



Angus Under the Big Sky

Billings, Mont., welcomed 155 junior Angus members for the Leaders Engaged in Angus Development (LEAD) Conference in August. Speakers and tours alike gave the 14- to 21-year-old Angus members more to think about than just their show ring strategy.

by Lindsay King, assistant editor

The National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) is focused on youth development in all facets of the Angus industry. First introduced in 1993, LEAD is hosted in a different state each year not only to showcase various areas of Angus prosperity but to encourage juniors from other regions to attend.

Part of the Angus Foundation's mission encompasses youth and education, and as a full supporter of LEAD the Foundation annually sponsors the event. The Thomas and Catherine Chambers Estate Angus Youth Support Endowment Fund is also a contributing sponsor of LEAD.



LEAD is hosted in a new state each year. It came to Billings, Mont., in 2018 for Angus Under the Big Sky.

Billings, Mont., native Jordyn Wagner, National Junior Angus Board (NJAB) leadership director, coordinated the event hosted Aug. 2-5.

"Throughout this past year, I have worked to choose host locations, organize tours and create a schedule the juniors would love," Wagner says. "I love kids and coordinating something like this is my

opportunity to give back to this Association that has given me so much, and to serve these juniors."

Wagner, along with the rest of the retiring NJAB members, gave their farewell addresses at the conference. The six new NJAB members witnessed the emotional addresses as they worked their first of many events in their two-year terms.

Thursday

The first day brought 155 junior members into Billings for an evening of icebreakers and hearing from speakers from all across the country. Sydni Lienemann, 2018 Angus Ambassador, kicked the evening off by encouraging those between the ages of 18 and 20 to apply for her position.

Applications closed Sept. 1, and those who applied will vie for the title of 2019 Angus Ambassador in Columbus, Ohio, at the Angus Convention this coming November.

The evening took a sharp turn into Russia when Darrell Stevenson, Hobson, Mont., discussed his adventures overseas starting an Angus operation from scratch, one fence post at a time.

“There are vacant grasslands in Russia that look exactly like our pastures in Montana,” Stevenson explains. “Russia is 10 time zones away from Montana and it is 10 time zones wide. The entire country is twice the size of the U.S. in landmass. But if you drive across it, you won’t see a single fence.”

Stevenson chronicled his journey of taking thousands of Angus heifers over to Russia in a five-year period.

The trials and tribulations of the climate, language barriers and infrastructure, only pushed him even harder to get 13,000 acres ready for cattle in just six months.

Conrad Helman, a LEAD attendee from Missouri, says, “[Learning about the cattle operation in Russia] opened a lot of doors for me — things that I had not thought about very much. I saw a lot of opportunity in it. Just when I thought I could not go any deeper into the breed, I saw that I was not even touching the surface.”

The frigid plains of Russia gave way to the Southern charm and humor of Jane Herlong. Crowned Miss South Carolina in 1979, Herlong encouraged the audience to use the tomatoes people may throw at their field of dreams to make salsa, spaghetti, anything.

“Jane taught me not to let negative energy affect you,” says California native Elizabeth Vietheer. “She talked about how a lady yelling at her husband while they were on vacation and she [Jane] took that away with her and it kept her up that night while her husband just blew it off. That hit me because I find myself holding grudges and it is something I would really like to change.”

Friday

An early-morning departure took the juniors just outside of Billings to Genex Bull Stud, originally named Hawkeye West. The tour showcased bulls on hand, collection procedures, processing of semen and their distribution and storage system.

Attendees saw a bull collected using a teaser steer. Genex is currently slated to collect 1.3 million units of semen this year, with 90% being Angus semen.

“I have never actually seen a bull collected, so that was really neat,” says Zoe Blankenship, a Missouri junior. “I was surprised by how many semen straws they can get in a day. I knew it was a lot but I did not realize how often they collected.”

A quick drive down the road for a look at Midland Bull Test had students peppering Steve Williams with high-level production questions. Midland’s slogan, “We do one thing. Bulls,” made it clear why they are so good at measuring genetic performance potential of bulls.

“They are using cutting-edge technology to gather data that you cannot just sit down and observe,” says Cale Hinrichsen, a junior from Kansas. “They use the technology



Angus juniors visited Billings Livestock Commission, one of two sale yards in Billings, Montana, on Saturday morning.

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to gather the data and analyze these bulls to figure out how they can better feed and produce them. They are able to get a better end product than what they started with by using this technology. My favorite part of the stop was learning how to interpret the data. You can look at the numbers all day, but until you know what they mean and how they apply you cannot use them right.”

A float trip down the Yellowstone River allowed conference attendees to let loose and truly experience Montana. Fly-fishing guides gave lessons while juniors took turns white-water rafting. The rain did not dampen the fun, with some kids jumping in the raft with their boots still on.

Supper at the Yellowstone Boys and Girls' Ranch (YGBR) in Billings saw more retiring addresses and multiple intense dodgeball games.

The working cattle ranch is a leading nonprofit organization in the field of mental healthcare for children and their families. Impacting more than 10,000 kids since 1957, YGBR works with close to 600 kids in the state.

A major sponsor of Yellowstone Ranch are Tim and Kris Todd of Green Mountain Ranch. Moving to Montana in 1981, Green Mountain leases land to graze cattle.

