



# Going Places

*Jessica Sawyer, Bassett, Neb., receives the 1999 NJAA Outstanding Leadership Award.*

BY JAMI STUMP

*Oh, the places you'll go! Today is your day. You're off to great places! You're off and away! You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes. You can steer yourself any direction you choose. You won't lag behind, because you'll have the speed. You'll pass the whole gang and you'll soon take the lead. And will you succeed? Yes! You will, indeed! (98 and  $\frac{3}{4}$  percent guaranteed.)*

**— Oh, the Places You'll Go! by Dr. Seuss**

**T**his year's winner of the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) Outstanding Leadership Award has taken the words of Dr. Seuss to heart. She's been off to great places, has seen great sights and has even taken the lead with great speed — all of which will help guarantee success for this young Angus leader.

Jessica Sawyer, Bassett, Neb., has traveled near and far serving as a leader in the Angus breed, her community and school. Her involvement and leadership have earned her the 1999 NJAA Outstanding Leadership Award.

This award is presented annually to a deserving junior member during the American Angus Association's Annual Banquet held in conjunction with the North American International Livestock Exposition (NAILE) in Louisville, Ky. The award was created in memory of Barbara Smalstig, who was an avid supporter of Angus junior activities.

Jessica, the sixth recipient of the award, is the 19-year-old daughter of Arlen and Becky Sawyer. Jessica has a younger brother, Adam.

"Jessica has proven herself to be an outstanding young leader in the Angus breed and her community, making her a very deserving recipient of the leadership award," says James Fisher, director of junior activities for the American Angus Association.

## The way up

Jessica's involvement in the Angus breed started when she was 4 years old. Her parents gave her a twin heifer calf, which she affectionately named Tish.

"That heifer calf is my first memory of being around Angus cattle," recalls Jessica. "The funny thing about that calf is that the other twin that my parents kept was struck by lightning."

Both of Jessica's parents had been reared in families committed to raising Angus cattle. But when Jessica was old

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enough to show, her father made sure she realized it was her choice.

"I told her that if she didn't want to show cattle, she didn't have to," says Arlen.

It didn't take long before Jessica made her choice to join in the family tradition shared not only by her parents, but by her grandparents as well.

"One of my most vivid memories is of my grandfather [Sawyer] when I was 9. I had just ended up having champion feeder steer at the Western Junior," remembers Jessica. "When I talked to my grandfather, I can remember him saying, 'I am so proud of you, honey.' That was when I realized that everything was paying off. Those words made me so happy and caused me to work harder."

Since her grandfather said those words, Jessica has set and attained several goals, including increasing her herd of registered Angus cows to 40 head and producing cattle that fit the needs of her customers.

"My family strives to produce cattle that will work for commercial producers," says Jessica. "We must have cattle that have a tremendous ability to gain weight to fit their needs."

Jessica's family has a yearly bull sale in April. Every other year they host a mature cow sale in the fall.

"We try to check [in] with our buyers to see how they are getting along," she says. "It also helps us keep up with what they want and how we can better service them."

### Taking the lead

Jessica has taken on several responsibilities as a member of the Nebraska Junior Angus Association. This past year she served as the president and show chairman for her state.

Garrett Pohlman, Norfolk, Neb., who has worked with Jessica for more than seven years

as a member of the Nebraska association, says she is a true asset as a leader in their state.

"She has a tremendous work ethic, is highly self-motivated and one of the most dependable individuals I have ever worked with," says Pohlman, current Foundation director for the National Junior Angus Association Board. "She is an extremely talented leader and has always remained actively involved on the state and national levels."

While being an officer in her state, she found that everything must be a team effort. She tries to delegate specific responsibilities to each of the officers, making them feel like they are part of the event and key players in its success.

"If everyone feels like they are a part of it, they will be inspired to stay involved and get others involved," says Jessica.

"Sometimes it is easier to take care of things by yourself, but that does not help anyone else. They need the chance to gain leadership skills."

At the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) in 1998 she served as the coach of the Nebraska junior cook-off team. With her experience in speech and drama and her past participation in the contest, she helped the members develop a skit.

