
A SECOND CHANCE

Troubled youth and a farm are reborn at the Indiana Soldiers' & Sailors' Childrens Home, thanks to an Angus cattle project.

STORY & PHOTOS BY JULIE GRIMES ALBERTSON



Indiana Childrens Home agriculture instructor Jeff Hamm, is always near with an encouraging smile and understanding hug for residents like Debbie.

This special youth issue of the Angus Journal is filled with examples of the Angus breed's best and brightest young people. Our kids are given lots of love and great opportunities.

In striking contrast are the young people on these pages. Instead of love and opportunities, many of these kids have known only hurt and disappointment.

The Childrens Home gives a few of these youngsters a taste of life on the farm. It's both a haven and an outdoor classroom where the primary lessons are responsibility, teamwork and, most of all, caring.

After spending just one afternoon with these kids, their teacher, and a group of generous Indiana Angus breeders, I was inspired by their vision, commitment and love for their animals. Their story is one I'd like to share with you.

— Julie Grimes Albertson

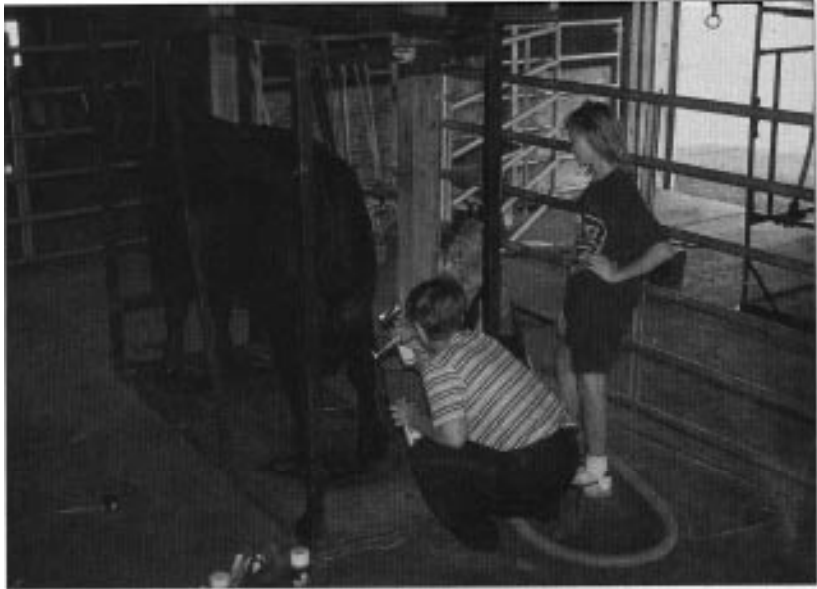
Imagine packing up seven kids in a van along with five calves in a bumper hitch trailer hooked up behind. Destination: your first cattle show.

You might think that the trip would be just the beginning of a stressful, unruly day. Instead, van driver Jeff Hamm receives many compliments on the behavior of both kids and calves.

On the surface, you could mistake these children for any in your farm community. Their background, however, is far from ordinary. Some have been neglected, some abused, and some have had difficulty fitting in wherever they have been. They are residents of the Indiana Sokliers' & Sailors' Childrens Home.

The state-run home, located near Knightsown, east of Indianapolis, was opened in 1865 to serve veterans' children in a rural setting. The farm included a dairy until it was deemed too expensive to maintain.

The unlikely force behind the new cattle program at the Childrens Home was Bob Molnar. When he worked as school administrator of the Indiana Soldiers' &



Jamie Brown contributes her talents both as a cattle fitter and aspiring elementary teacher. Brown and other Indiana Angus breeders conducted a fitting and showing workshop for the Childrens Home cattle project participants this past summer.

Sailors' Childrens Home, the view from his office window was of 417 acres of lush, rolling farmland. On his desk were studies citing the benefits of introducing troubled children to animal agriculture.

Despite being a city kid, the man had vision and a sense of history.

"Things are like a pendulum swinging back and forth," Molnar says. We sometimes take things away because we think they're no good anymore. Over time, they often become good again."

