



## *Time Flies*

*There was a time, believe it or not, when a gallon of gas cost \$0.32 and the new car it went in was only \$2,000. Times were much different 50 years ago. A new house was \$40,000, and a brand-new show heifer ran way under \$1,000. The picture of the cattle industry and organized breed associations was not quite the kaleidoscope we have grown accustomed to today. Yet like anything else, some things never change.*

*by Megan Green, editorial and communications intern*

Cattle prices were high right after the Civil War ended, a contributing factor to the formation of the American Aberdeen-Angus Breeders' Association in 1883. The growth of the Association has mirrored the increase in popularity and success of the Angus breed in America.

Registering more than 10 million head in the first century of operation,

the Association is the largest breed registry association in the world. A big part of this is thanks to the success of the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) and the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS).

Started in 1969 as the National Junior Angus Heifer Show (NJAHS) by Dean Hurlbut, the event brought 103 head of cattle from 12 different

states to Columbia, Mo. It was hosted in conjunction with the 15th Annual American Angus Conference.

"Both the national show and showmanship contest were firsts in the beef industry, and in 1974 the two contests were combined," Keith Evans wrote in the *40th Anniversary of the National Junior Angus Show 1968-2008*.

The showmanship contest was started in 1967 at the All-American Angus Breeders' Futurity to enable juniors the opportunity to attend and compete in a major livestock show.

The September *Aberdeen-Angus Journal*, now known as the *Angus Journal*, reported 81 showmen from 41 states competed in the National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest in August 1969. This was just one month after the first national junior show.

"We were just country kids, and the show was big and air-conditioned," says Lori Fink, from Randolph, Kan., who exhibited at the 1969 NJAHS. "It was the coolest barn I had ever been in. It was quite the luxury for those of us showing cattle at the time."

Hosted on the University of Missouri campus in Columbia, Fink



*It did not take long for backdrop pictures to go from outdoor, simple affairs to the large-scale production they are today.*

remembers thinking the arena was humongous. As she ponders on it now, she realizes it was not nearly as big as it seemed in 1969.

### My, how things change

In only a matter of three years, the NJAHS grew to be the largest heifer show in the world. Hosted

in Nashville in 1971, more than 200 showmen from 19 states competed. The crowd numbered over 1,000, many of whom competed in the cattle judging contest introduced at the 1970 NJAHS.

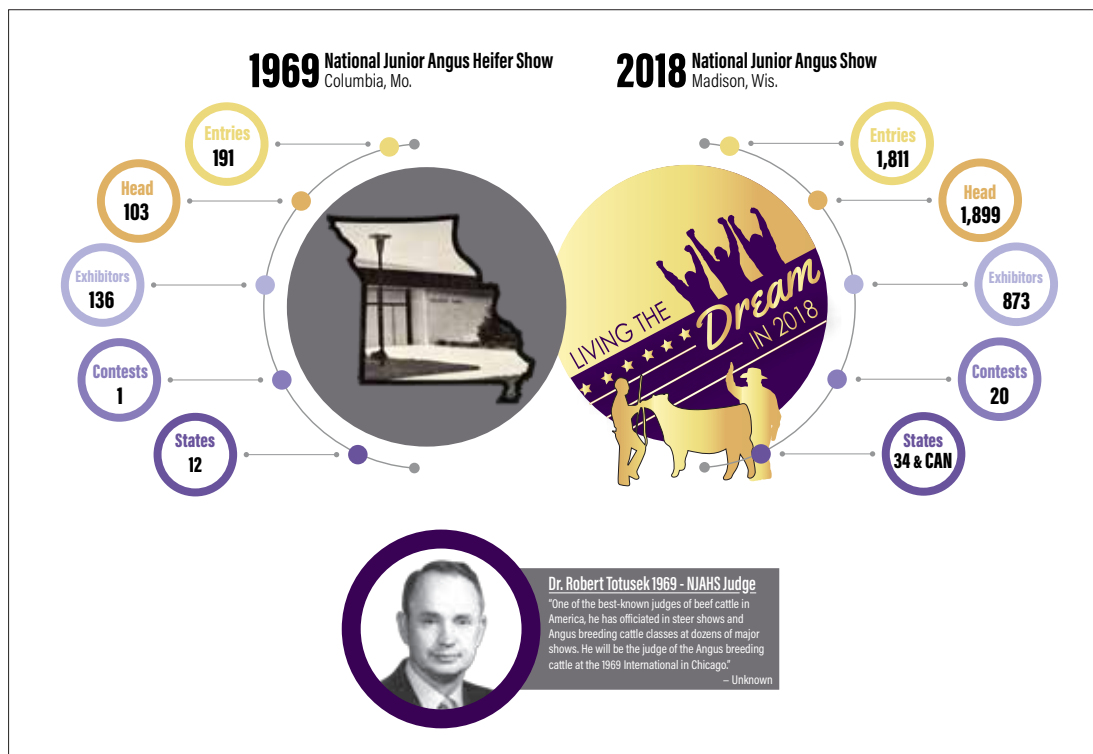
The heifers were small in frame, but high in quality for the style of animal the industry was calling for at the time.

