

Next Generation

► Postcard from an NJAA director and state spotlights

What do you value?

What do you value? During the holiday season, it's common for us to spend more time reflecting on things that are important to us. I'm not talking about material things, but about our relationships with family and friends, good health, and other things we often take for granted.

In one of my classes we have been studying immigration and diversity and its impact on our country. Why do people come to America? For many, freedom is one of the main reasons to come to this land of opportunity. Unfortunately, freedom is often taken for granted by



Ryan Sweeney

my generation. The tragic events that occurred Sept. 11 changed that.

Our freedom has been challenged. Terrorists are trying to take away something we hold dear. We watched the news in horror, as thousands of lives were lost during the attack. My friends from high school who joined the military after we graduated are being sent abroad to defend something we value — our freedom.

As I reflect on other things I value, true friendship and integrity rank high on the list. When my dad became manager of the Purebred Beef Cattle Unit at Michigan State University (MSU) in 1974, Dr. Branaman, a retired professor, told him, "When people tell you they will stand behind you, be sure you find out just how far back they intend to stand."

Of course, Dad has shared this advice with me more than once, but it's a hard lesson. When I tell people I will back them up, that is exactly what I intend to do. That's what I've been taught, and that is also what I expect of others. It's called trust. In business and in personal relationships, it is essential.

Unfortunately, not everyone shares this value. When you don't keep your word, it can be a devastating blow to the person who is depending on you. True friendship and integrity are gifts that are priceless.

True friends understand us and accept us as we are. For instance, it's no secret that I possess a competitive spirit. What most people don't realize is that I don't compete in order to prove I am better than someone else or for the prize at the end of the competition. Rather, I compete because I can. While I appreciate the awards and scholarships I have received over the years, what I really value is how my participation in junior Angus activities, FFA, 4-H and sports has helped shape the person I am today and the many friends I have made along the way.

My friends Amanda and Jody understood this, and they helped me keep things in perspective. Amanda and I went to school together from kindergarten through our senior year in high school. Both of us were in 4-H and FFA, and although she liked horses and I preferred livestock, we shared a common bond. As students at MSU, we often met for lunch just to talk. I admired Amanda for her kind heart, gentle spirit and strong faith.

Jody was two years older than I and was like a big sister to me. She appointed herself my mentor and guardian in high school, 4-H and FFA. In fact, it didn't stop there. When I headed to MSU after high school graduation, Jody was there to give me advice, screen my dates and keep me humble. The most incredible thing about Jody was her zest for life. She could light up a room with her smile.

On Oct. 19, 2000, Amanda was killed in a horseback riding accident, and just more than nine months later, on July 31, Jody lost her life in a tragic car accident. Amanda and Jody were talented young women with bright futures ahead of them. I valued their friendships, and now I treasure the special memories of times we shared and lessons they taught me about living life to the fullest.

I recently read the following story, which I believe helps put things into perspective when we think about the things we value.

One day a wealthy man took his young son on a trip to the country with the firm intention of showing him how poor people can be. They spent a day and a night at the farm of a very poor family.

When they got home, the father asked his son, "How was the trip?"

"Very good, Dad!" said the son.

"Did you see how poor people can be?" the father asked.

"Yes!" answered his son.

"And what did you learn?" asked his father.

The son replied, "I saw that we have a dog at home, and they have four. We have a pool that reaches to the middle of the garden, and they have a creek that has no end. We have imported lamps in the garden, and they have the stars. Our patio reaches to the front yard, and they have a whole horizon."

When the little boy was finished, his father was speechless.

"Thanks, Dad, for showing me how poor we are!" his son added.

The lesson here is clear. What we value depends on how we look at things. If we have family, friends, health, good humor, a positive attitude toward life, freedom and faith — what more can we ask for? You can have all the material possessions in the world, but if you are poor of spirit, you have nothing! The bottom line is that the most valuable things in life cannot be bought.

Best wishes to each of you during this holiday season! Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

— Ryan Sweeney,
Mason, Mich.

