



Down Whitman Lane

Connealy Angus Ranch recognized as inductees of the 2023 Angus Heritage Foundation.

by Briley Richard

Banter consumes the space as blonde little ones giggle and weave around towering adults. There's the murmurs of tomorrow's sale order, calls discussing expected progeny differences (EPDs) and pedigrees, and bets being passed about a Huskers score prediction.

The sounds are contained in an event space built to entertain customers visiting the ranch. The children, full of energy and rich imagination, are the sixth generation on their family's operation. The decision-making adults are three of four siblings, all now employed within the operation.

In the center of it all stand Jerry and Sharon Connealy of Connealy Angus Ranch. Together, they've built a fruitful life and an innovative operation in the rural Sandhills town of Whitman, Neb., earning them the status of 2023 Angus Heritage Foundation inductees.

From the start

Like many in the Angus family, their operation had humble

beginnings, beginning when Jerry's parents, Marty and Donnie, set out to start their own operation. Their neighbors questioned the decision, but the couple invested in 40 head of registered Angus heifers.

"I think he wanted to be different," Jerry says. "We were very small at that time, and he knew he probably couldn't compete with the masses if he was the same, so he struck out on his own and bought Angus heifers. We were kind of unicorns."

To earn extra income, Marty learned a new skill that benefited both his herd and neighboring cattle operations.

"He got certified to artificially inseminate cows in 1960, which was pretty unique to this area," Jerry recalls. "That's how he made his living, traveling around to AI dairy cows. That's where it started."

As finances steadied, the uphill battle remained. Competition grew as new breeds of cattle became popular, but the Connealys stayed slow, steady and consistent to set themselves apart.

"In the late '60s and '70s when the European cattle were brought over, we stayed with Angus cattle," Jerry says. "The willingness to leverage what assets we had and to stay the course has probably made us unique."

A fork in the road

Upon graduating high school, Jerry set off to Lincoln to attend the University of Nebraska. In the carved oak desks of an economics class, he met his match in Sharon, a bouncy blonde-haired woman from the big city of Omaha.

The two hit it off and wedded shortly before turning their tassels. But instead of settling into married life, they had a decision to make. As Jerry's six siblings entered professional careers, he remained the only child with a desire to return to the family operation.

"I contemplated going to vet school — doing something different," Jerry reflects. "Interest rates were high, cattle prices were low, so the decision to come back home and try to make

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a living with the small herd of cattle we had at that time — that was probably the boldest decision that we made.”

Though the economy was less than welcoming to them, Sharon never lost hope.

“Even though I knew nothing about the industry, I could recognize how talented [Jerry] was, which he wouldn’t really admit,” she says. “To me, they all looked black and had four legs, and he really could tell every single cow from each other at a distance. That was kind of my clue that he knew what he was doing.”

Into the ’90s, Jerry and Sharon, now with four youngsters in the picture, assumed sale management for the operation.

“I can remember up to that point, it seemed like after every sale, you kind of licked your wounds and wondered how you were going to survive,” Jerry says.

As luck would have it, Connealy Dateline entered the white-pipe sale ring, garnering a notable \$31,000.

“We were lucky enough to sell some bulls at a decent price and have some bulls that kind of were headliners,” Jerry says. “He was the first bull we sold that made a big splash, and we were able to ride that wave and survive.”

Turning a curve

As their four children grew older and paved paths for their own careers, three of them ended up navigating right back to Whitman.

Jed and his wife, Jais, a practicing



veterinarian, have three children. Jed is a Northern Livestock Video representative and helps AI on the ranch and for customers.

Ben lives in San Diego, working his dream job involved in Navy medicine.

Hannah, who lived in Boston for several years, now resides back at the ranch with her three kids. Her responsibilities range from being point person for their meat business, Connealy Angus Meat Market to helping with data entry and managing the ranch’s social media.

Gabriel followed in his father’s footsteps, with interest in the genetics side of the business. He helps with day-to-day management. His wife, Becca, a practicing registered nurse, also assists with various ranch and office duties.

“Having so much of our family back here is incredible — we kind of pinch ourselves,” Sharon says. “Jerry and I would have been stuck in a rut. We wouldn’t have expanded like we have, and we wouldn’t have all the new fresh ideas. They have just brought so much life to the ranch.”

The couple, having experienced twists and turns in their tenure, understand things may look different in the future.

“Jerry and I are very committed to letting our children find their own way,” Sharon adds. “We do not have this mindset that Connealy Angus always has to be here, and it always has to look like this.”

The next mile

Jerry and Sharon dream of a future where the fifth and sixth generations take the reins — but not by force.

“I tell the kids and the grandkids that the opportunity is there, but they need to be passionate about it,” Jerry says. “It’s a wonderful way to [make a living], but along with that comes an extreme amount of work, dedication and innovation.”

As a family unit, they continue to build upon the bold strategy Jerry’s parents instilled in him all those years ago.

“We have to be educated, we have to be progressive, you have to adopt the new things out there that the science is proving are real, and we have to listen to our customers,” he says.

It’s true no one knows what the future holds. For now, the bustling operation in Whitman continues to be graced by valued customers, energized toddlers and hope for what’s to come on the road ahead. **AJ**

EDITOR’S NOTE: BRILEY RICHARD IS A FREELANCE WRITER FROM GRAND CHENIER, LA.