

# DETERMINED, PASSIONATE, FUN

*Purpose unites diverse team; NJAA retiring board members reflect.*

*by Miranda Reiman, senior associate editor*

Everyone who went to the 2020 National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) unanimously remembers one thing: the heat.

That year in Tulsa, Okla., Alex Cozzitorto and Josh Jasper were both running for the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) board of directors, and those multiple days of sweltering temperatures above 100 degrees were wearing on them. Jasper dreamed of air conditioning and maybe a break for his feet, but Cozzitorto gave him a pep talk to remind him why they both decided to run in the first place: “It’s for the juniors.”

The pair was elected, along with Cutter Pohlman, Eric Schafer, Garrett Schuering and Walker McDermott. That phrase, “for the juniors,” or FTJ for short, became their mantra.

As a team, they were diverse in personalities and backgrounds — some came from a long lineage of Angus breeders, others were the first generation. Some knew each other well ahead of time, others did not.

“We were all really outspoken. Any one of us could go and command a room if we needed to and talk to people,” Schafer says.

Others described their team as “independent,” or “determined and fierce.” Some team members brought



The “retiring six” from left to right: Josh Jasper, Eric Schafer, Walker McDermott, Alex Cozzitorto, Cutter Pohlman, and Garrett Schuering.

high energy, others the jokes and some the thoughtful deliberation on decisions.

“Alex was kind of the one who was bringing us all together, and getting us back on track,” Pohlman says.

Board meetings were full of big plans and lot of opinions in the room, Jasper notes.

“Everybody had good ideas, but the hardest part was to narrow them down and just pick one,” he says. “We had some great discussions.”

Some might even suggest they bordered on arguments every now and again, but the adage of “iron sharpens iron,” seemed to ring true.

“You have got to find a way to work with people, and once you get it working, it can be amazing the things you can accomplish,” Pohlman says.

## The same ‘why’

The uniting thread was that shared motivation.

“There was a lot of passion in all of us, and we made a big effort to be able to make an impact on as many juniors as we possibly could,” McDermott says.

It all came back to FTJ.

Their greatest memories are the stories they share about times they knew they’d changed somebody’s NJAA experience for the better.

There was a young member who was a little hesitant to get involved in Angus Mentoring Program (AMP) activities, until McDermott came over and rattled off his heifer’s registered name and birthdate. The kid was shocked, “You really remembered me?”

“Sometimes I have a hard time remembering names, but I sure do remember their cows,” McDermott told him with a smile.

It was enough to convince the boy to get involved, on one condition. He wanted McDermott to be his mentor.

“It’s not always about the quantity of the people that you get to help, but the quality of the time spent with the ones you do make that connection with,” he says.

The first show Schafer attended as a green jacket found him directing a new member through the ring. The

# NATIONAL JUNIOR ANGUS SHOW



boy didn't know exactly what he was doing, and his animal's attitude wasn't helping.

"It was a bad experience all the way around," Schafer remembers, but by the exhibitor's third time through the ring, he had it figured out. "Seeing that kid grow and so many others ... I could tell you stories from judging contest to speaking contest that were just like that, and it made it totally worth it."

Sometimes FTJ meant getting out of their own comfort zones, too.

"I'm not the guy to typically go out of my way to do something silly or make people laugh," Schuering admits.

But even he couldn't stand to see a low-energy event stay that way for long. During the AMP event in Grand Island, Neb., at last year's NJAS, he decided to sacrifice a little personal pride to liven up the mood.

"I dove headfirst into a kiddie pool of water," Schuering says. "The smile on everybody's faces and the laughter to come from it ... I was soaking wet, but it was a lot of fun."

Each of the retiring directors measures success in a different way — someone tried the auctioneering contest for the first time, they had record-breaking attendance at Raising the Bar, the juniors all had a good time — but Cozzitorto sums it up in one line: "I think they felt how much we cared about them."

## A legacy left in good hands

That's really what each of them signed on to do: make the juniors feel valued, included and encouraged, just as the green coats of previous years had done for them.

"Junior nationals is the most rewarding, but yet the most



Behind every junior board member is a support system at home. As they retired, their family showed up for them again.

exhausting week ever. You start going through some of these days where your feet hurt, you're mentally drained, physically drained and then you just sit back and think of all the opportunities that presented to all these juniors — they were all the opportunities we had," McDermott says.

Whether it was a group activity or a one-on-one encounter, the whole experience was a chance to give, Pohlman says.

"It was the association I grew up in, and it gave me so much — a leg

up," he says, rattling off a list that included conferences, contests and events that were part of his formative years. "So every time I was able to participate in those and help give back, those were my favorite memories. I tried to help make that kind of impact on those kids."

Cozzitorto says seeing the members who now fill the seats and the show ring gives her confidence in the future.

"Seeing that the legacy of the National Junior Angus Association

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NJAS 2022

isn't going anywhere and might be stronger than it ever was before ... seeing that turning of the guard has been one of the coolest things," she says.

### Friends for life

The NJAA board is a big-time commitment, and many juggled judging team experiences or internships alongside their studies. They're at the age where studies and activities start to mix with real-world decisions.

Jasper plans to pick up more sales with his auctioneering business. Cozzitorto, Pohlman and McDermott are all staring down their senior years at Texas A&M, Texas Tech and Iowa State universities, respectively. Schafer will join Schuering at

Oklahoma State University this fall, where they'll both be juniors.

"Given the chance to run, I'd no doubt do it again," Schuering says. "It was a lot of work, and I gave up a lot of things for it, but the amount that I learned along the way — especially about myself — was truly mind-blowing."

This team leaves with a bond they'll carry throughout their lives.

"From the outside looking in, maybe you don't get it, but from the inside looking out, you can't imagine your life without it," Cozzitorto says. "When you start with the Association, these people do really become your family." **AJ**



"These were my boys, and we made it through some tough times and some pretty great times." — Alex Cozzitorto, of the NJAA board of directors team she led during the last year.

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