

Beyond BANNERS & BUCKLES

Roy Jones's investment in Angus youth is all about building tomorrow's leaders.

by Joann Pipkin

“What are you going to do about it?”

Roy Jones recites the words his wife, Karen, ingrained in his head early in their marriage. Now more than 50 years later, the mantra that served as a guidepost for much of their lives tells a story of one man's desire to get more young people involved in showing Angus cattle.

Whether through a heifer gifting program, monetary contribution or simple mentorship, Jones's investment in the next generation is more about developing future leaders than earning banners and buckles.

Becoming Angus breeders

The son of a dairy farmer, Roy told his new bride soon after their marriage in 1964, he couldn't live without cattle. The two settled on a beef business, partnering with Karen's father, Ted Gilliam.

Over the years, the Jones-Gilliam Angus operation in Gainesville, Mo., centered on building a program backed by strong maternal traits, a characteristic Jones found essential in his youth as a breeder of Jersey dairy cattle.

A banker by trade, Jones relied on Karen to provide much of the daily care for their cattle until his retirement in 2001. Both have been active members of the Missouri Angus Association and the Heart of the Ozarks Angus Association.

Complaint meets commitment

Amid their involvement in Angus activities, Jones complained to his wife that enough juniors weren't showing cattle. The complaint was met with Karen's counter, “What are you going to do about it?”

Jones had an idea. “Maybe we could give away a heifer every year to a young person,” he says. “They could show it at county fairs, and we could teach them how to do it.”

Karen loved it, and has thrived at seeing youth succeed over the years, Jones says.

The Joneses have gifted 28 heifers to young Angus breeders. Recipients have gone on to further develop their Angus herds, attend college and built successful businesses.

Continued on page 46

Jones admits no formal application exists for their selection process; the duo simply watched kids, monitored their work ethic and how well they performed in school.

Even years later, Jones continues to follow up with past recipients.

“Like Clint Hunter,” Jones says. “He’s one of my shining stars.”

Hunter went on to grow his Angus operation with his family and wife, Rachel, and build a successful sale management business.

“Showing cattle was such a wonderful experience for me,” Jones says. “I want everyone else to have that same opportunity.”

Working with the Angus Foundation, the Joneses have also been generous donors to the Missouri Angus Foundation Scholarship Fund, which awarded \$10,000 in 2019 alone to Missouri Angus juniors. The couple was also instrumental in establishing a similar scholarship program through the Heart of the Ozarks Angus Association.

Beyond the awards

While there’s nothing like the feeling of winning a shiny buckle or a purple banner, Jones says the experience he hopes to create for Angus youth comes with a far greater lesson.

“I hope they learn about responsibility,” Jones says. “I hope they get self-confidence. [I hope they learn] how to present themselves, shake hands; because that’s going to be important to them the rest of their lives. It’s wonderful when you win, but it’s getting to participate that is the real winning.”

Without Jones, Sophie Sweeny says she might never have had the opportunity to own and

show cattle. Growing up in Kansas City, Sweeny’s only involvement in agriculture came from a grandmother who showed dairy cattle and chickens.

Call it fate, Sweeny’s dad, Chris, had attended college with Jones’s daughter, Jackie. Long story short, the Sweenys and Jones met at a recent Missouri Angus Futurity. The meeting was just the beginning of Sophie’s Angus career.

Today, Jones serves as both mentor and business partner to Sweeny.

“I wouldn’t be where I am without him,” she says of Jones. “I think he has such a special impact on the junior community and the Angus association just because he is such a great leader and role model.”

A message Chris Sweeny left for Jones recently serves as a true testament to his




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investment in youth.

“Roy, I can’t put into words how grateful we are that you are part of Sophie’s life ... She is a more confident and responsible person because of you and her involvement in showing cattle.”

Even after selling their farm, the Joneses continue to be active in the Angus industry. While he and Karen now reside in Springfield, Mo., through assistance from Angus breeders like the Washam family and Eric Mohler, the couple continues raising cattle and engaging youth in the American Angus Association and junior activities.

“I’ve gotten more return than they could ever give me,” Jones says of the youth he’s helped. “We all owe a lot because I’ve had so many people help me over the years. The Lord has truly blessed me.” 

Editor’s note: Joann Pipkin is a freelance writer from Republic, Mo.