

# What's It Take?

Wearing the green jacket that signifies Board members of the National Junior Angus Association is a dream for many young members. However, there are only six openings per year and at least twice that many candidates.

Story & photos by **Lance Ziesch**

**T**here are many reasons juniors want to wear the green jacket. However, when asked the question, all of this year's candidates responded resoundingly that, first and foremost, they wanted to give back to the organization that had given them so much. They also wanted to improve and to strengthen what they already consider to be the best livestock breed organization in the United States, if not the world.

"I want to make a positive difference in the lives of other young members," Lacey Robinson, a candidate from Missouri, says. "I know that this association and the junior Board have definitely made a difference in my life through LEAD (Leaders Engaged in Angus Development) conferences and the different opportunities that

are available through the program. And I hope to make that better, if it's possible, and to make it grow."

Fellow candidate Mercedes Danekas of California agrees.

"I'm running for the Board because I feel that the association and the industry have made me the person I've become today. I want to give back to the association," Danekas says. "If I'm elected, I plan on spending all of my time for the Board getting kids involved and working with kids."

## Running for the Board

Each state junior Angus association is eligible to send a candidate to represent its state. And every state can send two voting delegates to cast votes representing them. The candidates themselves are also

responsible for coordinating and developing their own state herdsmanhood booth, which promotes their candidacy.

"It's important for me to represent my state," says the Kansas candidate, John McCurry. "It's very important to me as an individual because since '93, my first junior national, I've always wondered, 'Who are those kids in the green coats, and what does it take to become one?'"

For many candidates, it's a challenge to win the nomination at the state level. Then there's the application and résumé process. And, as in any election, the candidates' every move is scrutinized — especially during the week of the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS).

"Kansas has always had strong candidates for the junior

Board," McCurry says. "I had a young man by the name of Adam Jones run against me, and it was a very close call."

The election process officially begins on Tuesday afternoon at the NJAS exhibitor's meeting, where all of the candidates are announced to all of the show exhibitors. Another meeting follows where the candidates introduce themselves and say a few words to the voting delegates.

On Wednesday night, candidates are brought in one by one to say a few words at the formal candidate-delegate dinner. After a short speech, they're asked two standard questions. One question is industry-based, and the other is character-based.

After the banquet meal, the delegates get a chance to ask individual questions of the



► Above: As part of the candidate-delegate dinner, delegates get an opportunity to ask individual questions of the candidates in an alternating roundtable discussion.

► Right: Robbie Sand (right), a candidate from Florida, answers a question during a roundtable session at the candidate-delegate dinner. Questions range from industry-based to personality-based.





candidates in an alternating roundtable discussion.

In order to cast ballots for their states on Friday afternoon, the delegates must have been in attendance at the candidate-delegate dinner. Those delegates who choose to skip the meeting forfeit the right to vote on behalf of their state association in the election.

Before and after the candidate-delegate dinner, there's lots of meeting and greeting. The more people candidates know, the better the chance they can get elected.

"The best part of it is going out and meeting people," says Brian Howell, a candidate from Indiana. "You've always got to be cautious and be aware of what you are doing and how you are coming across to other people."

### Serving as a role model

Howell says there's more to the election process than campaigning, however. There's also the role-model factor to consider.

"Being a role model is a very big priority for me," Howell says. "When I was younger, I remember looking to the older people at my county 4-H or even state fair. I was 17 years old, but I still looked at these people, even though they were only one or two years older than I, and I mimicked them. Hopefully, I can be a good role model and be aware of my actions so younger kids can look up to me."

Georgia candidate Brandon Walker agrees that role models need to be mindful of their actions.

"I think it's very important to always be on your guard with what you say and what you do," he says, "because people will follow your example. It's not so much what you tell people, it's what you *do*. You're in a role of leadership. You've got to take it seriously."

Walker, who currently serves as an unofficial assistant youth pastor at his church back home, knows the powerful effect role models can have on young lives.

