

LEADING WITH PASSION

Jonwyn Ayres awarded the Jim Baldrige Outstanding Leadership Award at the 2023 National Junior Angus Show.

by Katelyn Engel, Angus Communications intern

From her dedication to the Angus breed to her passion for inspiring and mentoring, Jonwyn Ayres is truly an honorable youth leader. She strives to make a difference in the breed and have a positive influence on those around her.

At the 2023 National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) in Grand Island, Neb., Ayres was recognized as the Jim Baldrige Outstanding Leadership Award recipient. Alongside the trophy, she received a \$5,000 scholarship in honor of Jim Baldrige, a lifetime member and supporter of the American Angus Association.

"I have been working really hard to have an influence on youth in agriculture, but I never really expected any recognition for it," Ayres says. "I was extremely honored to walk up and receive this award."

Angus: family tradition

Though the Oregon junior claims the West Coast as home, Ayres started her Angus journey on her family's ranch among the tall mountains and beautiful valleys of western Montana. From her very first cow in Big Sky Country to her current herd in Oregon, Ayres' passion for black-hided cattle has been unwavering.

"My papa was the start of our Angus herd," Ayres says. "He really emphasized that the American dream involves Angus cattle."

Within her herd, Ayres values



retaining females, and she puts specific emphasis on exhibiting bred-and-owned (B&O) females. Although her cattle weren't always ranked in the top of her classes, she says it has always been rewarding to see her show heifers turn into great cows.

"Retaining females within the Angus breed is something that is very important as producers, but also something that I really strived for throughout my junior career," Ayres says.

In the Angus breed, the Ayres family's legacy extends far beyond the show ring. Ayres' grandma is a past American Angus Auxiliary president, and her mother served as both Miss American Angus and on the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) board of directors.

Ayres is following in her family's footsteps as a leader in the breed.

The past year has been spent serving as president of the Oregon Junior Angus Association (OJAA). Ayres also was a Miss American Angus finalist and served as the Western States Angus Queen and Oregon Angus Queen. Most recently, she was elected to serve on the NJAA board of directors at the 2023 NJAS.

"I am excited to continue being a mentor to Angus juniors while taking on this new leadership role as a junior board member," Ayres says. "This is the space where I feel my purpose."

As a junior member, Ayres took the opportunity to participate in many contests at the NJAS and has attended multiple Leaders Engaged in Angus Development (LEAD) and Raising the Bar conferences. These events have helped her hone her leadership skills and allowed her to

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serve as a mentor and cheerleader.

Lindsey Morgan-Ricksger, OJAA advisor, says Ayres uses her experiences and expertise to help younger members in the OJAA and the NJAA find success.

“She encourages youth to get involved in contests outside of showing at the NJAS,” Morgan-Ricksger adds. “Jonwyn loves helping younger kids prepare and getting them excited about competing.”

That sense of high character and leadership is what the Outstanding Leadership Award has been about since it was instituted in the 1990s.

“Jonwyn is very deserving of this award,” Morgan-Ricksger says. “For the past year, she has been president of the Oregon Junior Angus Association, and she is very good at making sure not only she is present and involved, but also that everyone else is.”

In 2013 Bill and Betty Werner of Werner Angus, Cordova, Ill., donated \$50,000 to establish an endowment fund and provide a scholarship for the Outstanding Leadership Award recipient. The scholarship is in honor of their close friend, Jim Baldrige.

Jake Tiedeman, Jim Baldrige’s grandson, presented Ayres the award in Grand Island.

“Grandpa was a charismatic leader with an infectious personality, and was enthusiastic about the Angus breed,” he says. “Jonwyn Ayres’ diverse leadership carries on the spirit of both my grandfather and Bill Werner, and I am so proud of her and all the past winners.”

Chasing opportunity

Outside of the NJAA, Ayres has been extensively involved in FFA, growing as an advocate for the agricultural industry. She served as her chapter and district president, and was the Oregon State FFA secretary.

In her blue corduroy jacket, Ayres competed at the national level in the prepared public speaking contest. Her passion for the beef industry inspired her to create a speech centered around cattle and carbon sequestration. While she did not advance to the finals, the *Angus Journal* published a story highlighting her speech and involvement in the breed. Ayres says although unexpected, things worked out for the best.

“Some of the most impactful moments in my life were the moments when things didn’t seem to go my way,” Ayres says. “Although the goal at hand didn’t pan out, something bigger was in store.”

The magazine article led to Ayres being invited to give a TEDx speech.

“My mission of sharing the scientific perspective behind cattle and climate has cultivated 10,000 media engagements, eight keynote speeches, nine sponsors and three podcast appearances to this date,” the junior says.

She has big dreams of continuing to serve as a leader and advocate for ag. Ayres is currently studying agricultural economics at Black Hawk College in Galva, Ill.

Eventually, she hopes to attend law



Jonwyn Ayres (right) receives the Jim Baldrige Outstanding Leadership Award. Also pictured is Jake Tiedeman, presenting.

school and practice agriculture and natural resource law.

“I would love to have an influence in not only policymaking, but also environmental cases in agriculture, specifically animal agriculture,” Ayres says. “Aside from being in the field of agricultural law, having an Angus cattle herd at home is a dream.”

Ayres says she sees herself continuing to be a leader and mentor for youth within the NJAA and other youth-serving organizations that teach about agriculture.

“I want to continue to support the youth organizations that have shaped my life and that I believe are shaping a better world,” Ayres says. **AJ**

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