

Planning rewards the patient

By Jim Cotton
Editor

Fresh from a successful sale, John Reed, Angus breeder and secretary-treasurer of the Minnesota Angus Assn., relaxes over lunch, reflecting. Warmth from an April sun streams in, a welcome benediction to a day well-spent helping the Minnesota folks bask in this year's good average of \$1,575 on 46 lots.

Two females set record highs at \$7,750 and \$5,100. Heifer calves were a strong area with bulls steady from \$1,000 to \$2,000.

It's a quality sale, this association effort, and not just a gesture toward breeders who wanted a time and place to present or sell their stock. "We've worked to keep the quality up, so this year when the time was right, we were paid for it," John says.

Getting "paid" for it involves some key ingredients: teamwork, selection, reputation. John credits selection by American Angus Hall of Fame principal Tom Burke as helping preserve the quality. "We moved our sale," John continues, "went to a select type of sale, and hired Tom to pick the offerings. Any number of us could probably do it (select the sale lots), but having an outsider eliminates the politics and takes the monkey off our back. We have to work together all year long, so it makes everything run smoother."

A reputation sale whets enthusiasm. A poor sale will backslide into oblivion, John thinks, and quickly unless steps are taken to revive it. "We've had some years through these tougher economic times when the sale kind of dropped... Then you get some disappointed people. I've seen sales when the price is poor one year and folks bring a poorer quality animal the following year—it just drives itself into the ground."

Therefore, in the view of this breeder-auctioneer-state secretary, a successful sale is fundamental. It's not the only activity necessary, but a good sale helps the membership feel positive about the other programs of the group. "A successful organization takes enthusiastic people and successful events to draw folks," he says.

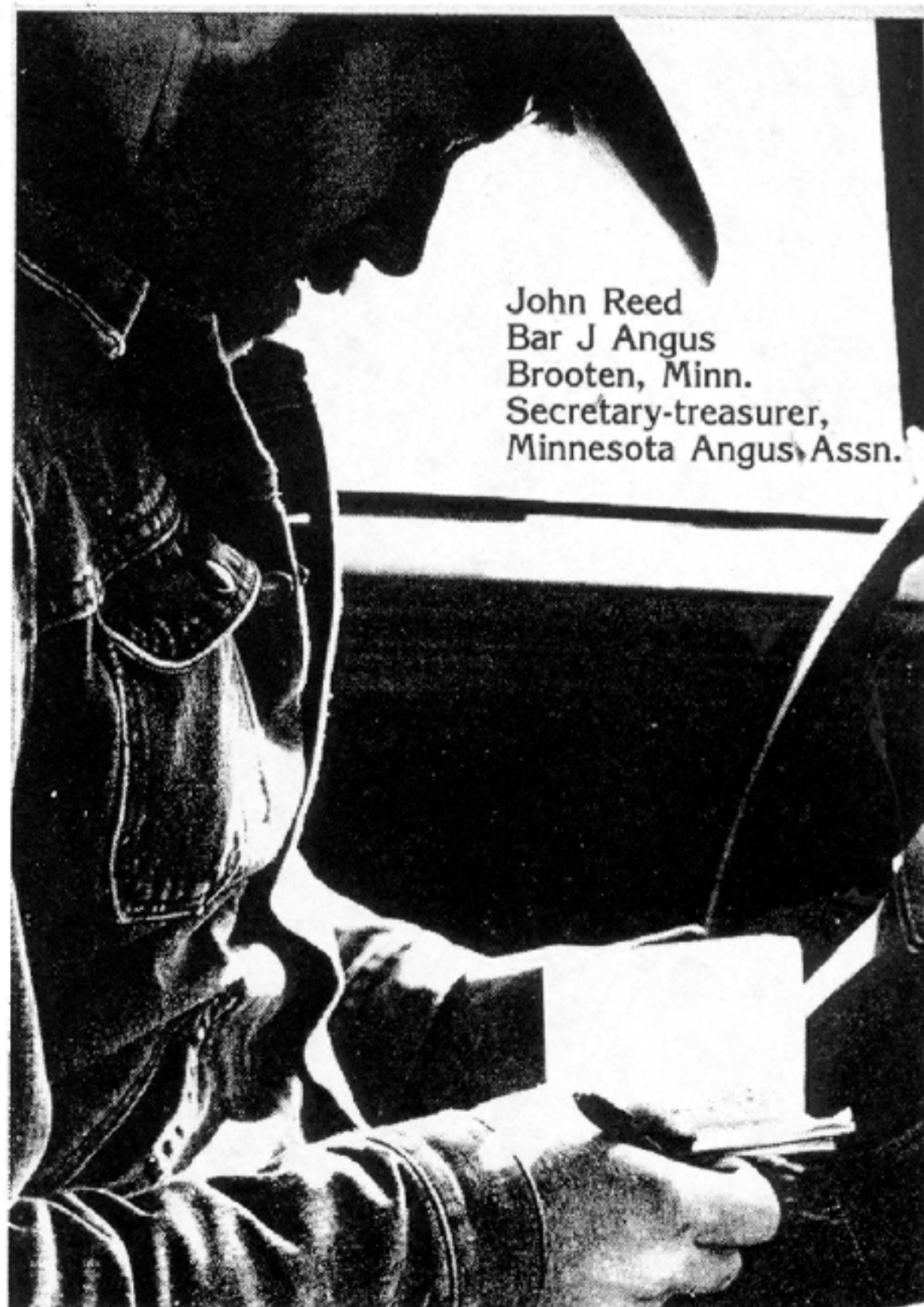
Minnesota conquered a big hurdle with its semen sale and scholarship fund. The association awards two \$500 scholarships yearly to deserving juniors. Now in its third year, the scholarship program is well-received and another cornerstone. It began through one family's donation of \$500. Other gifts were received and the fund grew by a few hundred dollars here and there. John and his fellow board members determined the fund would need to grow to \$10,000 to work off the interest. With the help of Tom Burke and several of the state's breeders, the fund grew to \$2,000.