“We run 1,300 cows and currently host two sales,” Tim explains. “We donate the proceeds from the very last heifer we sell in our sale to this ranch. She usually sells two or three times over to raise money for Yellowstone.”



Top: During the breakout sessions, Angus juniors got to put their new knowledge about artificial insemination (AI) to practice.

Bottom: The NJAB directors kicked off night one with a skit, followed by impromptu skits performed by the 155 Angus juniors.

Saturday

Breakout sessions in the Billings Doubletree kicked off Saturday's activities. A flight delay allowed Rick Cozzitorto to take the reins of a session, dealing out career advice and outlining how life after college often takes unexpected turns.

Gretchen Mafi, professor at Oklahoma State University (OSU) Department of Animal and Food Sciences, discussed the many opportunities within the food science industry. Jay Nansel from Select Sires talked about the finer details of artificial insemination (AI) and then allowed juniors to give it a go on the repro tracts he brought.

“I learned that instead of probing with your AI gun, you are actually manipulating the cervix around it,” says Kristina Scheurman, a junior from Ohio, about learning how to properly AI. “My favorite part was the hands-on portion where we got to actually see what we were doing with the probe inside of the cow cervix.”

A quick trip to the oldest livestock sale yard in the state, Billings Livestock Commission, revealed how the town sustains two sale barns. Between hosting the largest horse auctions in the nation and running more than 500,000 head of cattle through sales annually, labor is the limiting factor for the sale barn.

“Labor is the biggest deterrent for growth,” says Joe Goggins of Billings Livestock Commission. “We have back-to-back sales

between here and the Public Auction Yards. We share crews. We combined the two sales barns to make the two competitive markets of Billings.”

Awaiting conference attendees at ORigen Genetics was both lunch and two flatbed trailers for a tour of multiple barns holding various breeds of bulls. Started by a handful of producers, ORigen is a semen company. It is the first of its kind to be started exclusively by producers and not own any of the bulls. The last thing this service-only company wants to do is compete with their producers, which is why they don't own any bulls.

“I liked getting to see how

operations are ran in different parts of the country and how other companies do the same business within the same field of sale,” says Iowa junior Baxter Knapp, about the ORlgen tour. “I also enjoyed getting to go around and see how all the bulls were taken care of and what they had to offer as far as quality and performance.”

The better part of Saturday afternoon was spent at ORlgen learning how the largest independent beef bull stud provides 15% of all the semen produced in the U.S. annually. The number one breed for semen sales, Angus, makes up 80% of the bulls at the facility.

The final evening in Billings was spent at the historic Vermilion Ranch where supper, dancing and games lasted well into the night. Hosted by the Goggins family, the

group had free-run of the entire ranch, exploring the barns, viewing the herd of black Angus cattle and enjoying a hay-rack tour through the pastures just along the river. For the entire Goggins family, both Angus and Vermilion Ranch are home. Bob Cook, head of sales and advertising, talked about the ranch’s rich history, effectively inspiring the crowd to reach beyond the stars.

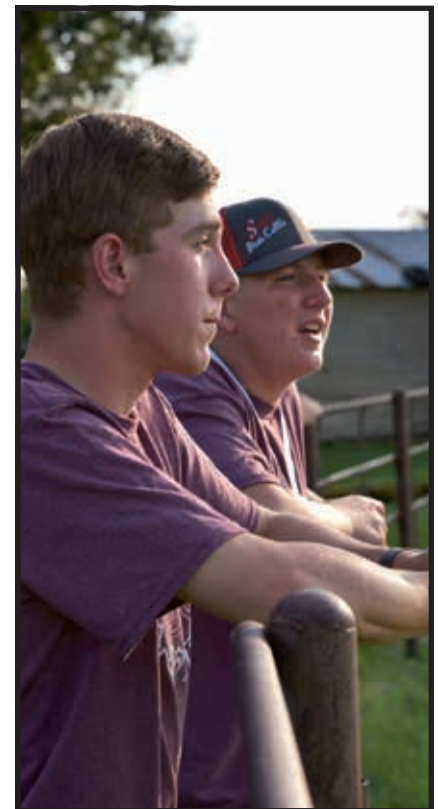
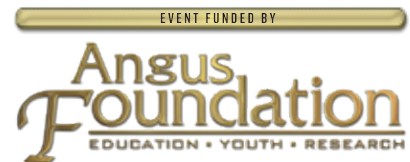
“Hard work can get you wherever you want to go as long as you have the work ethic and it is always worth it in the end to reach your goal,” says Ella Jordan, a junior from Missouri, about Cook’s inspirational speech on the history of Vermilion Ranch.

Sunday

After four busy days of tours, networking and full engagement, the attendees’ final activities on Sunday

morning were all about character.

“The 2018 edition of the LEAD Conference was a tremendous success,” says Corbin Cowles, NJAB foundation director. “Reflecting on my time being involved with LEAD, this event has always been a highlight of my year. Whether it’s being exposed to new agricultural practices, making new connections or just having a blast with so many people passionate about our breed, this conference has been a vital part of my NJAA experience. I will cherish these memories for a lifetime.” **AJ**



Top and bottom left: At ORlgen Genetics, Angus juniors toured the entire facility. They visited each barn full of the nations top bulls. Bottom right: While at Vermilion Ranch, roping, volleyball and corn hole were just a few of the activities juniors participated in.

Juniors had the run of Vermilion Ranch Saturday evening. A hay rack took them out to see the back pastures of the ranch.