

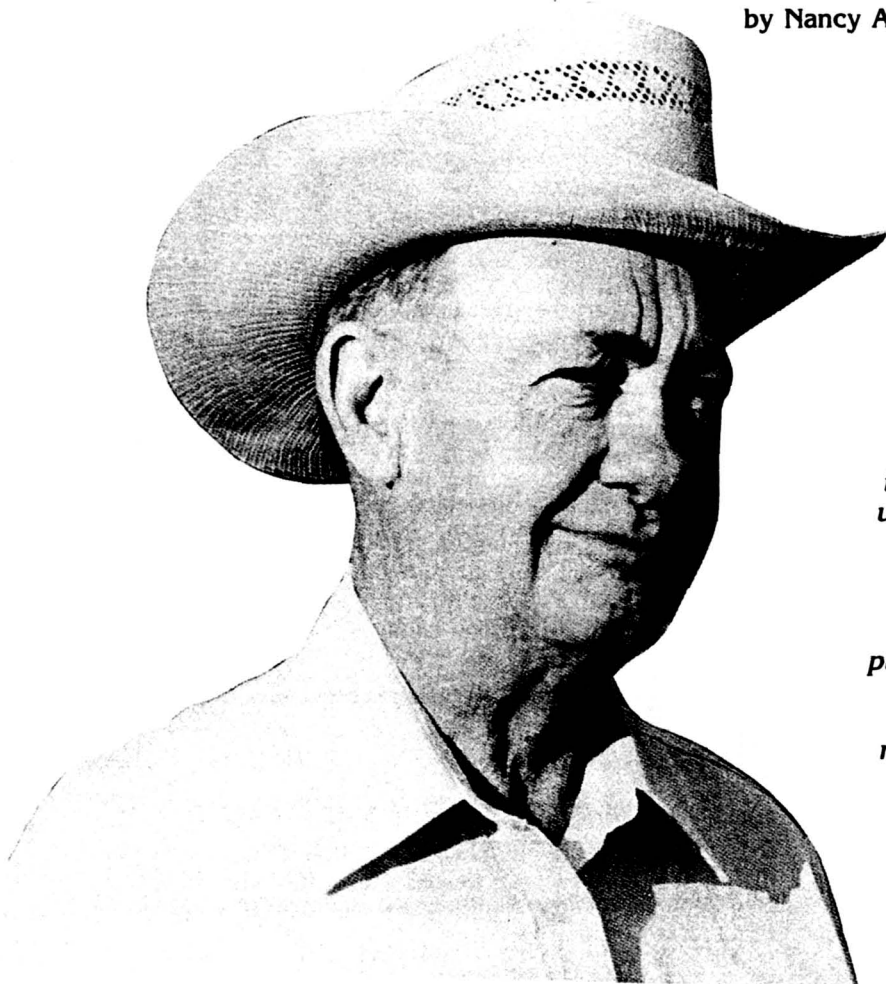
We'd pretty much all agree upon the sincerity of Vern and his work. He's a person that didn't always appear to be the outgoing leader, but he was always in the background with great encouragement. When he talked to a group, his message always had meaning. He was a very strong believer in the fact that our breed dominated all other breeds. He was very interested in people keeping records and weighing their calves. For many years his area had more weights turned in than any other area.

—Bob Miller
Viewlawn Farms, Mabel, Minn.

Vern Kerchberger

His Sincerity Has Made a Difference

by Nancy Ann Sayre



Perhaps Vern Kerchberger has kept a bit of a low profile and has avoided the spotlight on many occasions. But for more than 30 years he has been helping Angus breeders—large and small, old and new—and promoting their breed with a sincerity hard to match. As regional manager for the American Angus Assn., there isn't anything more important.

In fact, two primary objectives of a regional manager, by definition, have been to 1) promote Angus cattle, either commercial or purebred, to the total industry by keeping goals and direction closely aligned to quality, efficiency and profit, and 2) provide the livestock knowledge to the membership of the Association necessary for a successful purebred or commercial operation. Vern has striven to do both.

And in the process, he has made a difference—to breeders, to the breed and to the industry.

Vern started with the Association in June 1951 as a regional manager in the Southeast (his territory included Kentucky, Tennessee, Mississippi and Alabama), then moved to the South Dakota area in 1962. For the past several years, he has covered Nebraska, South Dakota and Minnesota. He retires at the end of this month.

The territories and breeders have differed greatly, but in both areas Vern saw the Angus breed progress from a minor role to a dominant force. In 11 years he helped put three of his Southern states among the top ten for registrations, watching registration numbers in Tennessee alone jump from 1,249 to over 12,000. And when Vern moved to South Dakota, it too was a minor Angus state. Last year, it ranked fifth in registrations.

