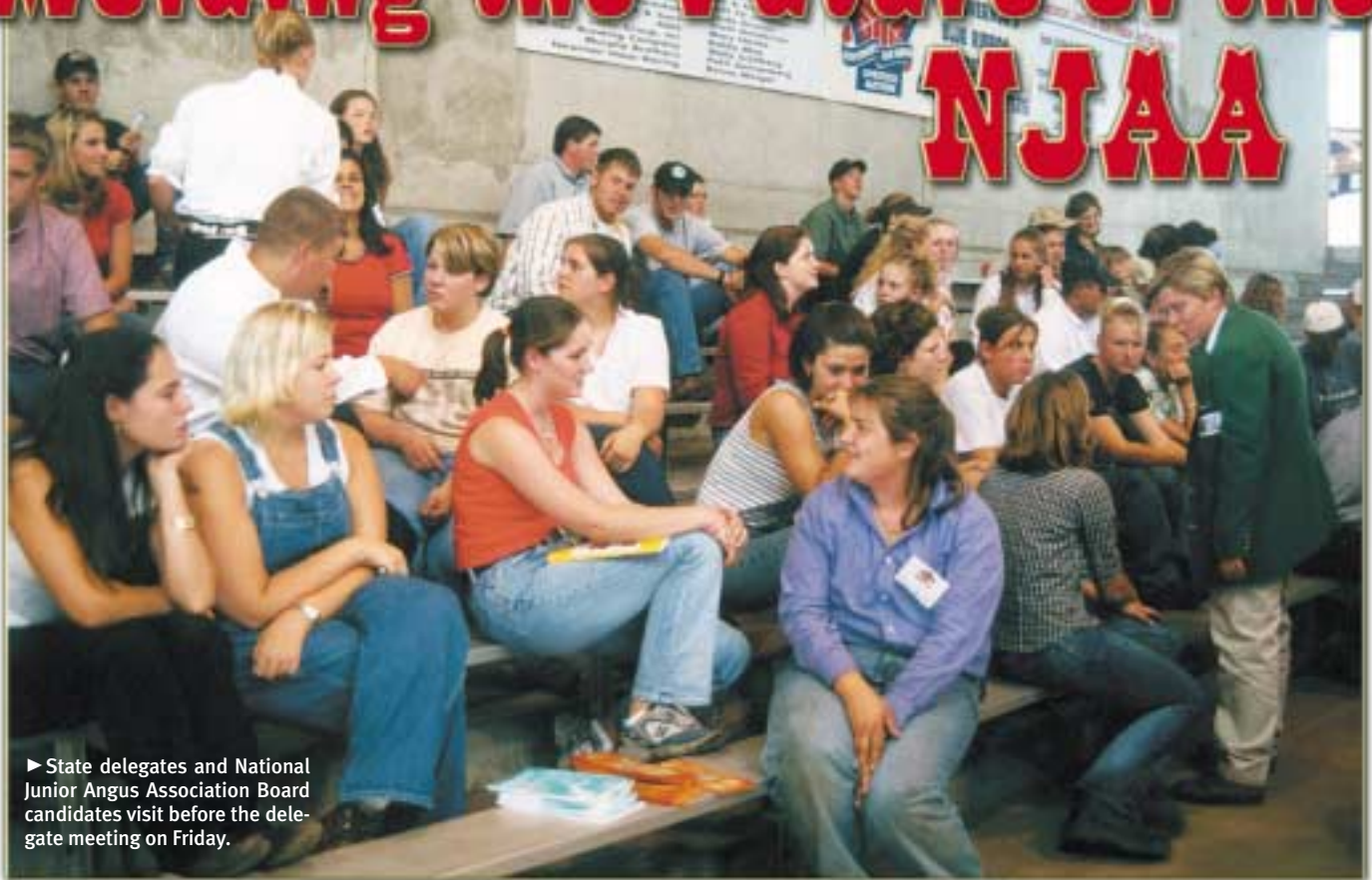


Molding the Future of the NJAA



► State delegates and National Junior Angus Association Board candidates visit before the delegate meeting on Friday.

State delegates to the annual meeting of the National Junior Angus Association vote on bylaw changes and elect six members to the Board of Directors.

Story and photos by **Courtney Wimmer**

The green jackets worn by members of the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) Board of Directors are a visible symbol of leadership, dedication and achievement. These NJAA members are selected to be ambassadors for the NJAA, the American Angus Association and the beef industry. Not as visible, but no less important, are the state delegates who dedicate their week at the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) to making decisions that will affect the organization's future.

Each year, state junior associations choose two NJAA members to serve as voting delegates to the NJAS. These members are carefully selected to be the voice of their state association and to make decisions that will affect the entire NJAA. These chosen few then select juniors to serve on the NJAA Board of Directors and vote on any proposed NJAA bylaw changes. Tom Patterson, 2001-2002 NJAA Board chairman, says that serving as a state delegate is a very important responsibility.

"They need to take it seriously, because the people who they choose are going to be the leaders of the most industry-progressive and largest youth beef organization in the world," Patterson says, "as well as making policy regarding rules and new contests. It's a very, very important job and one that should never be taken lightly."

Duties of a delegate

Texas junior Angus member Joanna Olson, Hereford, agrees with Patterson on the importance of the delegate position. "This job should not be taken lightly," Olson says. "It gives each area of the nation an opportunity to voice its opinions. The board that is selected should represent a collaboration of all of the states with their ideas."

Jennifer Ourso, Donaldsonville, La., has served twice as a delegate. "Being a delegate is important because you are representing both your state and the nation," Ourso says. "The decisions that you make will affect all NJAA

members. It is also important because it allows people to express their thoughts and feelings about current issues and rules."

