

# Sweeping the Show

Kansas juniors continue five-year sweepstakes streak.

by Corinne Blender

**K**ansas juniors sweep a lot of wood chips from their aisles during a National Junior Angus Show (NJAS). But wood chips are not the only things that they have been sweeping lately.

For the fifth straight year, the Kansas Junior Angus Association (KJAA) has swept through the competitions at the NJAS, scooping up the coveted sweepstakes award in the process.

The sweepstakes award is given to the state group that accumulates the most points in contests throughout the weeklong NJAS.

"Every year we hold our breath until we get the sweepstakes under our belt," Sharee Sankey, KJAA advisor, says. "They just seem to get it pulled off each year."

Sankey has seen the KJAA evolve. She was involved in the state association before her children, Cody and Jeana, were junior members. Sankey says she has witnessed a tremendous

amount of growth since the organization's inception in the 1960s.

Cindy Rezac, KJAA member, says, "Everyone in the Kansas Junior Angus Association has really learned to work together in cooperation and friendship through the years that I have been a member, especially in the last five years. Members have the desire not just to participate, but also to go a step further and put forth the effort to compete. It has become a matter of pride, not just in ourselves, but in our state."

But it didn't take a winning streak to bring a group of Angus enthusiasts together.

"In those earlier years before we started winning the sweepstakes, we all became friends and made a lot of memories. We grew to know and trust each other and had a whole lot of fun in the process," Rezac remembers. "Then we grew up a little and filled our time with contests and supporting our

fellow Kansans in their events, but we still remained friends. We're like one big family."

## A winning heart

What they pull off is no small feat. Kansas has a large youth contingent that brings several calves to the NJAS. It takes dedication to keep that many juniors working together toward a common goal.

"It's a lot of work to be able to organize and support the sheer number of kids," Mary McCurry, KJAA advisor, says.

"It's something we prepare for all year. We practice and then get to the show and do what we've practiced — and do pretty well at it, too," Courtenay DeHoff, a third-year member of the KJAA, says.

Kansas has done more than just enter a mass of juniors in each contest. Points are given for entering, but a state can tally up more by placing in the top five in the different categories. Practice

has paid off for the KJAA juniors, as many have placed near the top in their events.

"Everyone contributes to sweepstakes in his or her own way. The most amazing thing is that, to the Kansas Junior Angus Association team, it doesn't matter who you are, what your name is, or how long you or your family has been involved in the Angus business; you are asked, encouraged and expected to do whatever you can to contribute," Rezac says.

## Mentoring

Several state advisors ask them how they manage to sweep the sweepstakes year after year.

"We keep asking ourselves that, too," McCurry laughs.

Sankey says there is no recipe for winning. Success for Kansas begins with individually mentoring the youth and encouraging them to pursue their own interests. The only downside to having many



► Kansas Junior Angus Association (KJAA) members know what it takes to be leaders at the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS). For five consecutive years, they have grabbed the coveted sweepstakes award by entering nearly every contest offered at the NJAS. They perform well, too. Grady McCurry, Mount Hope, represented Kansas in the showmanship contest and placed in the top 15. cb



► Kansas juniors pride themselves on being team players. They compete not only as individuals but as a team in events such as the Certified Angus Beef® (CAB®) Cook-Off. Kansas juniors team up for the intermediate quick-and-easy division of the Cook-Off. cb



► Kansas has a large youth contingent that attends the NJAS, bringing several calves and participating in the many activities outside the showing. ad

juniors participate, McCurry says, is the limited space available in each contest.

“The juniors are the ones who wanted to start the mentoring program,” McCurry says. The mentoring program helps keep communication outlets open between old and new members, as well as between the adults and the juniors.

“I try to help out the younger kids who are just starting out. That way, they know they can do any event they would like, and if they need help, older kids are there,” Jeana Sankey, KJAA president-elect, says. “I try to get them involved in events at nationals and at our state preview show.”

The KJAA makes certain that its members know what is going on and what opportunities are available to them.

“We keep everyone informed. Everybody gets the *Kansas Angus News*, an association newsletter. We try to make them aware of what is going on and to give everyone a contact person for every event,” McCurry adds.

**In the loop**

Keeping in touch is one key to Kansas’s success. McCurry says the newsletters and contacts made by officers help keep new members in their organization and get them involved.

“E-mail is now the communication tool of choice.

After our junior show, we had dozens of e-mails from members with questions,” McCurry says. “That’s a tool the juniors feel very comfortable using. You know it is coming from their heart, not from their mom and dad.”

The KJAA is proud to continue the tradition they have started. But they know, too, that a time will come when they might not walk away with the sweepstakes.

“I think everyone wants to win. If they didn’t, I don’t think we could do it,” DeHoff says.

Advisors McCurry and Sankey both agree that parents play a strong role in the juniors’ success. But more importantly,

the juniors themselves know what their parents mean to their association.

“The Kansas parents are a fantastically supportive bunch all year round. The truly unique aspect about the parents is that they don’t just help out their own children. After all, each individual’s parents can only be experts in so many things,” Rezac says.

It’s a matter of teamwork and dedication for Kansas.

“We encourage them to compete at any level they feel comfortable,” McCurry adds. “Let the kids do their own thing with some encouragement, and the sky is the limit.”



► The NJAS is not the only time Kansas juniors compete in contests such as speech and team sales. They compete at the state level, and many times they must qualify to compete at the NJAS. Heather Hopper, Leonardville, contributed points toward sweepstakes by competing in the extemporaneous speech contest at the NJAS. lz



► Kansas pride is visible in the stall aisles at the NJAS. kg



► Parents play a key role in supporting the KJAA members as they participate in contests throughout the NJAS. Above, junior member Parker Rayl, Hutchinson, Kan., gets some assistance from his father, Brad. cb