"When I went to work in the Southeast," reflects Vern, "they were registering eight head of Hereford for every



"I have always believed in the process of trying to swing people over to Angus . . . it was really important to get into new areas to talk to people who hadn't had Angus . . . And at sales, the very first thing I always did was talk about some of the great attributes Angus cattle have. I always stress the uniform color, the dominance of black and polled characteristics, no cancer eye, less pink eye, less calving trouble, fertility, etc. . . . Visiting with the small breeders that didn't have a chance to get around was also important to me . . . helping them and letting them realize that some of these things needed to be talked about and promoted within their local region."

one black. By the time I got through working there, Angus had passed Herefords. I hadn't been out of the area much and I thought the Angus business was that way all over. But when I got up to South Dakota, they were registering eight head of Hereford for every one black.

"It took years to get the thing going—people up here have been in the cattle business a lot longer than folks in the Southeast, and they thought Hereford cattle were the only thing around. I wouldn't say Angus have swept the country, but Angus bulls are easy to sell now in western Nebraska and South Dakota—they're by far the easiest. And we're getting a lot of calls now for straightbred Angus females. People need them to straighten out three or four generations of crossbreeding."

Registrations and sheer numbers of Angus cattle aren't the only things Vern has helped progress, though. Quality of the cattle has improved, and much of that improvement, as well as enthusiasm for Angus cattle, may be attributed to Vern's concentration on records and his commitment to the Association's AHIR programs.

Dick Spader summed it up well for a special retirement presentation to Vern during last year's annual meeting. Vern is probably responsible for starting more people on the AHIR program than any other individual," he said. "I don't know what bigger favor he could have done for those breeders or for his territory."

A belief in records

Vern started in the South Dakota area just when performance programs were put on the Association's computer. They have been of utmost impor-

tance in his mind ever since their start. "I have really pushed AHIR ever since I've been here (in South Dakota)," he says. "It was always a lot easier to tell people to get on a weighing program than to tell them their cattle weren't good enough to grow fast enough. After they got on the program for a year or so, they could see the results for themselves."

It's a matter of record that breeders in his territory believe in the value of performance records. South Dakota ranks second among all states for total number of weights processed through AHIR, Nebraska ranks third, and Minnesota ranks tenth.

Bob Miller, Mabel, Minn., will agree that Vern has played a key role in encouraging breeders in his territory to keep records on their cattle. "For many years his area had more weights turned in than any other area," says the owner of Viewlawn Farms. "He was always encouraging people to take care of these weights, and if it hadn't been for his persistence, I don't think this area would have been the leader."

Roger Knochenmus, Sioux Falls, S.D., recalls first-hand help from Vern. "One of the things he really helped me with was weight records . . . he was instrumental in getting me started weighing calves and that has helped me greatly . . . I keep the better ones that way and my weights have gone up a lot since I started."

Every breeder important

Breeders and peers that have known Vern also tend to agree on another point: Vern has a genuine interest in every breeder. "Because of that," says Joe Huckfeldt, Gordon, Neb., "people

have had a tremendous amount of confidence in him."

Reuben Littau, Carter, S.D., punctuates the same feeling. "Vern treated everyone fairly, whether they were just beginning in the registered Angus business, or were old hands in the show ring," he says.

"He also kept the economics in line, he'd like to see everybody make a little money," adds Knochenmus. "He always liked to see a younger guy stay in that \$1,500 to \$2,000 range instead of going out to buy a \$5,000 to \$10,000 bull . . . in this day and age that's even more serious than it was back when I started."

"He always tried to help out the young breeders as much as the older ones," he adds. "He was out there trying to help everybody . . . but I think he particularly looked out for the new and younger ones."

Vern's territory has changed. Breeders' attitudes have changed. And cattle have certainly changed in the last 34 years. But through it all, Vern's role has remained virtually the same. He has tried to help cattlemen do a better job with their Angus cattle. And he has helped promote their breed and their product at every possible chance.

Nebraska native

And if progress of the Angus breed boasts of Vern's efforts, so does his past career and his family.

A native of Hay Springs, Neb., Vern grew up on a cattle, hog and grain



Vern's first Iowa State judging team took national honors. The faces have changed since 1947, but many remain quite familiar in livestock circles. From left, back row: Donald Shirk, Ed Lidvall Jr., Dave Pingrey and Stanley Anderson. Front row: Coach Vern Kerchberger, Gail Danielson, Donald Kiser and Carl Rehder.

A "square shooter" is what we call a man of Vern Kerchberger's caliber out here. It is a high compliment. Vern treated everyone fairly, whether they were just beginning in the registered Angus business, or were old hands in the show ring.

Through the years we have known of Vern helping many to get a start in the registered Angus field. He was always around to attend area meetings, helping to set up sales within a local association to help merchandise the cattle. The AHIR program got a big boost in South Dakota, thanks to Vern's efforts.

