



# Life After the Showring

NJAA alumni continue to support the NJAS.

by **Corinne Blender**

**T**hey are familiar faces to many at the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS). Some people remember them as past National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) Board members. But many people might know them as faithful supporters who can't give up their love for a cattle show.

For Melissa Pickrell, Alan Miller and John Dickinson, the NJAS is one event they refuse to miss.

"You would be surprised at how many faces in the crowd are NJAA alumni," Dickinson says. "To a certain extent, the NJAS is a social gathering for friends you travel thousands of miles to see once a year."

NJAA members recognize the supporting role that alumni play. Rachel Postin, winner of the 2001 National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest, says there is a lot of support for people who are involved with Angus cattle. Support even comes from those who are no longer involved in showing.

## The fun factor

This year's NJAS in Denver marked Pickrell's 16th show. "I still vividly remember my first NJAS, in 1986, in Springfield, Ill. My dad took me along with him to see if I was interested in showing cattle," she remembers. "After a week of 110-degree weather, I seriously questioned the 'fun factor' of showing. But, after my first show, I knew I was hooked."

Pickrell was an NJAA Board member from 1998 to 2000, and

she has continued to support junior members by attending state shows and the NJAS.

"I still try to attend as many shows as I can. I attend not only because I enjoy the actual show, but I enjoy the people," Pickrell, event manager for Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB), says. "Most of my close friends are involved in the industry. Attending shows allows me to see the people that I've grown so close to over the years."

It is not only the old friends that dedicated alumni come to the NJAS to see.

"I can remember a few years ago when I met Parker Rayl for the first time at the *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) Cook-Off contest. After talking for a while, I learned that he and his family manage a Christmas tree business. I joked with him, mentioning that I may have to order my Christmas tree from him that upcoming holiday," Pickrell says.

"Parker and I kept in touch, and I couldn't have been more surprised when a handmade Christmas wreath arrived at my front door that year! Since then, Parker and I have remained good friends, and I really enjoy coming to the National Junior Angus Show to see him."

## A stronger program

The NJAS is a way for alumni to continue to work with junior members. Miller, who is actively involved in his

family's operation, Prairie View Farms, Gridley, Ill., travels to the NJAS to support juniors who have purchased heifers from their herd.

Miller has been attending the NJAS for the last 15 years. From his first turn at showing cattle at age 8 to finishing his junior career on the NJAA Board in 1995, Miller is still involved with several show events.

"The NJAS, NAILE (North American International Livestock Exposition) and NWSS (National Western Stock Show) are annual trips for my wife and me, as well as a number of other state and national shows each year," Miller says.

Miller's support goes beyond attending cattle shows. He and his wife, Theresa, have been asked to serve as advisors for the Illinois Junior Angus Association. He has seen the junior program grow, and he continues to play a supporting role.

"The showing is definitely a different merchandising tool than it was when I first became involved. And, fortunately, the type of cattle being shown are significantly different than they were in the '80s," Miller says. "There is no doubt that the junior programs have grown in size and scope and have gotten stronger."

## Foundation traits

Dickinson's first assignment as a regional manager for the American Angus Association

was to attend the NJAS, something with which he was familiar. His first NJAS as a junior member was in Milwaukee, Wis., in 1991. He has attended every show since then.

"When I first got involved on a national level with the NJAA, I was told, 'You will get as much out of this organization as the work and involvement that you put into it.' I don't think I have ever heard a truer statement," Dickinson says.

He took this advice to heart while he was a junior member, taking part in many of the events at the NJAS. He also was on the NJAA Board from 1995 to 1997.

"The biggest things I took away as a younger member were foundation traits like discipline and responsibility," Dickinson says. "A junior heifer project is a perfect device to instill these qualities in a junior member's lifestyle. I think anyone who has exhibited cattle will readily agree."

And it is the qualities adopted through working with youth that make the NJAS more than just a cattle show. It is an event that brings Angus enthusiasts together from across the nation to provide support for future generations.

"One of Mr. [Richard] Spader's favorite sayings is that, 'As an Association, we are not in the cattle business; we are in the people business.' I think the NJAS could be the finest example of that statement," Dickinson says.