► North Dakota



► **Kris Peterson, Bowbells**, was the year-end winner in the Angus division of the North Dakota Junior Point Show Program (NDJPSP). The award was given by the North Dakota Stockmen's Association (NDSA).

Angus Foundation donors

Without the generous contributions members make to the Angus Foundation each year, many programs would not be available, especially those that involve members of the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA). Scholarships available through the Angus Foundation enable juniors to take advantage of leadership programs and to gain recognition for their leadership efforts. These are just a few examples of how your support through the Angus Foundation is making a difference. A special thanks goes to these contributors:

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Angus Foundation Fundraiser

The Angus Foundation has commissioned the printing of a set of four black-and-white grease-pencil drawings (shown here) from a series of works by Angus artist Frank Murphy. To be offered as the "Profitmaker Prints" collection, these four 11-by-14-inch images were used in the Association's advertising campaign from 1966 to 1970.

The set is available for a \$100 donation to the Angus Foundation. For more information, call the Junior Activities Department at (816) 383-5100.



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► Serving on the Board of Directors for the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) for 2001-2002 are (seated, from left) **Tom Patterson**, Columbus, Mont.; **Ryan Sweeney**, Mason, Mich.; **Heath Johnson**, Corinth, Miss.; **Christy Walther**, Mount Crawford, Va.; **Brittney Burns**, Kickapoo, Ill.; and **Jessica Sawyer**, Bassett, Neb. New directors elected to serve a two-year term are (standing, from left) **Lacey Robinson**, Montgomery City, Mo.; **Lana Myers**, Jennings, La.; **Mercedes Danekas**, Wilton, Calif.; **John McCurry**, Burrton, Kan.; **Brian Howell**, Union City, Ind.; and **Brandon Walker**, Lexington, Ga.

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Angus members earn top honors at 74th National FFA Convention

The National FFA Organization has selected **Ryan Sweeney**, Mason, Mich., for one of the highest honors the agricultural organization can bestow. He has been named the 2001 American Star in Agribusiness. Sweeney is vice-president of the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) Board of Directors. He is a member of the Mason FFA chapter, and is the son of Peter and Barbara Sweeney.

He was presented with the award during an onstage ceremony at the 74th National FFA Convention. Each of four award finalists received \$1,000 from the National FFA Foundation and the opportunity to participate in an international tour experience to Costa Rica. As



an American Star in Agribusiness winner, Sweeney will receive an additional \$1,000 award.

Sweeney is an animal science/agriculture business major at Michigan State University (MSU). He learned to weld in the eighth grade. As part of his supervised agricultural experience program (SAE), he formed a business to make cattle blocking chutes. He and his father built the first cattle chute in 1996; they are continuing in the business, now as equal partners.

“Continuing growth of the business and my commitment to finishing my college education have made this a natural fit,” Sweeney says. “Fortunately, I have been able to capitalize on the many opportunities that have come my way, and I hope to be able to continue to recognize new opportunities.”

Junior Angus member **Jason Arehart**, Staunton, Va., a member of the Buffalo Gap FFA chapter, was named the winner in the national FFA beef production-entrepreneurship proficiency award. He is the son of Carey and Brenda Arehart.



After starting his involvement in the beef cattle arena by following his father and helping feed, Arehart has become a major player in the industry. He continues on an annual basis to increase his enterprise’s overall size and scope. Arehart has realized that correctly performing skills, such as livestock selection, recordkeeping and proper nutrition, is essential to the success of his operation.

He hopes to enroll in the agricultural technology program at Virginia Tech and earn a degree in animal production. Arehart plans to own his own Angus operation someday.

▶ Angus member **Shirley Kaufman**, Staunton, Va., coached the Buffalo Gap FFA national livestock evaluation team. The team finished in the silver division overall. Competitors in the event were asked to demonstrate their ability to grade market class steers and hogs according to U.S. market grading standards. They evaluated classes of breeding and market beef, sheep and swine. Oral reasons were given for the selections they made. Team members are Jonathan Riley, Heather Kisamore, Tina Wilson and Renee Pelny.

