



► Junior Activities Director James Fisher gives the junior Board some last-minute advice before beginning the awards ceremony.

A TEAM EFFORT

NJAA Board members end their tenure with strength and determination.

Story & photos by Cara Bieroth

Six of the 12 National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) Board members will be retiring their green jackets this year. They were chosen by their peers at the 2001 National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) in Denver, Colo., to serve a two-year term. During their tenure, they have organized leadership programs and activities and have acted as mentors and role models for more than 11,000 members of the NJAA.

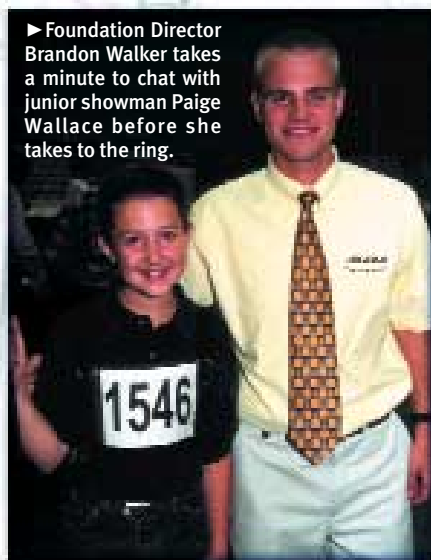
These six retiring officers are as diverse as the states they represent. They each have their own directions and goals, challenges and accomplishments and strengths and weaknesses. The qualities of each individual are unified with the 11 other members of the Board to become a single entity — a team.

It starts with a goal

Whether it was a desire to be part of the action or to make a difference on the state level, goals were set as each member decided to run for the NJAA Board. For Membership Director John McCurry, 21,



► Got Milk? Chairman Mercedes Danekas and Vice Chairman Lana Myers think up ways to spend their free time once they retire those green jackets.



► Foundation Director Brandon Walker takes a minute to chat with junior showman Paige Wallace before she takes to the ring.

Burrton, Kan., it was the idea of being a leader and a role model.

"I consider myself a leader," he says. "I enjoy kids and being able to lead them. Being a Board member gives me the opportunity to meet hundreds of people from hundreds of miles away that I never would have otherwise gotten the chance to. This is why I became a Board member."

Vice Chairman Lana Myers, 22, Jennings, La., wanted to encourage more participation from states with fewer numbers of junior members, like her home state of Louisiana.

"My state had not had representation on the Board in about 10 years," she explains. "I think that it is important for states with fewer members to have representation as well."

Watching the 'green jackets' in action influences many young members. They are inspired to rise to the level of the NJAA Board.

"It's not easy for me to sit by and let things happen," says Communications Director Brian Howell, 22, Union City, Ind. "I often want to be a part of the action, or at least help the action in progress, in a positive manner. I wanted to seize the opportunity."

Facing the challenge

Serving on the Board can be a trying experience. During the past two years, these members have faced the challenges that have come their way head-on.

For some, learning to work with members of the Board is a challenge in itself.

"I think the biggest challenge we faced as a group was learning to get along with the different personalities that were on the Board," Myers says. "We have people from all ends of the spectrum. I'm not a laid-back person, so I had to learn to ease up a bit and to have fun sometimes. Just learning how to work as a team was a challenge — to learn that each and every one of us has a duty, and we have to work together to accomplish our goals."

"My biggest challenge has been time management," Howell says, pointing out that Board members are also students, employees and family members. "During the school year I am a full-time college student, and during the summer I work full time on the farm at home.

"Sometimes Board work has been my escape from the stress of school, but at other times it is a challenge to fit everything in," he

admits. "It has been a good growing experience, learning how to manage my time and to prioritize what I need to get accomplished."

Leadership Director Lacey Robinson, 21, Wellsville, Mo., also dealt with the challenge of time management. "Everyone has such busy lives, especially as a college student," she says. "Just getting into the routine of giving it the time that I felt that it deserves has been hard. I think that I have done that now, but at first it was a challenge."

Knowing success

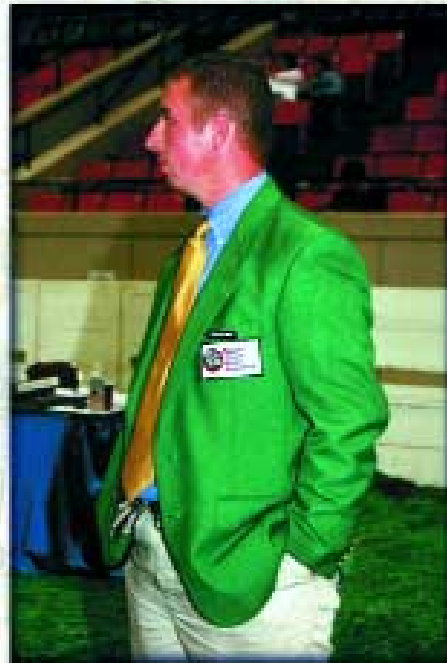
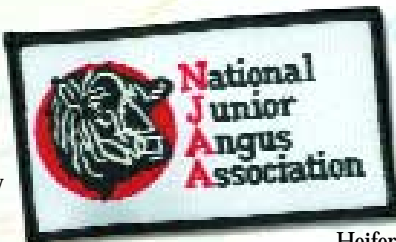
Out of the challenges come accomplishments, self-growth and the realization that, through it all, the successes have outnumbered the defeats.

The work done by the NJAA Board to sell the Foundation

Heifer package was a proud accomplishment for Foundation Director Brandon Walker, 22, Lexington, Ga.