"The body mass of the breed was changing to a more lean beef

look," recalls Jay Cox, originally from Ninnekah, Okla., when he first exhibited at the NJAHS. He is now a resident of Edmond, Okla. "As the breed matured, it was getting a more professional look."

As the look of Angus cattle evolved, so did the Association and

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the national show. At the fourth NJAHS in 1972, the National Junior Recognition Program was established providing the platform for Bronze, Silver and Gold awards. This was also the year bred-and-owned (B&O) heifers were shown in a separate category.

“The shows were fairly small as far as participants, but as the years went by they continued to grow,” Cox adds. “I was always amazed at how many people were involved with the Angus breed and how that continued to grow quickly. I forgot how small it all started though.”

The event’s humble beginnings led to a continuous string of record-breaking years as the location of the show moved all throughout the Midwest.

The national showmanship contest goal was to “emphasize the widespread interest in Angus among farm and ranch youngsters throughout the United States.” As the showmanship contest and national show combined in 1974, the objective was quickly applied to both.



The NJAA was formed at the 1980 NJAHS in Wichita, Kan., and the legend of the coveted green coats began. This show was followed by the introduction of cow-calf classes in 1981 and B&O bull classes in 1982. At the 14th annual national show, in 1982, the name officially dropped heifer and became the NJAS.

“I really enjoy the cook-off contest, and that is not something that has been around forever, I think it came around in the 1980s,” Fink says.

Now known as the All-American *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) Cook-Off, the addition of the cook-off was followed by steer classes and a carcass contest in 1985. This began

the era of adding multiple contests. Many, if not all, are what make nationals what it is today.

## A new era

“The whole scope of the NJAS changed dramatically during my 18 years as the director of junior activities,” says James Fisher who served the Association as the director of junior activities from 1991 to 2008 and as the director of activities from 2001 to 2007. “It changed from a focus mostly on cattle to one on the kids. While the cattle gave us a reason to gather together, I think what was brought to the table was an emphasis on the experience for the junior members as a whole.”

From the addition of the photography, creative writing, graphic design and career development contests to the leadership opportunities outside of the national show, Fisher helped to build the NJAS into what it is today.

“The goal of adding these additional contests was to provide opportunities for learning and life



*Attendees of the first National Junior Angus Heifer Show in 1969 gathered in 2018 at the 50th National Junior Angus Show in Madison, Wis. Pictured are (from left) Guy Laflin, Saint Ignatius, Mont.; Dave Nichols, Bridgewater, Iowa; Dean Hurlbut, Saint Joseph, Mo; Sharee Sankey, Council Grove, Kan.; Anne Patton Schubert, Taylorsville, Ky.; June Hagenbuch, Holton, Kan.; Lori Hagenbuch Fink, Randolph, Kan.; Andrew McCurry, Burrton, Kan.; and Tom Burke, Smithville, Mo.*

experiences for the junior members all across the country,” Fisher says. “The NJAA board felt it was important to provide opportunities for junior members who may not be able to attend the NJAS with cattle to still have the opportunity for success and recognition at the national level.”

At Fisher’s first NJAS in 1991, the trend of expanding the learning opportunities was just beginning. The Angus Foundation awarded one scholarship that year.

“At the 2008 NJAS, I witnessed hundreds of junior members from all across the country engage in life lessons through the contests and competition,” Fisher remembers. “More than \$100,000 in scholarships were awarded, and the pieces were in place to award more than \$200,000 the next year.”

The 50th celebration this year brought in almost 1,900 head of cattle and boasted 20 contests with competitors traveling from 34 different states and Canada. Growth is always a precursor to success, but

change is not necessary for the two to exist.

## Some things stay the same

“As far as the cattle showing, that has not changed much other than the fitting products,” Fink says. “There are some things that you just do the same way forever and ever.”

Fink also recalls how her parents never emphasized winning as the main objective of showing. It was all about the experience and the friendships built while traveling and showing together as a family.

Watching peers in the ring was one of Cox’s favorite aspects of the NJAS, but he also enjoyed seeing what large operations were bringing to the table.

“I liked seeing where the breed was going in the animals that people brought,” Cox adds. “It was a great learning experience and a place for people to display their Angus farms, their livelihood, and how successful they were at it.”

The fluff and stuff of fitting has remained a staple element of showing Angus cattle, though

the procedures have changed significantly over time.

“For the summer shows, most animals were slick sheared, but we did use bars of saddle soap to work their leg hair up,” Fink says. “We did not have the ‘glue’ in those days. We also did not try to grow hair on them because they just shed it all off in the summer anyways.”

One thing that never changes is the quality of showmen and sportsmanship displayed at each national show. The dedication of the juniors to their breeding programs and preparation amplifies ten-fold each year as competition gets tougher with differences between animals becoming marginal.

“The young people are just as excited about the show today as they were 50 years ago,” Cox says. “We have a great group of young people out there and many of them work countless hours with their animals. This is their chance to show off their work, and it’s like nothing else in the world.” 🌟



*A celebration was hosted in honor of the 50th anniversary of the National Junior Angus Show.*