Vern started as a field man shortly after we began raising registered Angus. We have appreciated his help at our association sales years ago, and now at our own sale. We have been lucky to have had him all these years working for us. His footsteps will be hard to follow.

—Reuben Littau
Littau's Angus Ranch, Carter, S.D.

Vern is one of the true gentlemen we've had to work with in the Angus business . . . He's been very helpful to us. I've worked with him ever since we were in the Angus business and the thing I've always observed about Vern is that he seems to have a genuine interest in every breeder, large or small. Because of that, people have had a tremendous amount of confidence in him. He's helpful with everyone and I think he's been a real asset to the Angus breed.

Wherever there was an Angus function, Vern would be there. His attendance at all livestock functions is one of his first assets and when he attends any of those, he does a tremendous job of promoting Angus cattle to cattlemen, regardless of the breed they're involved with.

—Joe Huckfeldt
Huckfeldt-Krebs, Gordon, Neb.

farm. He entered the University of Nebraska with hopes of pursuing agricultural teaching, but switched to an animal husbandry major in his junior year. While there, he chalked up quite an impressive livestock and meats judging record.

After graduation, Vern took a job with the extension service in northeastern Nebraska. He was county agent for four years, and in 1946 his county lined up the first place Angus steers in every class of the state fair. Iowa State was the next stop; Vern went there to work on his master's degree, teach and coach the meats team. After the meats team took second in the national contest, Vern's coaching duties expanded to the livestock team as well. His first team included many faces now familiar in the livestock world, and they won the prestigious Chicago contest. Vern stayed at Iowa State for four years and his teams did well, to say the least. He had five winners in 14 contests, and is proud to say he never had a team out of the top ten.

The Association hired Vern in 1951 and assigned him the Southeastern territory. Things were much different then, and Vern recalls that the most frequent question from breeders was "Where are my pedigrees?" At that time, the Association office was just a small room in the Chicago Stock Yards, and hand-done pedigrees took six to nine months for processing. (In fact Vern was asked to work his first few days in the office, proofreading.) "The greatest change we made," he reflects, "was from the typewriter to the computer."

His South Dakota territory was a new one when he moved north in 1962. His area of responsibility changed several times (Nebraska was a separate territory for a few years and eastern North Dakota was his for a while.) Things

have gotten busier, in fact Vern compares a former schedule of seven or eight South Dakota sales in a year to today's calendar with that many in a week's time.

In addition to sales, Vern has attended as many Angus meetings, shows and other events as possible, and has tried to reach a variety of cattlemen's meetings and happenings, too. Wherever he could be promoting Angus, he was there.

"That's one of his first assets," says Huckfeldt. "And when he attends any livestock functions, he does a tremendous job of promoting Angus cattle to cattlemen."

Family important

Such activity has monopolized much of Vern's time, but he has made time

from that area and also practices there. John, three years younger, also completed medical school and is now in residency at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn.

Both boys went through medical school with honors. Chip started undergraduate school at the University of Nebraska, then spent two years in medical school at the University of South Dakota before graduating magna cum laude from Emmerly University in Atlanta. He spent three years concentrating on internal medicine in residency in Dallas, then studied infectious disease in St. Louis. John graduated phi beta kappa from Carlton College before going to medical school at the University of Chicago.

Vern and Mary Ann also had an older daughter who died in 1973.



Vern's family is a success story in itself. Pictured with Vern's wife Mary Ann are Dr. Vern Kerchberger Jr. (Chip), his wife Dr. Mary Kane Kerchberger, and Dr. John Parks Kerchberger.

for a close-knit family. He and his wife Mary Ann have raised two successful sons and are more than proud of both.

Vern Junior, 30, better known as Chip (as in "chip off the old block," according to Mary Ann), is a doctor with a practice in Berrington, Ill. His wife Mary Kane, a gastroenterologist, is

Sincere concerns

Vern himself has stayed close to the cattle business his entire life. A good judge of cattle since he was quite young, Vern expresses some concern now when he analyzes trends in the Angus business and the cattle industry in general.

Structural correctness is of utmost importance, he says, and he sees many breeders ignoring problems with feet and legs (or running gears, as he puts it) on their seed stock.

"Another concern of mine is the fact that we've lost some fleshing ability and the ability of our cattle to utilize roughage and stay in good condition," he adds. "We've got to breed some more red meat back in them, otherwise breeders will find out that commercial people will bypass them and buy something else."

He is sincere. After all, he has spent the last 34 years of his life encouraging commercial cattlemen to buy Angus and helping Angus breeders produce seed stock successfully. **AJ**



Vern took an early interest in livestock and had cattle of his own by the time he was 13. Here, as a 7-year-old, the Hay Springs, Neb., native is shown with one of his family's calves.