

INSPIRING LEADERS — ONE JUNIOR AT A TIME

*Ellie Kidwell awarded the Outstanding Leadership Award
at the 2022 National Junior Angus Show.*

by Sierra Walter, communications intern

The show ring buzzed with laughter and anticipation as Angus enthusiasts from all corners of the country gathered. Colorful lawn chairs scattered Hale Arena of the American Royal Center as junior members converged in front of the stage. On the same dirt where Angus cattle were exhibited just hours before, the highly anticipated awards ceremony began at the 2022 National Junior Angus Show (NJAS).

As the ceremony commenced, the announcement of competition winners started. In the middle of the crowd, National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) member Ellie Kidwell leaned forward in her chair. Having competed in the Auxiliary-sponsored All-American Certified Angus Beef Cook-off and other contests, she was hoping to hear her



Ellie Kidwell

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name called — though she was equally excited to celebrate her peers’ success.

Announcing the recipient of the Outstanding Leadership Award, National Junior Angus Board (NJAB) member Garrett Schuering approached the microphone.

“This year’s recipient truly defines leadership,” Schuering said. “As some of her peers put it, ‘She constantly works to improve herself and her craft so that one day she can leave a lasting impact on the industry that has already given her so much.’”

Instituted in 1994, the award honors a junior member who embodies high character and a profound passion to serve, lead and further the NJAA.

“Please join me in congratulating the 2022 Outstanding Leadership Award Recipient,” Schuering said. “Ellie Kidwell.”

At the announcement of her name, Kidwell humbly accepted the award. Feeling both honored and thankful, Kidwell credited the award to her experiences in the NJAA, where her journey to becoming a leader began.

Her first Angus heifer

Nestled in the hills of Walhonding, Ohio, Kidwell’s grandparents began raising Angus cattle long before her birth. With a focus on performance and genetics, Kidwell’s grandpa poured years of work into building a

NATIONAL JUNIOR ANGUS SHOW



herd of competitive purebred cattle.

At age 8, Kidwell received her first heifer from her grandpa's prized herd. Initially, she kept her show string at her grandparents' house and visited frequently to work and prepare her heifer for the ring.

"I remember my first year at the county fair I won the open show and showmanship," Kidwell says. "I was pretty pumped about that, since it was the first thing I ever won. I got a silver plate for it and everything."

Although Kidwell began showing in 4-H at an early age, her career in the NJAA did not start until years later. Kidwell explains her experience showing in 4-H, FFA and then the NJAA was a steady advancement in building her skill set. Likewise, her commitment to showing and raising Angus cattle became a passion that grew over time.

"It's always been a progression for me," Kidwell says. "I didn't work with my cows as much at the beginning, but I started growing the passion for it."

Journey into NJAA

The year 2016 marked Kidwell's first Eastern Regional Angus show. As a new junior member, Kidwell went to the show knowing only a few friends. However, she left with connections within and beyond her state association.

The following year, Kidwell attended the Atlantic National Regional Preview Junior Angus Show and the Leaders Engaged in Angus Development (LEAD) conference. Each Angus event Kidwell attended led to more friendships within the Angus family.

"Everybody's willing to talk to you and willing to make friends, you just have to approach them," Kidwell says.

In 2017 at the Iowa State Fairgrounds in Des Moines, Iowa, Kidwell vividly remembers her first NJAS.

"Everyone always remembers Des Moines being hot, but I don't remember that at all because I was having so much fun," she says.

In addition to placing third in her class, Kidwell grew her leadership skills through contests and further immersed herself in the Angus community.

"It was a super memorable experience for me," Kidwell says. "There was good food, and I made a lot of friends."

Leading by example

As Kidwell became more involved in junior activities, she took on additional leadership roles. These roles included serving as the 2021-2022 Miss American Angus and the president of the Ohio Junior Angus Association (OJAA) — a role she currently serves in. However, her leadership journey was inspired by an individual who served as a role model to her.

