

# HEART AND SOUL

The Hurlbut family celebrates a story that is uniquely Angus.

by Megan Silveira, assistant editor

The hum of excitement is a bit quieter through a computer screen, but there's still a sense of anticipation in the air as Dean Hurlbut watches the 2023 National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest online.

Sitting at home, he tunes in as his great-nephew, Dustin, walked through the ranks of National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) members in Grand Island, Neb. Dustin and his wife, Jeana, served as two of the three judges for this year's contest.

As Dustin gave his closing remarks Saturday, July 8, to the top 15 competitors, he couldn't miss the opportunity to give a special shout-out.

"This one hits a little special to me," he announced, addressing the crowd gathered at the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS), "because it was started by my Great-uncle Dean. I know he's listening, so I'd like to say hi to him."

Dustin labels this year's contest as one of the toughest showmanship events he and Jeana have judged. It was a task they didn't take lightly, but one that will stand strong in their memory for years to come. Having a family member and mentor tied to the contest's origin only added to the emotions for Dustin.

"It was an honor to have the opportunity to judge the contest that means so much to Dean and our family," Dustin explains. "I know he was proud to have another

generation of Hurlbuts in the Angus ring taking part in the contest."

## Ties that bind

Great-uncle Dean and Grandpa Jim started an Angus herd in 1944 with their father, Lester. Now the fourth generation to raise black-headed cattle, Dustin claims Angus as the backbone of their operation.

*The Business Breed* even helped serve as an "in" for Dustin when he met Jeana's parents for the first time. When a family friend helped her dad, Chris, connect Dustin to Dean, the new boyfriend was happy to have help making a good first impression on his future father-in-law.

"I've heard many stories over the years about how stern he was as the activities director," Dustin jokes today. "You were not going to slip anything past him."

Jeana also has a strong background in the Angus industry. She's a fifth-generation breeder, with ties to one of the oldest Angus operations in the country, thanks to her grandfather, Bob Laffin.

She says she grew up very active in the NJAA, showing at the national level and even serving on the National Junior Angus Board of Directors as vice chairman.

After marrying in 2010, the pair returned to the original South Dakota farmland Dustin's family raised cattle on and have introduced



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their daughters, Bayler (9) and Mattie (4), to the world of Angus cattle. It's where Dustin grew up, and the same barn his grandpa and great-uncle built in 1944 is the same one his kids get to watch cows calve out in.

"Having the opportunity to come back home to the original Hurlbut farm has been a dream," Dustin says. "Being able to take the Hurlbut Angus herd and continue to grow and make it better each year is something I truly enjoy."

Help is never far away, either.

# NATIONAL JUNIOR ANGUS SHOW

“Dean is always checking in on us, keeping us up to date on the latest developments in the Angus breed and making sure we are doing things right,” Dustin adds.

With a past boasting a 43-year career at the American Angus Association, it’s no surprise Dean is as passionate as he is. Jeana describes Dean as loyal and dedicated, saying he is a man who loves time spent with the Angus family.

It was this love that Dustin believes drove Dean to originally start the National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest in 1967. The competition was designed to give NJAA members a chance to showcase their talents of presenting cattle in the show ring — a tradition that lives on to this day.

The dedication for agricultural youth didn’t stop with Dean, however.

For herself and her husband, Jeana says the chance to serve as showmanship judges at this year’s National Junior Angus Showmanship

Contest was the perfect way give back to the breed that built their families.

“We really enjoyed having the opportunity to judge,” she says, noting she and Dustin were a good team, thanks to similar opinions on what it takes for a showman to rise to the top of the class.

As a former competitor in the National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest, Jeana stresses the importance of standing smooth, calm and collected when at the end of a showstick.

“The hardest part of judging the contest was knowing that you had to send some very good showmen back to the barn,” Dustin says. “We know the hard work and dedication that go into making yourself a great showman and that you only have one shot at the NJAS.”

But the couple’s time in the ring wasn’t the only noteworthy moment of this year’s NJAS.

Bayler made her first outing at the national level. With a bred-and-owned bull and a steer, Jeana and Dustin had a busy week of balancing their hectic schedule. The parents helped get both animals fit and were able to watch the bull show, before taking a step back to prep

for the showmanship contest.

The Hurlbuts say they are thankful for friends and family for stepping forward to help get Bayler and the steer in the ring.

“It takes a village to get through this weeklong junior nationals, and I’d say our village is one of the best,” Dustin says. “We have a great tribe of family that supports us and are always willing to lend a hand.”

As Bayler continues to take the show ring by storm, Dustin and Jeana look forward to the day when Mattie can join her. Until then, there’ll be plenty of opportunities for the girls to learn more about what it takes to join the ranking of those who’ve earned a silver pitcher at the NJAS.

For the Hurlbuts, a true winner in this industry knows there’s more to the show ring than just a shiny ribbon. It’s the heart and soul that make a champion.

“The Angus family is special,” Jeana explains. “Being a part of this breed from the time [Dustin and I] were kids to now raising our girls in the breed is something we have looked forward to. The friendships we have made, the opportunities we know our girls will have, are some of the most rewarding.” 

