

Dual Businesses

Whether talking cattle or the language of another profession, the same rules apply, say these cattlemen who venture into other businesses.

BY SHERYL SMITH-RODGERS



MATT CALDWELL PHOTO

“Your work must be something you enjoy doing,” says Oklahoma neurosurgeon Barry Pollard (left), who also owns two John Deere dealerships and an Angus herd. “If you don’t enjoy it, then you’ll likely not be as involved as necessary to make it successful.”

“If you need cows or cappuccino, semen or seasonings, you have the right number,” proclaims the lilting voice of Becky Tiedeman on the Baldrige Co.’s answering machine.

The brief message doesn’t mention granola. Yes, the family-owned, ranch-based business near North Platte, Neb., sells that, too. With or without raisins.

Back when Tiedeman’s father first started the company, it largely marketed purebred cattle and Angus seedstock. Then Jim Baldrige, an avid cook who loved to prepare beef for guests, branched out to catering.

To make his meats more flavorful, he developed a special blend of herbs and spices. The seasoning was an instant hit among family and friends. Judges at the 1990 All-American Angus Beef Cook-Off loved it, too, and declared a sirloin strip entry prepared by Baldrige and his grandson, Jake Tiedeman, the top winner.

One thing led to another, and soon jars of Jim Baldrige’s Secret Seasoning appeared on grocery store shelves.

Sadly, Baldrige succumbed to cancer in

1994, but his products — top-quality Angus cattle and an award-winning seasoning — still sell well five years later, largely thanks to Tiedeman, her husband, Bob, and son, Jake. They run Baldrige-Tiedeman Angus Cattle, the Baldrige Food Co., and the Baldrige Co., a sale-management business.

Tiedeman also co-owns a drive-up coffee shop company, called Calf-A-Coffee, with two other women. She’s often amazed how the four different products meld so nicely in their marketing ventures.

“It surprised me a great deal how many people in the cattle business purchase seasonings and granola from us,” she says. “There’s a huge number of ranchers and ag people who buy coffee from us because of the name.”

In day-to-day business, Tiedeman, 40, faithfully practices her father’s philosophies.

“We ship with an invoice,” she says. “We trust people until we have a reason not to. My father instilled in us that you need to exceed a customer’s expectations whenever possible. We always tried to do that in the cattle business, and now we’ve carried that over to the coffee and food business. People are shocked but pleasantly surprised, too.”

“When you have a guarantee and someone has a problem, you don’t give

them any guff,” she adds. “If a bull gets injured, they notify us as quickly as possible, and then we work things out to their satisfaction. That’s our guarantee. We treat people the way we want to be treated.”

Becky Tiedeman, like a number of Angus producers, earns a living from both cattle and other businesses outside the industry. As she shares, she and her family have learned that the different ventures — cows, coffee, seasonings and cereal — often intertwine.

We at the *Angus Journal* wondered what other breeders involved in multiple businesses have learned from one profession and applied to the other. So we talked to several across the country. Over and over again they echoed similar philosophies and lessons learned. Their bottom line: Whether you’re in the cattle business or selling seasonings, the same business principles apply:

- Always offer a quality product and guarantee it;
- Provide top service;
- Treat people right; and
- Work hard.

■ Work ethic carries over

Terry Van Hilsen, 47, knows the meaning of hard work. He’s owned Aztec Landscape Maintenance in Phoenix, Ariz., since 1977. He started his Angus business, Aztec Angus Farm, in 1981.

“I needed to invest in something else, and I’d been around Angus all my life,” he says. “I used to raise Angus in Illinois. We run about 60 head of registered Angus in northern Arizona and near North Platte, Neb.”

Van Hilsen sees several similarities between the two businesses.

“The landscape business is very much promotion and sales,” he explains. “I definitely think that coincides with the Angus business. You have to promote and present them well. And if you don’t manage your business well, you won’t be successful.”

On the ranch or on a landscaping job, Van Hilsen isn’t afraid to get his hands dirty.

“Work was always a part of my life,” he says. “I get out with my men and work, and they respect me for that. The work ethic I

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■ **Worthy of devotion**

Like Van Hilsen, Barry Pollard, 47, of Hennessey, Okla., grew up on a farm. A neurosurgeon by profession, he also owns two John Deere dealerships and a large Angus operation on his farms in north-central Oklahoma.