"This year our semen sale brought in \$3,700, so we've achieved our \$10,000 goal plus the excess we're funneling into other junior activities now. We took a treasury that was just bouncing between black and red, and we've been able to make it solid enough to have some money for promotion."

As with any organization of volunteers, there are specialities and talents. The Minnesota association has been blessed by members with different interests and the willingness to tackle the heifer show, advise the juniors, supervise the queen contest, or put the tour together.

A junior steer and heifer show in the middle of June is an annual highlight. It circulates among the individual farms. "Minnesota's a big state, and we try to spread it around."

And crucial to servicing the membership is keeping them informed, John emphasizes. The *Minnesota Angus News* is his special project during the sale seasons particularly. It appears during the months of September, October, January, March, and April. *Continued on Page 27*



John Reed
Bar J Angus
Brooten, Minn.
Secretary-treasurer,
Minnesota Angus Assn.



"Hey, Ma, you gonna allow this?" says a newborn undergoing its first of several performance tests at Bar J.



John and Joanne Reed at home. The couple have three children, Joshua, age 14, and Jacob and Jana, age 10.

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Area or district Angus groups have pretty well distilled down to a central association that stages its field day yearly and a northern group which schedules a fall tour of farms in that area. "This way we have something on both ends to keep folks active. We have the central bull sale where a lot of the northern people consign. There are shows in the south and the Red River show in the north." John definitely believes two or three state-sponsored events are enough. Keeping these activities attractive and anticipated is vital. Too many activities or programs and the group risks burning out its volunteers.

New people are often a source of welcome ideas and possess the willingness to do the phone work or legwork, John finds.

"The state directory indicates that over time, half of your membership will change. You always have to realize you'll have new people coming in," he advises his fellow state secretaries. "There's such a turnover. You have to be continually reaching out to the new people coming in. They'll go through a period when they're real active and interested and then as the seven-year cycle rolls around, they'll drop out. You have to keep aware of the new people coming in and find a place for them. That's what makes it go."

The Minnesota Angus Assn. does not sponsor a feeding test as some other Angus associations have attempted. The state's BCIA is well-supported by members, though, and supplants any need to become involved in performance testing.

The state's breeders are generally performance-minded in the main. John includes himself when discussing industry attitudes and trends, observing he and fellow breeders tended to base selection too much on pedigree and not enough on what "AHIR told us. We need a little more open eye toward the entire industry and not just Denver."

In his own program, John acknowledges his kinship with fellow breeders who've made purchases "you wish you hadn't made. Or there were some bulls that didn't work out as well as you'd hoped." If he had the option of reversing decisions, he would base his selections on "less smoke and more fire (facts)." He's found stricter culling and more attention to performance and sire evaluation as helpful in undoing some of the matings that haven't proved up to expectations.

The original Bar J herd came along when John moved from the Black Hills to become manager of Glencoe Farms near Brooten. That base herd was composed of old line Western Dakota cows and Erdmann lines, namely the Marshall Prides and Revolutions. He has a sizeable number of daughters by Windwalker, a bull John promoted which was sired by



Crackerjack Baros 2459. He's found Pine Drive influence on these Windwalker daughters to be a good mating. Gain and function must match in his view . . . and in his environment.

"We run a grass and hay operation, and we've tended to select against cattle that wouldn't do well under these conditions. We needed more frame and were ready to go in that direction, but we had to watch what we were giving up to get it. We were fortunate in that if we were reaching for the stars, we never went so far that we got into real trouble with fertility."

The Reeds have sold back. Survival has been the "number one theme. We're running about 70 cows now, half of what we were a couple years ago. We regrouped and had a sale and sold a lot of our good cows while keeping the heifers back."

Most breeding operations do likewise: biting what bullets they must and pressing on. John Reed's been both a doer and observer, so he knows the struggles fellow breeders endure when selecting the best compromise. He likes the business and tries to encourage those newcomers mentioned earlier to stand in for the long haul.

Strip away all the elements of a seed stock breeder's makeup and you should come down to the core: integrity. That, in John's view, is the essence of what's being peddled out there. "Some folks adhere to the old P.T. Barnum theory and they get by."

That's the frustration, one of the major or lesser bullets served up to the seed stock producer, John finds.

Take the adjustments or outright replacements breeders must make if the "bull's a dud."

"You have to stand behind your cattle. You know you're right, but you're in the purebred business so you take some of those knocks when someone's taking advantage of you. You know — the bull only bred three-quarters of his cows. The fact that his cows are out of condition, well, it kind of wears on you. But I think that's the commitment you've got to make if you're in the purebred business. You got to stand behind them—it's your store. Eventually, it will come back to you.

"I guess it's how you want to live, but I sleep pretty good."

Like many of the Angus community, the Reeds have found the rewards come with time and endurance. John speaks of this when he reflects on the new people entering the breed. He hopes those representing new spirit and new blood will enjoy and cherish the Angus experience for all its dimensions, not just the cattle angle. Folks cling to things with meanings that are hard to define. John confirms it, saying:

"I never went into it to get rich, but you can't beat the way of life and the people, the places we've gone, and the friends we've made all over the country." AJ