

Determined

The sun sets on another day in Six Mile, S.C., where long shadows cast across Sac Alexander as he sits simply enjoying the peace while watching his cattle. His love for his Angus herd is evident in the smile tugging at the corners of his mouth as he talks about them.

by Lindsay King, assistant editor

The humble cattleman is a first-generation Angus breeder, who got his start from the hobby farm his father started. The small herd of Guernsey cattle were sold in 1959 after Sac's father passed away in a car accident.

"I bought about 10 Angus cows and a bull to start. I had always liked Angus, and I had seen them while traveling," Sac says. "It was not much of a choice for me really, it was either Angus or Hereford. An uncle of mine had some Herefords and he called every other day about having to pull a calf, so I was pretty sold on Angus."

In 1968, seven years after starting his herd,



Steps

(AI) even if they did not own interest in the bull they were getting semen from. I decided I was going to give it a try.”

Semen shipped in from New York and a neighboring dairyman got the job done for Sac that first year on his 40 cows. He went to a completely AI breeding program and has not owned a bull since.

“The bull selection process was a little bit hard for me,” Sac adds. “I just did it on my own even though I did not have a whole lot of background in animals to guide me.”

Though Sac was in FFA in high school, he only judged dairy. This made it difficult in the early years for Sac to know what he was looking for in beef cattle.

The family that built Alexander Angus

Sac was working on his liberal arts degree at Clemson University when he met his wife Jaerilynn. She was a school teacher working on her master’s degree when the couple was married in 1972.

“I was about a year shy of finishing my degree when I got a job at Clemson, and I bought the property I grew up on,” Sac says. “My grandfather raised cotton on it, and my father had his cattle here. I worked in the finance and accounting

department for 25 years while raising my cattle on the side.”

Jaerilynn has helped Sac as much as she could on the farm in their 58 years together. Sac says she grew up a true “city girl,” never being around livestock before then. She learned quickly how to operate tractors and work the cattle alongside her husband.

“She said she never knew what she was getting



Many of Sac Alexander’s cows walk quietly into the chute and put their head in the catch, patiently waiting for him to close it. He does a lot of work by himself, making his docile cows even more valuable.

Sac joined the American Angus Association and registered his cattle. A man of high standards, Sac was and is determined to do everything to the best of his ability. He decided the Association was the best place to start.

“We did not have EPDs (expected progeny differences) back then for bull selection,” Sac explains. “It was a lot of trial and error. In 1974, Angus allowed producers to artificially inseminate

Continued on page 22

into with me, but clearly she has liked it since she has been with me through it all,” Sac jokes.

Jaerilynn taught for 11 years before getting an insulin pump. This allowed her to raise their boys, Cliff and Robin, and help Sac with his cattle.

Between their two sons, Sac and Jaerilynn have eight grandchildren. Their oldest grandson Zach, newly married, helps his grandfather with his cattle as much as he can.

Always moving forward

In 1983, Sac was determined to see what else he could accomplish with his cattle, so he gave embryo transfer (ET) a try. He bought some recipient cows from Georgia and got to work with the new technology.

“I was probably one of the first ones to try ET, because we did it surgically. It was an awful mess,” Sac explains. “The dairyman who was Aling my cattle was having issues with the cows catching. I decided to get AI certified so I could help him.”

In 1990, Sac started Aling his own cattle, reteaching himself after getting certified in 1983. He says the more you do it, the easier it gets. For Sac, it is like riding a bicycle.

“I don’t have a clean-up bull, but most times I only miss one or two,” Sac says. “There have been a few

times I got them all. You have to be clean with it, and I have the facilities for it. I have watched some people AI, and I have no idea how their cattle settle.”

Many of Sac’s cows walk quietly into the chute and put their head in the catch, patiently waiting for him to close it. He does a lot of work by himself, making his docile cows even more valuable.

“In the late 90s, I was still determined to get a good cow,” Sac says. “I would rather have one great one than five to six mediocre cows. I finally got one from Randy Daniel. That was one of the best investments I ever made.”

Randy judges all over the country, bringing

information back for Sac about which bulls to use. Sac’s cattle reflect a lot of Randy’s genetics, and they are now partners on three of his cows.

Sac credits Randy and David Gazda, regional manager for the American Angus Association in Georgia, South Carolina and Florida, for the cattle

herd quality he boasts today.

“When David started with Angus in 1990, he was a big help to me,” Sac says. “He steered me in the decisions I needed to make when keeping cows and selecting bulls. Anything David or Randy tells me I can count on. They are top-notch guys.”

Many are hoping to purchase Sac’s cattle once he finally decides to retire, though that will not



Alexander maintains a barn close to his house where he has a wagon wheel of pens to develop his weaned calves and two calving pens.

be anytime soon if Sac has anything to do with it.

Fate played a tough hand

It was March 2011 when a hematoma on Sac's spinal cord made its

presence known. It was a typical morning spent checking cattle while jogging for over two miles when a pain between his shoulder blades became unbearable.

"I live on one side of the road and the barn is on the other," Sac recounts. "By the time I got into the house, I was paralyzed from the waist down. I went to the Greenville hospital in an ambulance because the weather was too bad to be life flighted."

Prior to surgery that evening, doctors told Sac he would be lucky to survive much less walk. Of course deep down he did not believe them one bit.

"Surgery was Wednesday night, by Sunday I was sitting up. The doctor said it was a miracle," Sac says. "I was told it would take eight weeks of rehab to walk again. I walked out after 21 days on a walker."

Though Sac had a cast for the next five months, he did many things his doctors said he shouldn't do. Though he had just gotten done with calving, the timing could not have been more perfect, his grandson reminded him.

"I can't do as much as I used to, but I never really slowed down either," Sac says. "I am still breeding between 40-50 cows and heifers every year. I've got a Gator to drive around in to check on everyone."

Zach kept the farm going while Sac was recovering for roughly three months. Sac hopes that Zach will come back to the farm one day and expand it as his own operation.



Labor of love

Back when Sac was operating almost entirely on his own, he basically lived with the cattle when it was breeding time.

"When I started

AI, I had to check them twice a day for about six months," Sac says. "When I was breeding heifers, I would check them before bed about 10:30 p.m., and then get up at 2:30 in the morning to check them again. If one needed assistance, I called one of my sons to come help. They were not too crazy about that."

When he was in thick of it, Sac tried to keep his breeding season to 90 days. He started around

Thanksgiving and hoped to have the herd bred by February.

"You name it, I can probably do it. From fencing and all that, I feel like I have done it all at one point in my lifetime," Sac says. "The only help I ever did have was from Zach."

When Sac retired from Clemson in 1997, his

breeding season got a little bit easier. His time also freed up to be doing what he truly loved. So long as he can put one foot in front of the other, he intends to keep his cattle.

Sac jokes that he spends so much time with his cattle they probably think he is one of them. Though it is not a picket-fence farm, Sac says he wakes up in paradise every single day.

"I try to get everything done by 10 so I can do whatever I want for the rest of the day," Sac says. "I love brush hogging. My brother goes on all these cruises and he tries to take me with him. I would rather be on the tractor brush hogging and watching all those cows." **AJ**