



NJAS 2022

# the **BIGGEST** show ON DIRT

## TAKING A SHINE TO IT

*Brazos Worrell, at only 12 years old, has been shining shoes professionally for two years.*

*story by Sara Gugelmeyer, photos by Megan Silveira*

We've all heard it said — kids aren't like they used to be. They don't have work ethic or responsibility, blah, blah; and maybe that's right. For some. But there are certainly some kids who know the value of a dollar and are willing to work for it.

Meet Brazos Worrell, Texas Junior Angus Association member from Harper, and professional shoe shiner. He is the perfect example. At 10 years old, he found a skill that interested him and now has made it into a successful business.

### How it started

Brazos's interest was piqued in October 2020, when the Worrell family was preparing for their annual Christmas photo shoot.

"My dad thought it would look nice if my shoes were shiny, so he took out some basic things and I watched how he did it," Brazos explains. "I thought that would be a pretty cool thing to do."

For the next few weeks, Brazos practiced shining anyone's shoes who would let him. Grandmothers and house guests, to name a few, his mom, Erin, explains.

Then it was time for the family to go to a jackpot cattle show. While the eldest Worrell son, Pecos, loves all things cattle showing related, Brazos is not a big fan.



**Brazos Worrell**

"Stock shows are boring," he says with a sigh.

But when dad ultrasounds cattle for a living, mom works part time as a livestock photographer, and older brother loves to show, one has to go to a lot of cattle shows.

"By this point, Casey (Brazos and Pecos's dad) had turned over all his polishes and boot shining equipment to Brazos," Erin explains, "and as a

way to get him interested in going to the show with us, Casey said, 'Why don't you bring your boot shining stuff and see if anyone wants their boots shined?'"

It was — without question — a successful venture.

"I think I made \$50 at that first show," Brazos says, "and I thought this was a really good business because my dad furnished all the

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supplies — so that \$50 was all profit.”

His mom recalls the drive home fondly because Brazos had a wad of mostly small bills, and when they stopped at the gas station he said, “I got it,” and pulled it out to buy all his own snacks.

She says they chuckled about him being the only one who left the jackpot richer than when he arrived.

Erin says, “Brazos is very much motivated by entrepreneurial things. That’s how his brain works.”

After that first show, he was hooked.

Brazos adds, “I just thought it was really cool and felt good to make money. I had been looking for a job to make money for a while. I had tried a knife-sharpening business but never made much.”

At this point in his shoe-shining career, Brazos only had what little knowledge he could glean from his dad’s limited experience and from watching YouTube videos.

“When I first started shoe shining, I had four simple steps,” he explains. “I would clean with rag and water, brush them off, shine with a rag, and do the edging.”

But in February 2021, the Worrell family attended the Patriot show at Abilene, Texas. There Brazos found a group of professional shoe shiners set up.

“There was one shoe-shine guy who really interested me,” Brazos explains. “I thought he was really good at it, better than the others, and

I wanted to learn from him.”

He asked his dad to take him to Walmart, where he bought a notebook to take notes.

Brazos got his boots shined by the man who impressed him — he’d later

learn his name is Binky — and asked him how he did it.

“He was really nice to me,” Brazos explains. “He said he’d teach me, and he explained everything while I

watched, and it helped a lot.”

Brazos spent that whole day with Binky, watching and learning. He even gave him an edging pencil so he could finish the stitching properly.

“I wrote down what I learned, and when I got home I typed it on the computer, printed it out and put it in my (shoe-shining) box,” Brazos says. “I went over it a bunch of times until I learned it in my head.”

By watching Binky and working with his own customers, Brazos says he learned some tips on how to bring in new customers and keep them happy.

“It gets distracting sometimes talking to the customer,” Brazos says, “but they will remember me if I have a conversation with them while I am doing their shoes. And I think it helps the time go faster for them.”

Brazos also learned to ask his customers

to tell their friends where they got their shoes shined. Maybe the most amusing things he learned from Binky, though, according to his mom, is how to call to potential customers as they walk by.

“He picked up on those guys’ little marketing techniques,” Erin says with a chuckle. “He has no reservations talking to adults or kids as they walk by and telling them they need their boots shined. He calls out to people, saying things like, ‘Look at those dirty boots, don’t you need them cleaned?’ or his favorite, ‘I’ll make those work boots look like church boots.’”

He also learned how to price his services. Erin explains he always makes what he’s going to charge an uneven number in hopes the customer will give them what they have rather than wait for him to make change. For example, at the most recent show, he charged \$11 hoping they would give him \$15, but oftentimes getting a \$20 because that’s what people have in their wallet.

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## How it's going

At this year's National Junior Angus Show (NJAS), Brazos was the talk of the day when he set up his boot-shining spot.

One customer in particular stood out, though. Regrettably, Brazos didn't get his name, but the gentleman asked him what he was going to do with the money he earned shining shoes. Brazos explained he was saving up to buy a real shoe-shine chair so he could do a better job. The customer asked him how much he lacked to earn enough to buy it. "Three hundred dollars" was Brazos's answer, and when the gentleman paid him, he explained that he was impressed with his ambition at such a young age. He pulled out three \$100 bills and gave them to Brazos.

His mom explains, "I am not necessarily sure that man should have done that, but it was very generous of him, and Brazos was very appreciative. I think that speaks to the generosity of people in the Angus breed and their encouragement of kids to pursue what interests them and rewarding them for the work they're putting in."

For now, it seems like Brazos has more business than he has time. He only set up to shine shoes one day at the NJAS because he left early to go to summer camp. Word of mouth spread quickly though, and he ended up doing several pairs at the family's stalls the morning before he left after people had tracked him down there.

He's also gotten a reputation for his shoe-shining skills in his hometown, and typically does some for locals needing clean boots for a special occasion. Prom, in particular, is when moms seek out Brazos to be

Brazos Worrell was the talk of the show at NJAS when he set up his shoe shine spot. He earned enough at that show to purchase a real shoe shine chair off of Craigslist.



sure their high school boys' boots are in order for the big night.

If you ask 12-year-old Brazos about future plans and what he's learned, he sounds more like a typical preteen boy than is implied with his successful business venture. After all, he's made as much as \$600 in one day.

His mom says he has an independent spirit, and aside from helping him buy his shoe-shine chair off Craigslist thanks to that \$300, they haven't had to do a lot to help him with his business. His parents help him order his supplies, load things up in the trailer and get him there, but Brazos prefers to do most things himself.

"He knows where to find customers, where to set up and finds a chair if he needs one. He decides what to price it at that day," Erin says. "He's done it all on his own. It's gotten better at every show, and I am proud that he has stuck with something."

Brazos admits he will probably

discontinue his shoe-shining career when his brother goes to college, and he no longer has to go to all the shows. But the skills he's learned will stick with him, no doubt.

"I think what drives him is the interaction with people," his mom explains. "He is very social and animated. This has made him even more independent and has taught him to learn to work for it. That's what we appreciate the most is that we can see the skill set developing with him to be in customer service or sales. It's helping him grow those skills."

She adds, "We are just amazed at how kind and generous Angus breeders and people, in general, have been to Brazos. They keep him motivated and reward him generously with tips. I think for the most part people are excited to see a kid working at something like shining boots to earn money rather than sitting around playing video games."

**AJ**