

by Sara Gugelmeyer

*For nearly 40 years, Phil Trowbridge has been educating young people with his internship program.*

Phil Trowbridge didn't plan on becoming one of the most influential beef producers in the Northeast when he graduated with an animal science degree from Alfred State College in 1976. The young man with a farming background from western New York was thrilled to get a job with Gallagher's Farm as herdsman. Time would reveal Trowbridge to be a leader in the industry with a dedication to helping youth find their way in the beef cattle industry.

Trowbridge traveled the country representing Gallagher's Farm of Ghent, N.Y., as a herdsman and claimed champion banners at major shows for four years in a row. He married Annie in 1977, and their one-day honeymoon included them traveling to look at and purchase a bull who would become a two-time national champion.

By 1979, Trowbridge was promoted to manager. Business was booming, and he was looking for more qualified help.



## THE PROBLEM

“We hired three recent graduates,” Trowbridge explains. “All really good people. But shortly after they started, I sent them to castrate a set of calves,” he says. “I was busy in the office, and they came back only 20 minutes later. I was surprised when they explained that they didn’t know how to do that. That really hit me wrong.”

Trowbridge was not impressed that these three recent graduates from some of the most prestigious schools in the country weren’t really prepared to do a day’s work on a beef cattle operation. He says he felt the college graduates were lacking basic skills but still expected to be making top money.

“I grumbled all summer about that, and I really held the universities responsible for it,” Trowbridge says. “Finally my older brother came up to me one day and told me to shut the heck up about it. He was sick of listening to me and said if I had a problem, I should bring a solution, otherwise I was the problem. I took that pretty seriously and gave that some thought.”

Trowbridge had the solution. He wanted to start an internship program.

“I went around to some different schools and universities and talked to them about how important I thought doing an internship could be in doing their students a proper service.”

When Trowbridge hired his first intern in 1982, Trowbridge’s boss had just decided to get out of the cattle business. Phil and Annie continued with their own cattle under the name Gallagher’s Farm. The reputation was there.

Gallagher’s Farm was also in the Thoroughbred business — raising foals out of about 30 mares and racing horses all over the world.

## ROCKY START

The very first intern was a young woman from the University of Massachusetts, Rosalie Nataupski, and she was interested in horses, Trowbridge explains. He says he thought the whole thing went excellently, but decided to do an exit interview to get her feedback.

“I am thinking I am very professional — at only 24 years old, she’s just a few years younger than me, and we’re doing this exit interview. She’s telling me a few things we could do better, which I thought I was taking pretty well,” he says.

Then he asked Nataupski about her future plans, and she explained the first thing she was going to do was change her major. She explained if she had to work like that she wanted to look at different options. She was an equine science major, and she already had three years of college completed.

“I was crushed,” Trowbridge says. “Here’s this girl who didn’t seem to be lazy, but I thought I worked her too hard and ruined this kid’s life. I had all these things going through my head.”

Trowbridge dwelled on that awhile and worked on making things better for his future interns, but later he realized it wasn’t necessarily his fault.

“She showed up about 10 years later and told me that was the best thing that ever happened to her,” Trowbridge says. “At that point she was one of the largest honey producers in New England. She said she just realized when she was here that she wasn’t that in love with horses. After the internship she switched from horses to bees.”

## ALL-AROUND PROGRAM

Since that first young lady, Trowbridge has hosted 136 other interns. In 2005 they switched the name from Gallagher to Trowbridge Angus. Now it’s he and his wife, Annie, plus their son P.J. They manage about 125 cows, mostly Angus. They sell about 80 to 100 bulls a year. Trowbridge contracts with producers to raise embryo transfer (ET) calves.

When students do an internship with Trowbridge, they get to see all aspects of the business — from registration paperwork and bookkeeping to calving and fitting and, yes, even castrating.

The internship is not advertised, and now Trowbridge typically just gives the opportunity to the first person who shows interest.

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## CASE IN POINT

In summer 2017 it was Natalie Strub, who came from a dairy cattle background. “My family has a 1,200-cow dairy in New York and just about 30 to 40 beef cows we raise 4-H calves with,” Strub says. “I met Phil at a New York beef producer meeting, but I had always known of him. He’s a big name in the area because of what he does for the beef community.”

Strub wanted the opportunity to learn more about beef cattle and says she loved the summer spent working with Phil and his family. Her favorite part was helping his grandchildren care for their 4-H animals.

Although after her internship Strub ultimately returned to the dairy industry to find a career, she says what Trowbridge taught her was invaluable.

“When I came to work for Phil, I was really anxious,” Strub explains. “I didn’t have much self-confidence. If there was something I was uncomfortable with, Phil helped me look at things differently. He taught me that it’s not that I can’t do it, just that I don’t know how to yet. I just need to take the time to learn.”

Steven Quanz is another former intern who praises Trowbridge’s ability to help young people navigate life.

