



Team Captain. Ralph Bridges has bred and raised Angus cattle for more than 50 years. He owns and operates a family farm near Lexington, Ga., and is a partner in a Montana ranch.

The **President's Perspective**

*Ralph Bridges captains the
American Angus Association with
the spirit and drive to succeed.*

by Jerilyn Johnson

Ralph Bridges' spirit is grateful and humble. That's why you seldom hear any grumbling from this Georgia Angus breeder, even in the midst of a depressed cattle market or when pressed to make a decision over a tough industry issue.

This spirit overflowed in an inspiring acceptance speech last Nov. 13 in Louisville, Ky., when, in his proudest moment, Ralph was elected president of the American Angus Association. And this spirit shines through in his daily life and deeds.

Ralph is powered by his strong religious faith as well as his faith in family, agriculture and America. "If you put trust in God, work hard and do the best you can, you will receive your just reward," he says. "I have lived and prospered by that faith for 69 years."

From humble beginnings on a small family farm near Lexington, Ga., Ralph learned many important life lessons. These lessons have carried him through the tough times and led him along a path to the successful family farming business and industry leadership role he enjoys today.



Here are just a few examples:

1. Live one day at a time -“I believe in taking one day at a time,” says Ralph. “This might be the only day we have, so put everything into that day. Do the best job possible in whatever you do.”

2. Follow your dreams and work hard to accomplish your goals — “Establishing a farm or business starts with desire. You can do anything you set your mind to. I wake up every morning and Angus is on my mind. I always ask, ‘What can I do to make this Angus cow out in my pasture do a better job?’”

3. Never quit -“If you get knocked down, don’t stay down. Get up and try again.”

4. Respect, listen to and make friends with older and more experienced breeders -“I was fortunate to have helpful mentors in my early years who I will be forever grateful to.”

5. Support agriculture youth programs. “Young people are our country’s greatest asset. If you look at today’s beef industry leadership they are people who went through the ranks of 4-H, FFA and junior Angus programs. If you know a young boy or girl who would like to start a beef project but can’t afford it, give them a calf. It will be the greatest investment you’ll ever make. It’s just like the Bible tells you, ‘ye shall reap what ye shall sow.’”

6. Be willing to take risks and search for new opportunities— “I almost turned down the greatest opportunity I’ve ever had in my life— serving on the American Angus Association Board of Directors,” Ralph admits.

Fellow Georgia breeder Harvey Lemmon, who was serving as Association president, approached Ralph at an Angus field day back in the spring of 1988 and asked him to run for the Board. “I told him I really

“We must not become complacent and say we’re at the top. There’s always someone out there wanting and trying to beat you. Continue to seek new avenues in this great Angus breed to do a better job.”

— Ralph Bridges



Bridging the Generations. Three generations of the Bridges Family gather for a group photo. Pictured are front row (l to r): Brad, Mark, Rachel; second row: Katie, Erica, Brandon and Becky; third row: Ralph, Iris, Tricia, John Mark, Gloria, Ralph Davidson and Margaret; fourth row: Lee, Barry, Walter and David.

didn’t have time,” Ralph says. Not one to argue, Harvey just nodded his head in disappointment.

Ralph went back home to tend to his farm and family. It wasn’t long, however, before his thoughts turned back to Harvey’s request. The next day he called Harvey and said, “If you think I can contribute anything to the Association Board, then I’ll try.”

Ralph was elected to the Board that fall and went on to serve six years. Board members and Association delegates recognized his spirit and leadership potential, which led to his election as treasurer, vice

president and eventually the top office.

“The fellowship, friends and opportunity to travel across the country to visit different Angus operations have meant a lot to me,” Ralph says.

The United States is often referred to as the land of opportunity. No one knows and appreciates that better than Ralph, who grew up a poor Georgia farm boy and became the owner and operator of one of the Southeast’s largest and most successful family farms.

Ralph started farming on his own as a cotton sharecropper immediately following high

school graduation. Through hard work, a little bit of luck and lots of desire, he was soon able to acquire his own farmland and beef cattle herd. His first Angus purchase was made in 1944 when he made a deal on two heifers.

During those early years Ralph worked one day a week as a ringman at the local stockyards. “That’s where I really learned the cattle business,” he says. “I spent a lot of time evaluating, classifying and pricing the cattle lots in my mind, then comparing my selections with the cattle buyers.”

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He was also able to charm and court a neighboring farm girl named Margaret, who would become his best friend and life partner. "We had very little starting out, except love for one another," Ralph says.

Ralph and Margaret had six children—Steve, Terry, Iris, John Mark, Walter and David. All but the oldest are now involved in the family farming operation, a rarity these days. Ralph views it as a true team effort but gives Margaret top credit for making it happen.

By the 1980s, thanks to the extra income from their turkey business, Ralph and Margaret entered the registered Angus business full time and never looked back. Today Bridges Angus Farm includes a herd of 500 Angus, plus a large herd of commercial cows and 1,200 acres of forage and grain crops. In addition to the cattle, this farm produces one-half million turkeys each year for the Louis Rich Company. All income comes from agriculture.

In recent years, the Bridges have turned over more of the day-to-day operation of the farm to their children.

Terry and David serve as cow herd managers. Terry keeps all the records and is in charge of the artificial insemination breeding program and embryo transfer preparation. He and his wife, Lucy, have three children.

Daughter Iris, along with her husband Barry and three children, have their own registered Angus herd and help manage a part of the turkey operation. Their children have 4-H Angus projects and are active members of the Georgia Junior Angus Association.

John Mark is in charge of delivering feed to the Bridges Farm turkey flocks. He has acquired three of his own turkey houses and has a cow herd. He



Teamwork. Ralph and his sons, Terry and David, and grandson, Phillip, examine cow records before the breeding season begins. Their goal is to develop a herd of balanced-trait cows with good udders, consistent performance and positive carcass values. Bulls must produce progeny which make their customers money.

and his wife, Tricia, have three children.

Walter is in charge of hauling the turkeys to market and owns nine turkey houses plus a small herd of cows. He and his wife, Hope, have two children.

Youngest son David, his wife Gloria, and their children reside at the original Bridges homeplace. He is in charge of daily care of the cattle herds and the hay crop operation.

The Bridges Family has always been active in local and state livestock work and now the third generation is carrying on that tradition. Community involvement is also important to them.

"We still believe in the tradition of family and neighbor helping neighbor," Ralph says. "It may be old fashioned, but it works for us."



RALPH BRIDGES PROFILE

Age: 60

Hometown: Lexington, Ga.

Career: Farmer, Angus breeder, turkey grower

Leadership Roles:

- President of American Angus Association, 1996
- Association Board of Directors, 1988-94
- President of Georgia Cattlemen's Association, 1992
- President of Georgia Angus Association, 1989-90

Honors:

- Georgia Seedstock Breeder of the Year, 1991
- Certified Angus Beef Program Seedstock Commitment to Excellence Award, 1995
- Historic Angus Herd, 1995

Special Talents:

- Story and joke telling

