

# Q&A

## President's Perspective

### SCHIEFELBEIN

*Retiring President Don Schiefelbein shares insight on his tenure on the American Angus Association Board of Directors.*

*by Julie Mais, editor*

#### **What motivated you to run for the Board?**

Actually, I had no thoughts, no desires, not even a whole lot of interest in running for the Board until a guy named Jim Sitz gave me a call. He said, "You need to run." And next thing you know, I had my name in the hat.

#### **Why did he say you needed to run for the Board?**

Well, I think he appreciated the perspective that I would bring, coming from a family operation that makes 100% of their living from Angus cattle. At that time, he thought that perspective was badly needed on the Board to keep focus on those that make their living off of cattle.

#### **You've held other industry board positions as well. What made you want to serve the industry in this role?**

That's a philosophy my dad has put into all of us — if you expect to make your living in this world or the agriculture industry, you'd better do your time and better put some effort towards making sure the industry's going to be around when your children are involved. So, it was just almost



a requirement. If you look at all my family members, everybody's in some sort of a service area, trying to make sure that we're doing our part to make sure there's a future in whatever organization or industry we're involved in.

### **What goals did you have going into your first term on the Board?**

I never go into any of these positions that I get elected for with specific goals or personal objectives for me to accomplish.

I see it as a service role, where my job is just to basically navigate the interests of the membership I'm serving. It's really not my interests I need to accomplish. It's whatever happens to be needed at the time.

### **What have been your goals for this year serving as president?**

To me, success is if I left the organization in a better position than when I started. And that can be a myriad of things. Nobody can really anticipate what the future's going to deal you. I think I can pleasantly and confidently say, where the organization is today vs. when I began my term especially, we are in an enviable position with staff, with programs, financially and all of those things cumulatively. That is what really defines whether or not you've done the job you're supposed to when you were elected, not the single year you were elected president.

### **What have been some of the Board's priorities recently?**

Among the Board's priorities is getting our arms around the fact that the membership is very diverse.

As we begin to roll out programs that a portion of the membership may not really appear to like



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that much, and some may disagree with, the goal ought to be that everybody can have a say in having priorities for the individual members, the way they think their priorities ought to be.

There's a bunch of people who just like doing some of the show aspects, and that's fine. There's a performance bunch who really enjoys using expected progeny differences (EPDs) and doing performance, etc.

I think the Board really learned to discover here this last year that some just are raising cattle because they love Angus cattle, and they don't want to necessarily play at a high level of intensity that some of us on the Board have learned to play at.

Just understanding that this is a very diverse membership with different needs for different groups, and making sure our programs supply the needs for all. But, you don't let a group with one set of interests redefine the interests for another group, especially when you get into the EPDs and performance.

There were so many times that, as we went through the last few years, people would say, "But a lot of the members don't want that." And, that's all right. They don't have to necessarily use those particular tools. We aren't mandating the use of tools, but we're ensuring that the tools are available for those that need them. I think that's a big mind change that had to occur.

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### **Were there any specific decisions that you felt needed to be made in the last year or two?**

What I think Mark McCully has said, and I subscribe to it as well, is that the most important decision we made is we had to ensure that we had the license to be progressive with the membership, that they trusted us to do the right decisions on behalf of the whole membership. Part of that regaining a license or confidence is being a little more transparent in what we were doing.

So, some of the things we did with regard to making sure the membership was aware of decisions that were going to be made at upcoming meetings, let them know fairly soon after we made those decisions what they were and why we made them, were, to me, very crucial.

And, to me, what that has done is set the stage as we've begun the process of going through an inventory-based performance system. Now, again, we have that license to be a little more progressive, to do things that just a few years ago the membership would have looked at the Board with skepticism and said, "Are they doing it for their own selfish purposes, or are there good reasons to do what they're doing?"

### **What do the Association and the Board need to do to help the members be successful?**

Well, that goes back to understanding how diverse the membership is. Each member's going to define success by the Board and the programs we offer very differently. A wise board will understand that is the key to the successes, to make sure that those that are most involved in a certain aspect of the Angus business have the authority or the means to write the rules for their own area.

