

# Angus Pairs



Mentoring program helps first-time National Junior Angus Show exhibitors get involved.

Story and photos by Courtney Wimmer

committee to design a program that would benefit both the mentors and protégés involved. "This program utilizes the resources and talents the National Junior Angus Association has in our older exhibitors at the NJAS to help other junior members get started with their career in the Angus breed," Sawyer says.

Sawyer says the program was developed as a possible solution to concerns voiced by advisors from several state junior Angus associations.

"The concern was that the NJAS was an intimidating event for first- and second-year exhibitors," she says. "The advisors were wondering if there was something that could be done to help these exhibitors feel more at home at the event. It was also a concern that these exhibitors were not having the opportunity to meet juniors from other state associations throughout the week."

The 2002 NJAS marked the debut of the program. More than 115 juniors signed up to be mentors or protégés. Mentors had to be at least 14 years old and were asked to check on their protégés at least once a day.

## Becoming a mentor

Applying to be a mentor was an easy decision for Abby Janssen, Bloomfield, Iowa. "I wish I would have had someone to help me through my first National Junior Angus Show, so I wanted to help the program by taking time to help someone new," she says. "When I first heard about the program I just said to myself, 'That is something I would like to help with.'"

Mentors were paired with protégés from different states during a mentoring mixer Tuesday morning. Sawyer and Mercedes Danekas, 2002-2003 NJAA chairman, led several group activities that provided participants with an opportunity to meet each other. A game of musical chairs, in which the

**F**irsts can be both scary and thrilling — the first bike ride, the first day of kindergarten or the first jump off the diving board. These milestones are met with some hesitation. But once the first step is taken, the event becomes enjoyable and is eagerly anticipated.

Many juniors feel the same

way about their first attendance at a National Junior Angus Show (NJAS). They know it will be a wonderful opportunity to meet people from across the nation and to showcase their cattle, but the unknown is still scary.

To help these junior members get involved at the NJAS, the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) has

developed a mentoring program. The program is designed to pair first-time exhibitors with juniors who have attended at least two previous national junior Angus shows, allowing the mentors to call on their NJAS experience to assist their protégés.

Jessica Sawyer, 2001-2002 NJAA membership director, worked with a membership

► Above: Mentors and protégés had lots of fun during the week of the National Junior Angus Show. Abby Janssen (left), Bloomfield, Iowa, and her protégé, Samantha "Sam" Jackson of Fennimore, Wis., enjoyed a night of skating Thursday evening at the Pettit Ice Center.

mentors were the chairs, resulted in many get-acquainted laughs.

During the mixer, Janssen met her protégé, Samantha “Sam” Jackson, Fennimore, Wis. Mentors took their protégés with them to various contests to expose the first-time exhibitors to the variety of events offered. Janssen and Jackson attended the ice-skating social and looked through state scrapbooks together.

Helping a first-year exhibitor was something Janssen enjoyed doing. “It kind of reminds me of my first national and maybe what I felt like,” Janssen says. “It was a fun experience for me, and I think it taught me a lot. I hope Sam learned a lot, too.”

Jackson says she enjoyed having a mentor. “It’s fun because you get to meet new people that you would have never met if you hadn’t been involved in the program.” Jackson learned about the Auxiliary-sponsored All-American *Certified Angus Beef*® Cook-Off, and she says she would like to enter it in the future.

“I want to show young junior members the exciting activities involved with a National Junior Angus Show,” Nebraska junior Angus member Jake Tiedeman, North Platte, says as to why he volunteered to be a mentor. “I hope to give these junior members the desire to get involved and enjoy many of the events and competitions offered each summer.”

Mentors were encouraged to help make their protégés feel at home during the NJAS by helping explain rules and basic information about the event. “This program is valuable because it will give young participants a chance to ask questions and learn more about the NJAS,” Tiedeman says.

### Meet someone new

Meeting new people was a major goal for many of the protégés. Mentors were asked to introduce their protégés to other



► Mentors and protégés were paired with each other during a mentoring mixer. The 2002 NJAS marked the debut of the mentoring program, and more than 115 juniors signed up to be either mentors or protégés.



► Paige Wallace (in front), Mount Vernon, Mo., was paired with Ryan Nelson, Wilton, Calif. Wallace says she enjoyed meeting someone who lives so far away. Each protégé was paired with a mentor from another state.



► Kindra Wood (left), Holly Pond, Ala., and her protégé, Jessica Kasten (center left), Shawano, Wis., ask Christy Walther, former NJAA Board member, to sign Jessica’s autograph book. Protégés were given an autograph book and a list of different people to have sign it.



► Courtenay DeHoff (left), Tonganoxie, Kan., and Jessica Radcliffe, Weston, Wis., enjoy getting to know each other during the week of the NJAS. Radcliffe says having a mentor was a fun experience. “It was a good way to meet people from states other than just your own,” Radcliffe says.

juniors in the state who were the same age. Paige Wallace, Mount Vernon, Mo., signed up to be a protégé so she could take advantage of this opportunity.

“I thought it would be a good way to meet new people,” Wallace says. “It’s easier to meet more people, and you know their names. Lots of people say I like to talk a lot, so I wanted more people to talk to.”

Wallace says she was trying to meet people from different states. Paired with California junior Angus member Ryan Nelson, Wilton, Wallace says she enjoyed being able to talk to someone who lives so far from her. “There aren’t many people from California, but he introduced me to one of the girls from there.”

All protégés were given an

autograph book and were asked to go around Wisconsin State Fair Park with their mentors to find signatures. Protégés requested autographs from all the junior board members, regional managers, American Angus Association staff, NJAA members from different states and many more. Juniors who turned in their completed books received a T-shirt from the NJAA.

“I think they’ll have a lot more people doing this next year,” Wallace says. “I hope they’ll do that so they can get into the show better and have lots of fun.”

The benefits of the mentoring program were evident to Sawyer. She says she enjoyed watching the mentors and protégés interact with each other during the week.

“I truly hope that the mentors realize what a difference they can make in the lives of younger junior Angus members, sharing their enthusiasm for the junior Angus program with members who are just beginning their careers in the Angus breed,” Sawyer says.

“I hope that this program helps mentors realize that they don’t have to be involved with the mentoring program at the NJAS to be a role model for younger members in their state junior Angus associations,” she adds, encouraging juniors to take on a mentor role at the state level. “It is important for them to take time to help these young exhibitors get started in the junior Angus program.”