The summer of 2013, Quanz worked for Trowbridge in between pursuing his undergraduate degree at Oklahoma State University.

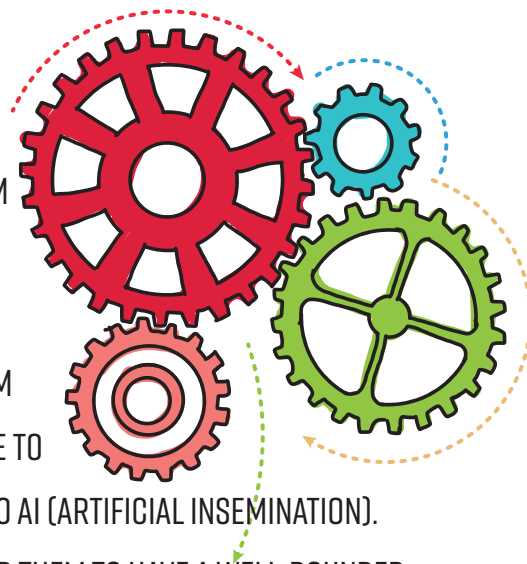
“I was hoping to learn more about the beef industry in general and learn more about the business of the Angus industry,” Quanz says.

He adds one of the best parts about Trowbridge’s program is that he’s sincere but also straightforward.

“I learned a lot about myself and my abilities because he was honest about my strengths and my weaknesses,” Quanz says. “Originally I thought I

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would find a career path in academia. Working for Phil, I decided my interests and talents were better suited for working in industry. Phil played a part in making that transition in career goals.”

Now working toward his doctorate in ruminant nutrition at Kansas State University, Quanz is planning to work as a consultant or nutritionist for a feed company after graduating in May 2021.

## UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY

Trowbridge says part of the reason his internship has been sought after and successful for so many years is because they don’t just treat it like free labor. “It’s not real cost-effective, but we don’t count on the intern as labor, because we are not super rigid on what they do,” Trowbridge says.

For example, when he had an intern who was interested in being an auctioneer and there was a dispersal sale nearby, Trowbridge encouraged the young man to go spend time at the auction.

“We set it up as part of the internship,” Trowbridge says. “We want them to see every aspect of the business, from building fence to weed-eating to AI (artificial insemination). Our goal is for them to have a well-rounded experience while they’re here.”

That’s the experience 2010 intern Travis Book received. He was looking for a different summer

opportunity before completing his last semester working on his animal science/ag business degree from Penn State University.

“I had already done a few other internships and worked for some local companies, so I was looking to try something new before I graduated. I wasn’t real sure what to expect, but I was excited that Phil’s name was listed as the owner on a lot of sires in the AI sire directory,” Book says with a chuckle. “The internship included everything that happens day-to-day on a farm — feeding, herd health, etc., but [I] also learned about making hay, taking pictures, checking heats and sale cattle prep. There was never one day exactly like the next.”

The internship turned into a full-time job after he finished his last semester of school. He was just planning on working for them through calving season, but ended up staying nearly 18 months. Now Book works as a crop insurance agent and seed salesman in addition to operating his own farm and cattle and sheep operations.

Book says the Trowbridges have become like family to him. Trowbridge helped him learn firsthand what it takes to run a beef cattle operation in the Northeast.

Trowbridge and Book agree that internships are as much about finding out what you don’t like as what you do.

“I encourage all college students to do as many internships as possible and try something different,” Book says. “You might be surprised what you find out about yourself.”

Trowbridge remembers one intern who had no practical cattle experience at all. She’d never even been around cattle.

“She ended up being a super star,” Trowbridge says. “Really a bright girl. She came to me one night because she thought a cow was having trouble calving. Sure enough, she was.”

Because of the young people Trowbridge has worked with through his internship program, he is quick to squash people when they start doubting kids today.

“I think most of our kids in agriculture don’t get enough credit,” he says. “People who are busting on this young generation all the time are hanging out with the wrong kids. The ones we get here are respectful and hardworking. I truly believe that.”

## LEADING THE WAY

During the last 40 years in the beef cattle business, Trowbridge hasn’t only been helping youngsters learn about themselves and hone their skills through internships. He’s also been giving back to the industry in leadership roles. He was elected the American Angus Association President in 2012.

“Phil is genuine about how he approaches situations. He has amazing attention to detail, from how he handles his cattle to working with customers. I feel like if some of that could wear off on his interns, no doubt it would help improve the industry. Quanz says. “He’s always been active in organizations and is a very approachable person. To my knowledge, no one else in the Northeast has the level of activity or prestige in the beef cattle industry that Phil has obtained. I think young people are drawn to that.”

As proof that Trowbridge is really in it to help the youth, consider how he used to choose his interns.

Back in the ’80s, he would have a lot of different people apply. How could he choose?

“We would go through them and pick out the worst one,” Trowbridge says.

Why?

“The good ones don’t need help, do they?” **AJ**