding locations to host junior activities like the Leaders Engaged in Angus Development (LEAD) conference.

When faced with many different ideas about moving forward, Justin kept a level head and stepped up to the leadership position that he was elected to by working with his fellow board members as a quiet example of consistent leadership. Through this chapter in his life, he encouraged others through a difficult time and has certainly inspired me with a desire to be a leader that sets an example for others.

I can still hear my mother's voice in my mind whenever I face potential conflict, "Mary, be the bigger person." As a child, I did not truly understand what that meant, but by her example, I learned how to approach obstacles. Not surprisingly, she was a woman who confronted difficult situations head-on, creating opportunities for friendship where there might have been strife.

Meeting people where they are, communicating with integrity and leading by example have become the foundation I continue to build upon as I move to the next chapter. But I always begin with a smile..