

by Mark McCully  
CEO, American Angus Association



## A lesson in perseverance

*Maybe it was the hype music being played. Maybe it was the incredible quality of heifers being paraded in the ring.*

Maybe it was the intensity, focus and talent of the showmen on the ends of the halters. Maybe it was the anticipation of the decision and selection that was about to occur. Or maybe it was the realization that the 2020 National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) really did just happen. I'm not sure the cause, but the chills that ran down my neck and the lump in my throat were real.

There is no doubt this year's show was like none before. The COVID-19 pandemic forced the event to be moved from Pennsylvania to Oklahoma. The social distancing guidelines required many of the contests be hosted virtually, and some even had to be canceled. We were not able to assemble for opening and closing ceremonies, but instead gathered with our families in living rooms across the country to watch online. But despite the things that were different or missing, the 2020 NJAS was just as important and significant for our young Angus enthusiasts as ever before — maybe even more.

While the activities were top-notch, I think the broader lesson was more about perseverance. This year

was more about working hard and not giving up. As steer judge Amanda Schnoor said, "These young people never gave up. They worked and they worked." They worked through uncertainty. They worked regardless of knowing whether a show would happen or not. That, she said, was something to be admired.



Don't get me wrong. The competition was as stout as ever, and the contests and the scholarships awarded were all fantastic. My congratulations to all who participated. But this year I know so many of our junior members dealt with disappointments. They dealt with questions and uncertainty from the beginning of the pandemic. Graduations were canceled, sports seasons were eliminated, and county and state fairs were taken away.

### The Angus family

Many parents shared with me the NJAS was the only opportunity to show their family had all summer. I'm incredibly proud of the Angus family for making the NJAS a reality for our junior members. Supported by the adult and junior boards and countless volunteers, the team pulled

off what many suggested was a pipe dream. With creativity, flexibility and several ounces of pure stubbornness, a dedication to provide a great stage and showcase for our young Angus leaders materialized in an event that all those in attendance will remember for a long time.

And while we will remember 2020 as a year that didn't look quite the same, the experiences for National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) members will be what matters in the long run. Showmanship judge and former National Junior Angus Board (NJAB) member Cheramie Viator spoke of her first ribbon from the NJAS and the bowl she won in showmanship in 1989.

"What I want to remind you about is that NJAA isn't about these things," Viator said. "That ribbon is faded. That bowl is tarnished. What NJAA is about is our Angus family."

When those young people returned home, the lesson of perseverance and how they faced a challenging time will be with them for a lifetime. **AJ**

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