"It was so much fun to work with kids that age," says Jessica of the junior team. "I did learn that sometimes you have to be super positive and to accentuate the really good things that they do. Juniors make mistakes, but what is important is what they learn along the way."

Pohlman points out that Jessica is a role model for other junior Angus members. "Her great attitude is contagious and around the Nebraska stalls, and it sparks the other juniors to get involved," he says. "Younger Angus juniors definitely look up to Jessica."



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### NJAA path

In 1990 Jessica attended her first NJAS in Omaha, Neb.

"If that National Junior Angus Show would not have been in Omaha, we may have never gotten involved," says Jessica's mother. "Jessica enjoyed it from the start and looked up to the older kids in the Angus breed. There are so many opportunities for kids."

Jessica is not one to stand on the sidelines and let opportunities pass. She believes in setting goals.

"It is very important for me to set attainable goals," Jessica says. "In everything, I strive to achieve my goals at the highest level possible."

Some of the goals that she has attained in the NJAA include winning the American Angus Auxiliary Girl's Silver Pitcher Award and being named Premier Breeder. Both of these she accomplished at the 1998 NJAS in Indianapolis, Ind.

"I have received the most inner pleasure through the showing part of my Angus

activities," says Jessica. "The showing aspect does not come easy. Each year is a new challenge, and a degree of luck is involved. That makes those awards even more special to me."

Outside the showing Jessica has participated as a team member in several of the contests sponsored by the NJAA. She has participated in team sales and the Auxiliary-sponsored *Certified Angus Beef*<sup>™</sup> Cook-Off Contest.

Jessica has two goals she would like to achieve before her time as a junior member ends.

"I have had a longtime goal to serve on the National Junior Angus [Association] Board," says Jessica with a smile. "It would be an honor to serve on the national level. In the showing I would like to have the national champion bred-and-owned female."

Whether she accomplishes these goals or not, Jessica has certainly accomplished a lot through her involvement in the Angus breed.



Jessica and her brother, Adam, ride herd.



Angus cattle are a family tradition for the Sawyer family. Shown, from left, are Becky, Jessica, Adam and Arlen Sawyer.

anyone would actually watch it, but people come up to me and say that they have."

She was also a member of the Nebraska 4-H Action Team. As a team member she coordinated a statewide community-service project collecting pop tabs for the Ronald McDonald House. The project raised 3.5 million pop tabs and \$2,500.

Jessica has used her communication skills to increase holiday spirit in her community. During the 1997 Christmas season, dressed as Mrs. Claus, she held a story hour at her local library and long-term-care home.

"I felt like I was bringing joy to people as Mrs. Claus," says Jessica. "It was a very rewarding, fun and memorable experience."

### Going places

Jessica is looking forward to her future. She is a freshman at Kansas State University, majoring in animal sciences and industry with a minor in leadership studies. After attaining her bachelor's degree, she wants to attend medical school and someday return to a rural community as a general-health practitioner. She also would like to have a family and raise cattle.

"Angus cattle will play an important part in my future as well," says Jessica. "I have a love for Angus cattle, and I understand the breed. It is a family tradition."

Family always will be important to Jessica no matter where she may go in the future.

"The No. 1 thing I don't ever want to do is take the people who I love for granted," says Jessica. "Being away from home has made me realize how important family really is to me."



"I have been lucky and blessed at the same time," says Jessica. "My mother always says that God has this little checklist of how much success you have. You're not going to win everything. God has to keep you down-to-earth and humble."

### Community involvement

It has been important to Jessica to share the knowledge that she has gained through her involvement with junior Angus activities. Specifically, she has shared what she has learned with 4-H'ers.

In the summer of 1997 she prepared a video entitled *Clueless About 4-H Beef Projects?* The video was designed to help young people learn more about taking care of their beef projects.

"It was very basic and entertaining. I showed techniques related to halter-breaking, feeding, grooming and the daily care of cattle that first-time 4-H'ers would need to know," says Jessica about the video. "I never thought that