"I like to invest in individuals'



► Above: On Friday, NJAA Board members distribute ballots to voting delegates. Delegates not present at Wednesday's candidate-delegate dinner are not eligible to vote.

► Left: NJAA Board members Jamie Meyer and Sonya Smith count NJAA election ballots. Upon completion, the delegates were asked to vote again to break a tie.

lives ... just share my road with them," he says. "As far as being a junior growing up, I can see how I looked up to the Board members and the example they set. I saw that a lot of kids did follow that example, whether it was negative or positive."

The No. 1 thing Walker wants

to be remembered for is not leaving out anyone.

"I've always tried to make people feel like they were important," he says.

In a statement made at the candidate-delegate dinner, Louisiana candidate Lana Myers explained a similar view: "When

people ask me, 'What can we do to keep the NJAA (National Junior Angus Association) No. 1?', my answer to them is we have to have every individual member feel like they belong to this association," she says. "Not only will we have stronger

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individuals, we will continue to be the best breed organization in the world."

### Making good better

McCurry, too, understands the importance of serving as a positive role model for youth. However, he also wants to help make them aware of the opportunities available in agriculture.

"I love to lead kids in the right direction instead of letting them run free," he says. "Showing is not what the beef industry is all about. Kids need to realize that when they reach 21 and their showing is done, there are still possibilities to be cattlemen.

"Feeding one and brushing one, yes, it's hard," he says referring to the time and effort it takes to show cattle. "But it's a small picture in a big picture. It's just a piece of the big puzzle."

"Through the contests, juniors are learning a lot, but they don't see what they are

learning," Danekas says. "It's a fun way for them to learn."

With this learning, Danekas would like to incorporate other geographical areas of the country, such as the far West, that haven't had much NJAA interaction.

"This national's been the farthest west it's ever been, and still it's been 18 hours for us," she says. "This is the western part of the United States, but when you go to California and all along the West Coast, it's a lot different than here. That causes a problem because there are a lot of breeders who don't get to go to the East."

The Western states need more representation on the NJAA Board, Danekas says, adding that she is pleased the LEAD Conference will be in Sacramento next year. "I'm excited to actually have all the kids come out to California because I've been to nationals before where kids ask me, 'How do you raise cattle on

the beach?' I can't wait for them to actually come out and see that California is a large agricultural state, and so is a lot of the West."

Robbie Sand, a candidate from Florida, points out that he thinks parts of the South also lack representation on the NJAA Board.

"I think it's important, if you are elected from a region, that you make yourself available to your neighboring states," he says, adding that some states may need help planning events, such as field days.

"I think that the Board members should be at that event to make the national junior Board visible and more effective.

"In the early days, if we would have had some people who were on the national Board come down and help us recruit, I think that would have gotten the word out more," Sand adds, describing the efforts he and others put forth to found the Florida Junior Angus Association.

"I think the membership is always going to be there," Sand says. "I think keeping members active is our biggest challenge. There are a lot of people here at nationals ... with one cow, and that's it. Our goal is to take that one kid with the one cow who doesn't want to do anything else, and get him into public speaking, quiz bowl, Cook-Off, et cetera.

"Get him more active in the whole program instead of just, 'Hey, I'm just going to walk my cow in the ring and come out.' That's what I think junior Board members need to focus on."

Although they may come from different areas and different backgrounds, the candidates for the NJAA Board have one thing in common: They want the best for their association. And they're willing to push the envelope to make a good organization even stronger.



## Junior Angus members elect national officers, directors

by *Shelia Stannard*

Junior Angus members from across the nation converged July 9-14 on Denver, Colo., to attend the Annual Meeting of the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA). The meeting was conducted in conjunction with the 2001 National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) at the National Western Complex facilities.

Delegates elected six new directors to the NJAA Board of Directors, and new officers were announced at the awards ceremony on July 13. The directors elected to officer positions are beginning the second year of their two-year terms.