### **What would you consider some of the greatest accomplishments that happened during your tenure on the Board?**

We've done so much as far as moving the dial in terms of genetic predictions, from my perspective, that it is becoming increasingly difficult for any breed to compete with Angus with the genetic tools that we have. If you look at how we've evolved

ourselves over the last couple of years, with single-step ... That technology has immensely, immensely improved over what we were doing previous to that.

Then, when you combine it with using that technology, with what we did to refine and further develop the index theory we used to predict \$B (beef value) and \$C (combined value) and \$M (maternal weaned calf value).

We've gotten the best tools available in the industry to allow our membership to succeed in making Angus cattle better.

Neither one of those changes was wholly endorsed by the membership initially. I mean they were looked at with skepticism; but, I think this is where leadership is so important. That's what I was trying to get across when I said, "If you look at it politically, the easiest thing to do is to do nothing."

The toughest thing politically to do is to change and move things dramatically in a new direction. I think during the tenure when I've been on the Board, if you look back at it, it will show the most aggressive stance towards moving the dial towards getting better technologies and better predictions genetically for Angus cattle.

### **What are some industry challenges the Board faced?**

There's obviously lots of things when you look at what occurred with COVID-19 and what happened to prices of beef cattle. Those are huge challenges the industry came through in the last year and a half. Whether it's the Tyson fire, followed up by the COVID-19 pandemic here of recent, it took a lot of coordinated effort between Angus and our affiliate *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) to try and keep the demand for beef strong during some very difficult, difficult times.

### **What challenges will incoming Board members face in the upcoming year?**

Well, the biggest challenge they're going to face is ... an incredibly aggressive turnover — five new Board members in three consecutive years.

The ability to develop or forge those relationships on a Board, while continuing to aggressively move the

breed in a path forward, will be increasingly challenging as I see this Board having to really deal with a whole influx of new thought and new Board members and new ways of thinking, while still trying to keep some common ground on where we need to go. I think it's going to be challenging, not just for the Board, but it'll be increasingly challenging for the staff, who've got comfortable with seeing the same 15 people over the last three years.



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### **What do you see as the Angus breed's opportunities?**

From a genetic evaluation standpoint, we have such a leading front path. I think now the question to decide is, do we want to shift — lead Angus, or do we want to lead the whole beef industry? I think we're in an enviable position should we decide to take a stronger, larger leadership role in doing genetic evaluation for other breeds. To me, the opportunity to take the entire beef industry by control is basically right in front of us, if we want to take that aggressive stance.

### **What lessons learned, either growing up in the Angus breed or professionally, helped you prepare for your time on the Board?**

Growing up at a family business did more to prepare me for all my leadership roles than anything else. When you're in a family business, especially like ours, where I'm dealing with seven other brothers, if you don't understand consensus-building, you will not succeed. It'll eat you alive. If you decide you're the smartest guy in the room, and just because you say it is so, you will fail.

Just going through that whole family business and making sure you're listening to everybody's perspective, and then weaving in everybody's thoughts to eventually come away with a consensus

thought on where the future is, to me, that's key.

The other key role, especially growing up in a family operation, is if you begin to let those that have expertise in certain areas, as I have brothers who are certainly much better at the crop aspects than I am ... If you allow them to be king in their domain, they will more readily allow you to exert influence over areas that you have some knowledge on.

That's how leadership eventually evolves. That whole family operation dovetails really well into that whole working in a board and working in a leadership position.

### **What part of raising Angus cattle do you most enjoy?**

Oh, the genetic improvement. Seeing how far you can move these genetics and how quickly you can make progress going in a direction when you have the tools that we have available today. It's just like nothing anybody's ever experienced before, especially if you use tools like *in vitro* fertilization, sexing and genomic testing. You put all those key ingredients together, and if somebody decides they're not going to use one of those extremely important tools, the odds of them competing genetically and the progress you're able to make are not even close. It's just the ability to make genetic progress quickly and effectively.