“My involvement in the Angus industry came from my desire to change my farming operation from a stocker and feeder cattle operation to a purebred operation,” Pollard explains, “and to utilize some of the knowledge I’ve obtained in my medical training to help direct a high-grade purebred program with emphasis on genetics and embryo transplant.”

“My father was a vocational agriculture teacher, so I’ve always been in the farming and ranching business,” he continues. “When I went to Oklahoma State University, I thought I’d go to veterinarian school and be a vet. But then I became more interested in medical school.”

His decision to skip vet school was clinched one day when he was home from college and helped a local veterinarian treat an irate cow on his family’s farm. As the mad animal charged away, leaving behind a badly bruised doctor, Pollard asked himself, “Why do I want to go to school for so long and do something like THIS?”

So Pollard, encouraged by roommates who were seeking careers as physicians, enrolled in medical school. Today, as a skilled surgeon at St. Mary’s Hospital in Enid, he performs an average of eight surgeries a week on patients with severe spinal injuries, ruptured discs in the neck or back, head trauma and brain tumors. After he finishes his work at the hospital, he always heads for the farm.

“I’m going to go build a fence in a little

bit,” he says. After a moment’s hesitation, he laughs, then adds, “I got into my pickup the other day. There on the seat were a Pollard Farms hat, a John Deere hat, and a surgery cap. I figured I must be ready for anything.”

Pollard enjoys wearing all three hats because he loves each endeavor they represent.

“Your work must be something you enjoy doing,” he shares. “It must be something you want to spend your time and energy on, something worthy of devoting your commitment to daily. If you don’t enjoy it, then you’ll likely not be as involved as necessary to make it successful.”

“You must also have a good product or service to offer,” he says. “In my neurosurgery practice, I must provide good service and maintain a level of care to keep the reputation necessary to be successful. The same holds true in the John Deere machinery business. It is much more fun to be in the Angus business with the quality of our product than in one of the other breeds.”

In all his businesses Pollard also seeks to hire only the best. “People make the business successful,” he says. “Competent and courteous people with a good work ethic and diligence to the job are vital. These people must be not only devoted to you and your product, but equally, or even more, to your customers. You must have people who will ‘work for the brand.’”

He concludes, “You must have a passion for the business to maintain the right attitude and drive to carry you through the rough times.”

■ **Do what’s right**

Bob Smith’s business ethics have carried him through thick and thin. Smith, 50, is a partner and principal of Republic Industries, a major national manufacturer of kitchen cabinetry in Marshall, Texas. The 11-year-old company, which employs 500 people, constructs 12 truckloads of cabinets a day. BSJ Farms, Smith’s other business, runs 70 head of registered Angus seedstock.

His never-fail business principle: Do what’s right, no matter what.

“Regardless of the circumstances or who you’re dealing with — whether it’s in the kitchen cabinetry business or cattle business, whether you’re dealing with a buyer, vendor, the government, friend or foe — if you will do what’s right in every circumstance, everything else will take care of itself, including the bottom line,” he advises.

“Making money was not *the* goal when we started the cabinetry business,” he continues. “Doing things right was. Anyone in business knows you don’t make money on every contract, or in the cattle business on every animal or calf crop because things, for different reasons, just don’t always work out. But when you find yourself in the position where a contract or a transaction is not working out, the right thing to do is complete that to which you have agreed and do it right.

“If I do it right, use common sense, and work hard — regardless of the markets or the droughts or too much rain — I know everything will be OK. And if you’re gonna do it, do it right.”

■ **Back up your product**

Bill Clark, 78, owns four used-auto dealerships called Clark Motors in Houston, Texas. He opened his first dealership in 1945. Seven years later he started in the Angus business. Today Clark Angus Ranch runs approximately 1,400 head of registered Angus near Crockett and Huntsville, Texas.

“We run the Angus operation the same as we do our automobile business,” Clark says. “If there’s any problem, we replace the animal immediately. By making those adjustments, it’s created some sizable quality sales. If we’d hesitated for a moment, the business wouldn’t have developed as it has.”