The students and staff involved in bringing back the farm take great pride in making it good again. The person who has spent time in the fence rows and on the wash rack facilitating this rebirth is Jeff Hamm, who is employed as farm foreman. Hamm's title should also read full-time instructor of 15 to 20 children whose agricultural experience is limited to non-existent.

Given all the time and effort put forth by both students and staff, it was Molnar's requirement that the farm be self-sustaining; therefore, not subjected to bureaucratic budgetcutting. Given this set-up the farm relies heavily on private donations not only of money, but of equipment and cattle.

"Our goal is to build our Angus herd to 20 females, so we can raise our own calves," says Hamm.

Reaching their goal is impossible without the help of other farmers. Hamm is impressed

At-risk — A child who is failing in school, home or community; usually a combination of these. "We see a lot of broken down families. Many kids don't have good, wholesome opportunities that lead them to make good, wholesome decisions. I'm convinced it's difficult for a child to make a good decision if he's never been exposed to them."

— Bob Molnar



Jeff Hamm shares feeding chores with a young man at the Childrens Home. Some of the kids are a little shy at first, Hamm says, but quickly catch on to farm life.

Caring for another living creature gives these children both responsibility and some of the warm fuzzies they so desperately need. These qualities will stand the children well in whatever they choose to do — in a family, community or an employment setting.

by the willingness of Angus breeders to become involved in the program, including American Angus Association regional manager, Jerry Cassady.

Walking into the cattle barn, I watch as several children brush, pet and water their steers and heifers. Two are even out on the wash rack in the 98 degree heat. I learn a water fight had ensued earlier, but it's all business after my arrival.

The kids are preparing for a fitting demonstration later that evening. Judy and Jamie Brown, Angus breeders from nearby Greenfield, Ind., have spent several hours teaching each child the finer points of spray adhesive and clippers.

The Browns and the Snepps, of Edinburgh,

are among several Indiana Angus breeders who have stepped up with donations of time, talents and even cattle. Joey Kubesch of P&J Angus, Peru, donated two heifers to the farm and sent two more down for the kids to show during the summer season.

"I just felt like these heifers needed to be shown and these kids needed Angus heifers. The hardest part will be when we have to bring the two home," says Kubesch.

One of Kubesch's heifers was shown by Debbie, a dark-eyed youngster who recently suffered the loss of her mother. Debbie's heifer was reserve champion Angus at a preview show in Converse. Another highlight for Debbie at the fair was when she and Hamm were walking through the exhibits. As she reached for a delicate item behind one of the cases, the lady behind the counter said, Why don't you let your father do that for you?

"Debbie looked at me and just grinned," says Hamm.

Hamm is a strong father figure for many of the children in the farm program. Before taking the foreman's position, he spent almost 10 years in maintenance at the Childrens Home. In that position, he had a lot of interaction with youth; for example, taking groups on day trips.

And yet, outings to a water park seemed like a breeze compared to travelling to five junior shows with kids and calves in tow.

It's not surprising to this writer that Angus breeders have become involved with this farm. It's obvious these children enjoy visitors, especially people with an interest in their cattle. They also have a refreshing willingness to learn.

The patience and devotion exhibited by these young people and their teacher, Jeff Hamm, leaves a lasting and deep impression.

AJ

CHILDRENS HOME DONATIONS

Livestock trailer & 26 acres of fencing supplies —
American Legion, Knightstown Home Committee

Angus heifers — *The Kubesch Family, Peru*

Fitting supplies, clipping —
The Snepp family, Edinburgh

Time & talents — *The Brown Family, Greenfield*

Indiana junior memberships —
Jim Singleton, Newburgh

Cowboy boots — *Cow Pokes Western Store, Anderson.*

CHILDRENS HOME NEED LIST

Angus heifers

Show supplies and equipment (new or used)

Time and talents of interested people

All donations to the Indiana Soldiers' & Sailors' Childrens Home can be acknowledged with an official letter as a tax exempt donation.

For more information, contact:

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