"I'd say the biggest thing for me getting involved was having a mentor to push me, because initially I was afraid to go talk to people," Kidwell says. "I knew people's names and I knew their faces, but I was like, 'They don't know me. I don't want to go talk to them.

They're going to think I'm weird.' But getting involved in contests and attending activities is how you meet those people, and you need somebody to push you to do that."

Serving as a mentor to Kidwell was Lindsey Grimes-Hall, the OJAA advisor. Her influence gave Kidwell the courage and motivation to compete in contests and junior activities that seem overwhelming as a young junior.

Similarly, Kidwell has had the opportunity to influence younger Angus members. As Miss American Angus, Kidwell spent a year traveling to Angus events across the country. During her reign, she influenced many aspiring leaders including a young girl, just 6 years old, named Adalyn Blankenship. Not even an official member yet, Blankenship followed Kidwell at Angus shows and events, watching her every move.

"At some point through the year, she told her mom she wanted to be the Angus queen when she grew up," Kidwell says. "The fact that I impacted one person is what made that role so special for me."

As Kidwell's leadership experience

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the BIGGEST show ON DIRT

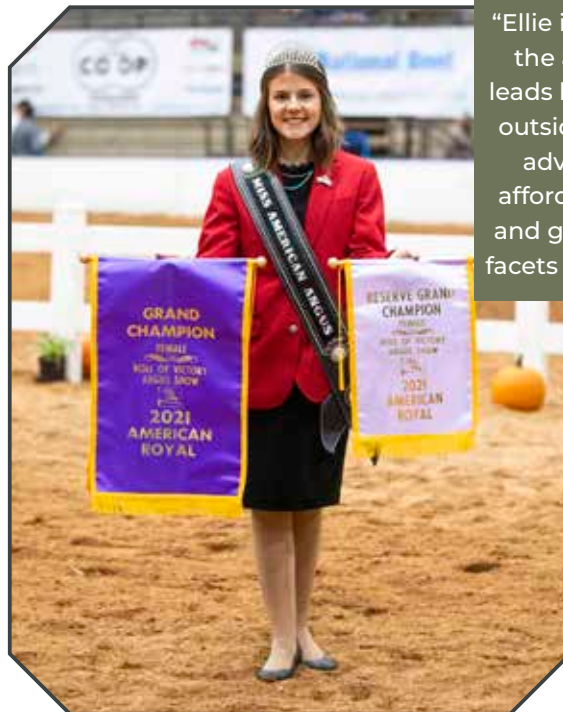
NJAS 2022

comes full circle, she continues to support Blankenship and other junior members. Kidwell's mentor, Grimes-Hall, says Kidwell influences junior members by her actions and determination to better herself.

"Ellie is an outstanding leader within the association and continuously leads by example," Grimes-Hall says. "She pushes herself outside her comfort zone and takes advantage of every opportunity afforded to her to meet new people and gain new experiences in various facets of the industry."

Kidwell has big plans to continue helping others in the livestock industry. She has hopes of working with Angus juniors in her home state, intending to grow the state's mentoring program and eventually serve as a junior advisor.

Currently an animal science senior at Kansas State University, Kidwell




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title. A few minutes later, her phone lit up with a text message from her grandpa, more than 700 miles away, congratulating her on the honor.

Once a shy junior and now a recipient of the Outstanding Leadership Award, Kidwell says there is an incredible reward to pushing yourself outside your comfort zone and getting involved. She

says the best part of being a leader is giving back to the community who supported your journey.

"Everything is for the juniors," Kidwell says. 

plans to attend veterinary school after graduating.

The 2022 Outstanding Leader

After accepting the award, Kidwell made her way back to her chair, with a wide smile and a heart full of gratitude. NJAA members who had once been strangers to Kidwell greeted her with smiles and praise on the well-deserved



Kidwell says there is an incredible reward for those who get involved and go outside their comfort zone.