"I saw how, as a Board, we worked together," he says. "I saw some people really getting after it, and I saw how unselfish they were. Their perspectives were on the kids and not on themselves. I learned, from watching other Board members, my character flaws."

Working together as a team and accomplishing the goals that were set has been rewarding for Chairman Mercedes Danekas, 21, Wilton, Calif. "I believe that all



► As cattle parade into the ring, Membership Director John McCurry watches, ready to assist the showmen and picking his favorites as they move past.

accomplishments that have been made have been the result of all NJAA Board members," she says. "As a group we have accomplished many tasks and achieved many goals."

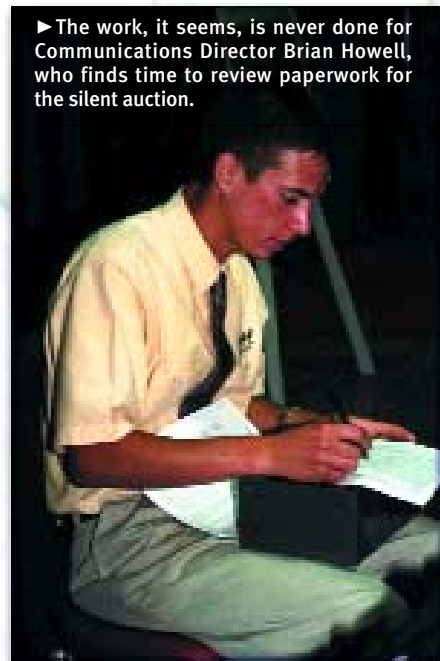
Robinson says she is proud that the Board has worked together to accomplish their goals of connecting with the junior membership and of trying to help each individual person as much as possible. "I really feel like those are the things — the things that happen outside of the showing — that I am really proud that we have done," she says.

Myers credits smoothly run programs and activities to the entire Board. "I think it's important for all contests to run smoothly, without any big problems," she says. "It's because of the entire group — everyone pulling their own weight, making sure deadlines are met, and that sort of thing — that we have been successful."

Serving on the NJAA Board has provided these young adults with invaluable experiences and opportunities to grow as individuals. Through challenges and hardships, successes and victories, they have become stronger people.

"Being on the Board has helped me in working with people," Howell says. "I have learned to listen more and think things through before making decisions. I have also learned to accept more people for their differences and appreciate them because of those differences."

"I have developed stronger



► The work, it seems, is never done for Communications Director Brian Howell, who finds time to review paperwork for the silent auction.

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communication and organizational skills, and I have had the opportunity to meet many very special people who have left an indelible mark on my life," Danekas says.

"It's allowed me to be more confident in my own abilities," Myers says. "And it made me realize that I have things to contribute and that you have to first believe in yourself for other people to believe in you as well."

Becoming a team

These six are an extremely diverse group of individuals; it is obvious in their different personalities and their characters. The individual traits of each member are what built a strong team. In an area where one person may lack, another member excels, thus building the foundation of a strong alliance — one with the skill and the capability to succeed at everything they set out to do.

"Each individual has their own unique talents," says James Fisher, director of junior activities. "We have some members on the Board who work great with other kids, we have some who work better with



► Leadership Director Lacey Robinson is 'cool as can be' before the NJAS opening ceremonies as she visits with juniors. Robinson says she is proud of the connections her officer team has made with the junior membership.

the adults, and its kind of a combination of those talents that raises the level of the whole team. You have some who have a great knowledge base of the industry, and you have others who understand working with different personality types. It becomes much more of a team than *this* officer doing *this* job. It is a team, working together to get it done."

It is the great enthusiasm and energy of Danekas; the practical, detail-oriented, hardworking attitude of Myers; the ability of Howell to make every situation enjoyable; Robinson's intelligence and ability to organize; the humor and warmth of Walker; and McCurry's communication skills and business sense that have made this a team capable of leading the NJAA.

"This team has been hardworking and focused," Fisher says. "When you look at what they have done and how they have accomplished it, I think they have really met the challenge of being junior Board members and what that entails."



Departing Advice

As Mercedes Danekas, Lana Myers, Brian Howell, Lacey Robinson, Brandon Walker and John McCurry prepared to step down as National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) Board members, we asked them what advice they would offer future Board members. With two years of knowledge and experience behind them, here's what they had to say.



Danekas: "Arrive with an open mind. Take advantage of the wonderful learning environment and the people that surround you. Get to know your fellow Board members; two years are very short when talking about lifetime friends. Most importantly, make everything that you do fun!"



Myers: "You have to be ready to give your whole heart to it because it takes a lot of time and a lot of effort on an individual basis and as a group. It's the best experience that you can have if you are able to give it your all."



Howell: "It is very important to be open to other people's ideas and suggestions. By being flexible, people can bring together many ideas — not just one's own — to make something successful. Always remember that you are a role model. People are looking up to you the same way you looked up to the green jackets. Never let them down. Try hard to remember names and faces, and buy a comfortable pair of shoes!"



Robinson: "Don't take the opportunity that you are given for granted. You have before you the chance to make a real difference in the lives of youth across the nation. Don't waste that. Don't waste any time, because it goes by really fast. Give your heart and soul and really dedicate time to it."



Walker: "In Corinthians it says, 'He who reaps sparingly, but he who sows bountifully, will reap bountifully.' If you want to get something out of this, you need to sow bountifully to reap bountifully. Don't just ride the wave of fame, because you will sow sparingly."



McCurry: Find common ground with your fellow Board members. Whether it is school or a love for Angus cattle, it is important to make a connection.