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### **How do you want to be remembered as president of the Association?**

I would like to be remembered as a guy who worked with a great team of Board members, who accomplished a lot during their tenure. What I would like more than anything is not to be remembered as Don Schiefelbein the person, but the tenure at which Don Schiefelbein served was among the most progressive, innovative periods for Angus breeders.

### **Is there anything else you would like to share with the membership?**

Probably just an encouragement for those that are contemplating serving on the American Angus Association Board of Directors. My advice to the Angus membership is we need all kinds of Angus members. Don't be thinking that just because I'm cut out of this cloth that I'm best-suited to serve. What made Angus during my tenure so successful is a variety of breeders from all different backgrounds, who have different perspectives. And, to me, those varying perspectives result in making good decisions long-term.

And, we're going to need a lot of new Board members.

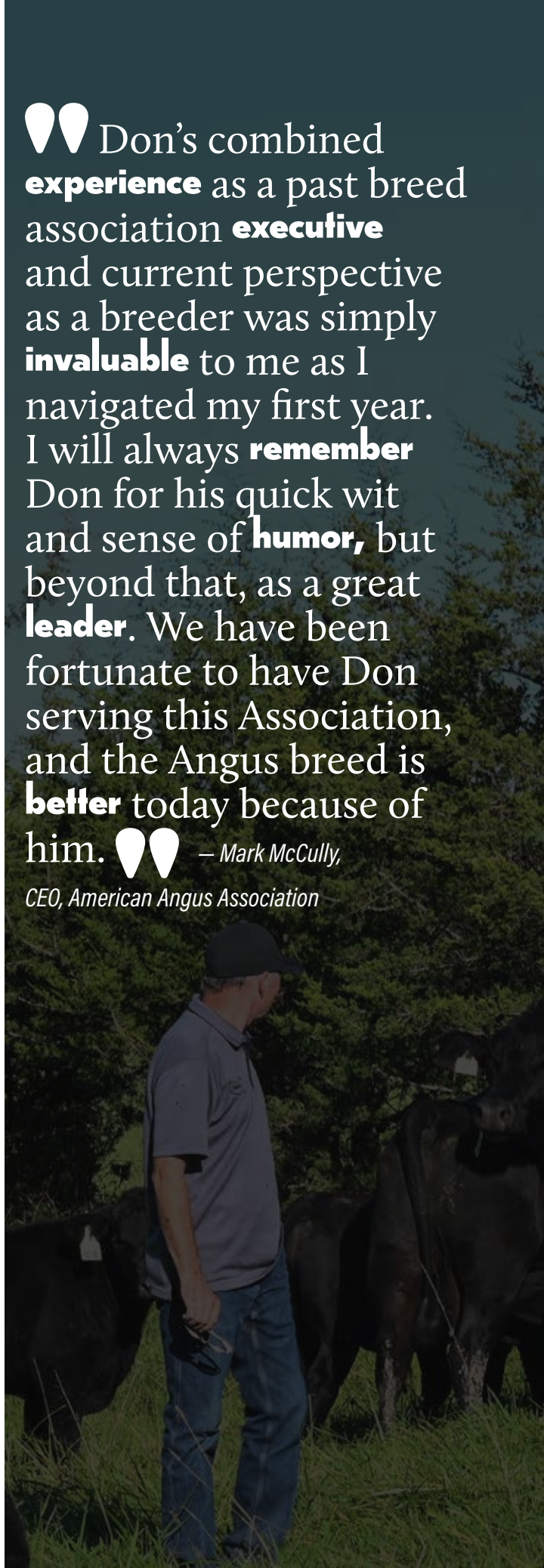
The last thing I would say, and I think it's a very important one, is the Board comes and goes, and it comes and goes in a pretty frequent turnover. So, if you really look at the longevity of what you really want to do, it's have you created an organization that allows staff to be fruitful and do things in a progressive, aggressive manner, and allow the most talented staff in the industry to want to work for the organization that you serve?

If I were to stand back and look at where Angus is today, I guess I can go off the Board very comfortably saying I believe that staff and its makeup, from the CEO position to staff in every department ... I believe they believe that the Board of Directors now wants them to be successful and want them to use their talents to make Angus cattle better.