Tom Patterson, Columbus, Mont., will lead the organization as chairman of the NJAA. Ryan Sweeney, Mason, Mich., will serve as vice chairman.

Heath Johnson, Corinth, Miss., is the communications director, and Christy Walther, Mount Crawford, Va., will be the Angus Foundation director.

Brittney Burns, Kickapoo, Ill., will be leadership director, and Jessica Sawyer, Bassett, Neb., is membership director.

### New Board members

Candidates from 11 states ran for the six open positions on the Board. Delegates cast ballots for their top six candidates after each candidate submitted an application, gave an oral presentation and

completed roundtable interviews. Brief biographies of the six newly elected directors follow.

- ▶ Mercedes Danekas, Wilton, Calif., is the 19-year-old daughter of James and Sherry Danekas. She will be a sophomore at San Joaquin Delta College and is pursuing a degree in agricultural communications. She has been active in Angus activities on both the state and national levels, holding various leadership positions in the California Junior Angus Association and attending numerous shows and events across the nation.
- ▶ Brian Howell, Union City, Ind., is the son of Philip and Judith Howell and will be a junior at Purdue University. He has been active in the Indiana Junior Angus Association, and he currently serves as third vice president. The 20-year-old is a member of the Purdue Block & Bridle Club and Purdue Collegiate 4-H.
- ▶ John McCurry, Burrton, Kan., will be a sophomore at Butler County Community College and is studying animal science and agricultural business. The son of Andy and Mary McCurry, he recently received the Outstanding Leadership Award from the NJAA. He has served two terms as president of the Kansas Junior Livestock Association and is a fifth-generation Angus producer.
- ▶ Lana Myers, the daughter of Charles and Linda Myers of Jennings,





► Above: Each year, delegates vote for new leaders. However, they also may vote on proposed changes to the NJAA bylaws. Activities and Junior Activities Director James Fisher counts by-law-change ballots.

► Right: In a rare runoff election, Brandon Walker was declared the winner, breaking a tie between him and Robbie Sand.



La., has been involved in junior Angus programs for 12 years. She will be a senior at Louisiana State University (LSU) where she is majoring in agricultural business with minors in business administration and agronomy. She has been involved in the LSU College of Agriculture's speaking bureau and was a member of the LSU livestock-judging team.

- Lacey Robinson, Montgomery City, Mo., currently reigns as Miss American Angus. She is the daughter of Allen and Stephanie Robinson and will be a sophomore at Black Hawk East Community College. The 19-year-old is studying animal science and agribusiness and is a member of the livestock-judging team. At college, she is a student government representative and is the president-elect for the Ag Business Club.
- Brandon Walker, Lexington, Ga., is the son of Barry and Iris Walker. He attends the University of Georgia in Athens and is enrolled in the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. He currently serves as president of the Georgia Junior Angus Association and has held numerous leadership positions within his state organization. He was active in various 4-H and FFA programs while in high school.

The NJAA Board develops and organizes leadership programs and activities for members of the NJAA, which represents more than 11,000 youth from all 50 states and Canada.



► Serving on the 2001-2002 National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) Board of Directors are (seated, from left) **Tom Patterson**, Columbus, Mont., chairman; **Ryan Sweeney**, Mason, Mich., vice chairman; **Heath Johnson**, Corinth, Miss., communications director; **Christy Walther**, Mount Crawford, Va., Angus Foundation director; **Brittney Burns**, Kickapoo, Ill., leadership director; and **Jessica Sawyer**, Bassett, Neb., membership director. New directors elected to serve two-year terms are (standing, from left) **Lacey Robinson**, Montgomery City, Mo.; **Lana Myers**, Jennings, La.; **Mercedes Danekas**, Wilton, Calif.; **John McCurry**, Burton, Kan.; **Brian Howell**, Union City, Ind.; and **Brandon Walker**, Lexington, Ga.