Before attending the NJAS, delegates receive a packet of information, which includes a copy of all the junior Board candidates' applications. "The best way to prepare for the meetings is to know the candidates before they introduce themselves," Ourso says. "You can learn so much about a person from the way he or she writes. When reading the résumés, you can write down notes or think of questions."

Reading the applications and formulating questions allows delegates to be prepared when they arrive at the NJAS.

"I prepare for meetings by



finding out little things about each candidate, such as their goals for themselves, their goals for the NJAA, their background, among other things,” says Heath McPherson, Snow Camp, N.C. “I do this by talking to them prior to the meetings and thoroughly reading each candidate’s application. This helps me formulate questions that will greatly affect my final decision.”

Selection process

Delegates have many responsibilities during the weeklong junior show. On Tuesday, candidates formally introduce themselves to all show exhibitors and the voting delegates at the NJAS exhibitors’ meeting. Another meeting is held for all delegates after the exhibitors’ meeting.

During the candidate-delegate dinner on Wednesday evening, each candidate makes a short speech before the delegates. Following the meal, as the candidates rotate to alternating roundtable interviews, the delegates ask them prepared questions.

Olson says she likes to ask questions that test the candidates’ knowledge of the beef industry, specifically the Angus industry. “I also like to test how well they think on their feet by asking creative questions,” she says. “The candidates should express great knowledge about the beef industry and confidently communicate with the public in order to represent the Angus breed as an ambassador.”

McPherson says the questions he asks depend greatly on the candidate. “I like to ask questions that I feel apply to the strengths of each candidate,” McPherson says. “However, I also like to throw somewhat of a curve ball at the same time. I like to make the candidate think.”

Throughout the week of the NJAS, delegates are encouraged to visit with the candidates one-on-one. This exposure allows the delegates to get to know the candidates’ personalities.

“While it is the candidates’ responsibility to make themselves known to the delegates, I

personally think that it is also the delegates’ responsibility to get to know the candidates on their own,” Ourso says.

Patterson recommends that delegates observe not only how the candidates handle themselves in front of a crowd, but also behind the scenes. “Are they the ones who are helping the kids when no one is looking, or are they the ones who are back at the hotel playing in the swimming pool? A National Junior Angus Board member should be someone who truly cares about the kids and has that heart,” Patterson says.

Voting delegates have a lot to consider when choosing the new NJAA Board members or voting on amendments to the bylaws. Ourso advises new delegates to take the job seriously.

“The decisions you make will affect a lot of people,” she says. “Also, choose the candidates who are the most well-rounded people. Don’t base your decision simply on a person’s knowledge of the industry. Look for the genuine and sincere candidates who are able to communicate with all people, be positive leaders and role models, work hard, and have fun.”

McPherson also has some advice for first-time delegates: “I would tell them to read applications carefully, listen to the candidates, ask lots of questions and most of all have fun.”

The delegates’ responsibility at the show ends Friday when they meet to cast their votes. In order to cast votes for their state, delegates must attend the candidate-delegate dinner Wednesday. The new Board members are announced during the awards function Friday evening.

Delegate today, candidate tomorrow

Patterson represented Montana three times as a voting delegate. The experience, he says, prepared him to run for the Board.

“The experiences that you look back on when you are running

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Candidate-Delegate Dinner



► Asking questions during the candidate-delegate dinner is a major role for state delegates. Joanna Olson, Hereford, Texas, says she likes to ask questions that test the candidates’ knowledge of the beef industry, specifically the Angus industry.



► Delegates and candidates mingle before the candidate-delegate dinner Wednesday evening. Delegates are encouraged to get to know candidates on a personal, as well as a professional, level.



► Cortney Collins (right), Board candidate, answers a question during alternating roundtable interviews. Candidates spent eight minutes at each table answering delegates’ questions.

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for the Board are all the candidate-delegate banquets that you attend,” he says. “That gives you a barometer for what questions you are going to be asked and what’s to be expected of you as a candidate. Basically, anything that goes into being a successful Board candidate you learn at the candidate-delegate dinner.

“So, in essence, the delegates are not only selecting the next generation of Board members, they are also preparing themselves. If they have the desire, they can run for the Board and be a little bit more prepared.”

Olson plans to run for the Board in the future, and she appreciates the skills she is gaining while serving as a voting delegate.

“Serving as a delegate has helped me to discover what is expected of those who run for

the Board,” she says. “This knowledge will be useful as I compete for the junior Board by giving me an idea of what the delegates expect of me.”

McPherson says wearing the green jacket has been a personal ambition of his since he attended his first Leaders Engaged in Angus Development (LEAD) conference in 1995. “Serving as a delegate has ripened my interaction and interpretation skills,” McPherson says. “But also, being a delegate has exposed me to different points of views and ideas from different parts of the nation, giving me insight and preparing me for questions I might be asked if I ran.”

Social business

Serving as a delegate is not just about meetings and business. The role also allows juniors from across the nation to visit and to develop friendships.

► Voting on proposed bylaw changes is another responsibility of state delegates. They serve as representatives of their states and make decisions that will affect the National Junior Angus Association for many years.



“Being a delegate gives me the opportunity to meet new people from other states and gain knowledge of how the aspects of agriculture differ in various parts of the country,” Olson says.

Ourso agrees that serving as a delegate is a valuable opportunity. “The most enjoyable part of being a delegate is the opportunity to meet new

people, who will eventually be lifelong friends,” Ourso says.

Although the Board members will be the official representatives of the NJAA, the delegates chart the organization’s course. In one week of meetings and interviews, delegates make decisions that will affect the future of the NJAA for years to come.