Quite frankly, that's more important than Board member turnover because staff can have 15, 20, 30 years, 40 years of contribution. **AJ**

Don's combined **experience** as a past breed association **executive** and current perspective as a breeder was simply **invaluable** to me as I navigated my first year. I will always **remember** Don for his quick wit and sense of **humor**, but beyond that, as a great **leader**. We have been fortunate to have Don serving this Association, and the Angus breed is **better** today because of him. **AJ** — Mark McCully,

*CEO, American Angus Association*



# Peer Review

*Don Schiefelbein's fellow Board members share their thoughts on his role as a leader of the American Angus Association.*

Don's most impressive quality is his continuous desire for improvement coupled with the understanding of when to change a process and when to leave the existing one in place. In one of our early Board meetings, Don told the story of how his father explained to him and his brothers that the only way for them to continue ranching would be to NOT do things as his generation had done, but rather to continually improve. The American Angus Association is better because of Don's leadership. — *James Coffey*

Working with his large family has provided many opportunities for negotiation, and he excels at keeping the point of the discussion at the forefront. Don is decisive, yet fair, and is a great listener. He incorporates humor into his role, which can lighten the boardroom and yield more productivity. He has a true north moral compass and a strong desire to do the right thing for the good of the breed and industry. — *Jerry Connealy*

Don is one of the most dynamic leaders within the beef industry today. His leadership skills have proven valuable to the American Angus Association, the National Cattlemen's Beef Association and the Schiefelbein Farms family operation. He has a depth of knowledge of nearly all aspects of the beef industry that gives him a unique perspective on any topic being debated by the Board. He demands critical thinking from the Board in every discussion, and expects it to make appropriate decisions for the future of the Angus breed. Don has helped the Board navigate through some turbulent issues during his tenure that has led to greater stability for the Association. — *John Grimes*

Don's intellect and progressive viewpoints are the earmark of his presidency. Also, as a Board member, Don has helped me by seeking clarification on complex or somewhat confusing issues. Don's very timely questions would always be prefaced by "just to be clear" or "to make sure I understand." — *Richard Dyar*

Don is a highly intelligent individual who is very open and direct with his opinion. He attacks problems or issues head-on; he doesn't tippy-toe around anything. You always know where he stands. He encourages Board members to participate in meetings, and he doesn't hesitate to make sure everyone is involved in discussions. Don was a driving force in the creation of \$C, \$M and the adjustments made to \$B. — *Chuck Grove*

Don is very thorough and evaluates all topics with great care and responsibility. He makes sure all individuals involved in any discussion and decision have had an opportunity to express their views and ask questions. — *Barry Pollard*

Don Schiefelbein is a great leader who considers each and every one's input before the final project or plan is enacted. He genuinely likes Angus cattle and understands their contribution to the beef industry. When he provides his opinion, you know it's in the best interest of the future of *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®), consumers, Angus breeders and the entire beef industry. — *Dave Nichols*

Don is a good leader who stimulates the rest of the Board to think. Sometimes you will wonder where his thoughts are coming from or where they are going, but you know that he is leading the Board to come to conclusions that will move us forward. Don has helped me with my Board leadership responsibilities by reminding me that leadership is about getting results that will last well into the future. If you continue to lead others, they will respond with their thoughts and ideas that will add to the success of new projects and directions. I will remember Don's contribution as president as sometimes zany, sometimes genius, but always trying to get the best out of each Board member. — *James Henderson*

During an unprecedented time and a year not many will forget, Donnie led the Board through some very tough decisions while always being mindful of the members and staff of American Angus Association. — *Mike McCravy*

Don has a wealth of industry and Association experiences that he has been able to draw from to help lead the American Angus Association in a constantly improving direction during his tenure on the Board. He has an uncanny ability to rapidly analyze information, draw conclusions and help lead toward the best course of action. His ability to not only analyze information, but also people and situations, has been invaluable in the boardroom.

I will remember Don's unique personality that almost seems to mask an understated brilliance and unmatched depth of beef industry knowledge that we have been fortunate to have working for the betterment of the American Angus Association. — *Alan Miller*