“Whether you sell a registered Angus or an automobile, you must offer a quality product at a fair price,” he stresses. “Then follow up the sale with a phone call to see how the cattle are doing, and make herd visits to be helpful in any way. It’s the same in the automobile business. By all means, if there’s a problem or a complaint in either operation, replace the animal or the automobile. The sooner the adjustments are made, the better. The customer is always right.”

C.L. Cook concurs with Clark. Cook, 65, has owned Pyramid Masonry in Decatur, Ga., since 1961. His Angus operation, called Bricton Farm, near Social Circle, runs approximately 200 head of mother cows.

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Over the years he, too, has learned that it's important to apply the same business principles to both ventures.

"You treat people like you want to be treated," he says. "You treat them fairly and show them that you appreciate them. You guarantee your product and support the customers if they need help."

■ **It's a business**

In Texas, Warren Wheelock, 53, is president and majority shareholder of American Navigation, a specialized ocean-transportation company headquartered in Houston. The shipping company transports unusually large and heavy equipment for power plants, petrochemical plants and capital projects all over the world.

Three years ago he started an Angus herd on the Wheelock Ranch near Hallettsville and today runs more than a 100 head of registered breeding-age cows.

"A ship that weighs 20,000 tons doesn't seem to have much in common with an Angus cow that weighs maybe 1,400 pounds," he says with a laugh. "But I've learned a lot from my shipping business that has been extremely valuable to me in the Angus business. The bottom line — the Angus business is just another business, and it needs to be run like a business.

"You need to keep records. The Angus breed is known for its recordkeeping, which is frankly why I chose Angus over Herefords. You also need to identify which markets you're going to serve and what part you can carve out for yourself. Preferably, it should be a local market, one you know you can serve."

What's the secret to success? "Having a properly capitalized business plan, a quality product backed up 100%, and innovation in customer service are responsible for our success in shipping," Wheelock says. "It seems to me that this formula will work well with Angus, the business breed."

■ **Determination**

In Billings, Mont., attorney Cliff Edwards, 51, owns Edwards Law Firm, a litigation/trial practice with five lawyers and six staff members. In its 25 years of business the firm has won numerous jury verdicts and out-of-court settlements for Montana citizens suing major corporations like Ford Motor Co., General Motors Co., Cenex Petroleum Co., and Montana Power Co.

Most recently, the firm won a major



WALTER MARICICH PHOTO

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lawsuit against the Burlington Northern-Santa Fe Railroad. In the July 1999 court case, the jury found the company guilty of illegally dumping toxic waste in the Park County landfill from 1977 to 1981 and awarded the county's taxpayers \$14.5 million, the largest verdict ever reached in Montana. The following September the railroad paid the judgment in full, plus interest, which gave the county cash to clean up the land.

Portions of Edwards' own land was originally owned by his grandfather, who settled in the region more than a century ago. Today the Edwards Angus Ranch near Denton runs approximately 1,000 head of mother cows.

Both businesses have taught Edwards many lessons.

"What I learned growing up in Denton, Mont., in an agricultural background was that things won't always run just the way you want them to," he says. "Weather changes can be quick and devastating; a prized calf dies suddenly right after weaning; or the high-indexing cow of the herd turns up open. But you have to accept what you can't change and adapt to it. Never give up.

"That is a lesson that transferred well into my law practice. Things aren't going to go just the way you want them to go every day. But you can't ever give up in either business. I pride myself in being too stupid

to know when I'm beat or when to quit. I just keep going on and fighting! Both businesses will only be successful if you show up for work every day and are in it for the long haul."

Along the way there are bound to be at least a few downs.

"The key to success in both businesses is a willingness to admit and recognize poor decisions and flat-out mistakes," Edwards says.

"When you're wrong, admit it. If it's a lawsuit, either settle the case or get rid of it. In the cow business, especially registered Angus, if your breeding program turns up mistakes, get rid of them by culling. In both businesses, recognition of mistakes and quick action on them may be expensive in the short term; but, in the long haul, it pays real dividends.

"The hallmark of success, I have found in both businesses, is to have great enthusiasm and energy for your work and all of the people you encounter. I love to represent people against large corporations. I love to see and be part of the little guy getting justice against multinational corporations. And, common to both businesses is, you must keep and maintain your core values, keep your word, and conduct your businesses with honor.

"If you do all that, you'll be successful."

