

# *Belle Point Ranch*

## David McMahon Makes Selling a Business

by Nancy Ann Sayre



*Enthusiasm of the McMahon family is the key to success at Belle Point. Pictured (from left) are Julie, Kathleen, Susan, Mary Ann and David. The family also includes daughter Mary Lynn Holland, her husband Marvin and their son Matthew; son David Jr. and his wife Deanna.*



A bid of \$20,000 for the Angus Foundation donation heifer this year in Denver did not just happen.

"The juniors and everyone involved had that project smoking before they got to Denver—that's what it takes," says David McMahon. "You can't wait until you get there and then start preparing."

"Getting things smoking" is a specialty of McMahon's. Although not directly responsible for adding this sum of \$20,000 to the juniors' account, his influence was strong—and his enthusiasm. From general brainstorming sessions centering around ideas that would help sell the heifer, to a few phone calls and lots of footwork to stir up interest, McMahon was behind the juniors 100 percent. Putting ideas in motion was made easy since his daughter Julie had served as chairman of the National Junior Angus board, but that is part of the Belle Point approach. They are doers, they get involved. And it pays.

"Success belongs to the man who prepares," McMahon emphasizes. And he will add that quality is the easiest thing in the world to sell. He helped the juniors go after a quality package—they took the featured Erdmann heifer and added breeding privileges, transportation, and insurance. After creating such a marketable combination, the actual selling was easy. "If you aren't too shy, just be sure to ask, you can get things done."

This is the prevailing attitude at Belle Point Ranch in Lavaca, Ark. The result has been notable; similar success on a much broader scale.

The David McMahon family bought Belle Point Ranch in 1975 with a few specific goals in mind. They wanted it to make money—in fact, they expected the operation to pay for itself within five years. In summary, McMahon says: "We thought Angus cattle could make money for us and we figured we knew how to get it done." The past eight years are proof enough; Belle Point has made quite a splash in the Angus world and most importantly, they are making money. The ranch did indeed pay for itself—in just over five years.

Beyond an optimistic belief in themselves and their product, advertising and promotion are McMahons' most important tools. Their ads come on full-force, the entire family gets involved and plays a significant public relations role, their cattle and farm are always well-presented, and they strive to set themselves apart from (as well as ahead of) any other breeder.

"You don't starve your way into the cattle business, especially if you plan to be successful," comments McMahon. He operates on the belief one has to give a whole-hearted effort and spend some money.

For the McMahon family, planning to be successful is an assumed approach to any undertaking. David and his wife Mary Ann have a son David Jr. and four daughters, Mary Lynn, Kathleen, Julie and Susan. They travel together, promote together (whether it's beer or Angus cattle) and have a good time together. No doubt about it.

Perhaps much of the drive and advertising spirit of this family has been overflow from the beer business. David has been a wholesale distributor for Anheuser-Busch Inc. (perhaps best known for their Budweiser and Michelob products) in the Fort Smith area for nearly 30 years. His father started Sebastian Beverage Sales about 40 years ago; the family-owned business is now known as Belle Point Beverages.

### No Skimping, An Anheuser-Busch Lesson

"When Anheuser-Busch does things, they do it well. One of the most expensive things you can do in the beer business, or this cattle operation and anything else, is to skimp on advertising dollars. You need to do it well and tell the truth."

McMahon has learned his lesson well from the parent company. His distributorship has grown and prospered, and his talents have been recognized. One of the first members of the Anheuser-Busch Inc. Wholesaler Advisory Panel, he held that position from 1968 to 1971. His list of national and community recognitions is lengthy, ranging from hospital and United Fund boards to 4-H and youth work to area rodeo promotion. The community park adjoining Belle Point Beverages' warehouse, named the Don McMahon Park, is only a brief indication of this family's civic support and involvement.

When McMahon bought Belle Point Ranch, he put many lessons learned in the beer business to work for his cattle enterprise. The ranch obviously draws its name from his distributorship, tracing back in history to a French description of the junction of the Poleau and Arkansas Rivers. The 500-acre unit had served as a "catch-pen"

for the Fort Chaffee army base 90,000-acre commercial cattle operation. McMahon, though, had known the place in its more glamorous days as Woodmont Hereford Farms. When the farm became available during a cattle cycle downswing, he bought it and set out to upgrade the much-deteriorated headquarters. The purchase included a feed store, now operated by McMahons, as well as the pasture land and barns.

"We were fortunate we didn't have any cattle at that time," says McMahon, "so we could put all our emphasis on the grounds and buildings." (They had owned some Angus and a few acres since the mid-50s, but had sold them.)

The farm's "facelift" not only included fencing and barn repair, but also gave rise to the now-famous 8,734,902-oz. beer can—McMahon had an upright silo custom painted to resemble a Budweiser can. The unique result still stops many travelers on Route 22 (which passes through the farm) and has been featured in many Belle Point ads and catalogs.

Why the \$3,000 paint job to have a silo look like a beer can? The answer comes easily to the McMahon family: To sell more beer. Why feature it in an Angus ad? To sell more cattle. In fact, that simple answer governs everything done at Belle Point.

### They Entered in a Big Way

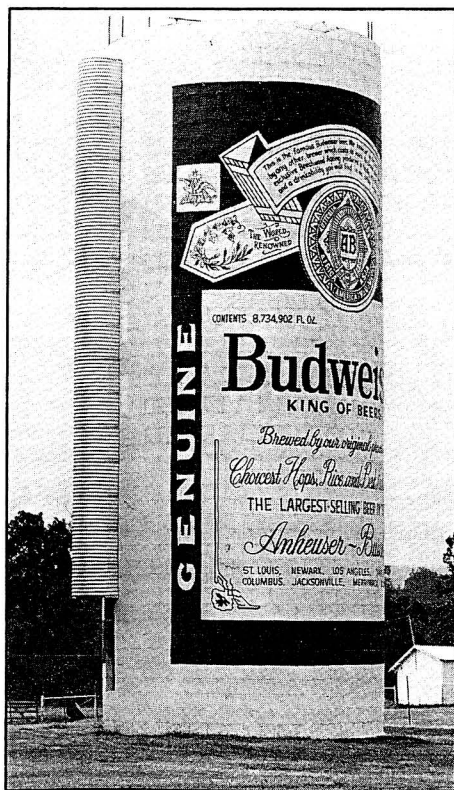
By the fall of 1975 Belle Point was ready for cattle, so McMahon jumped on the opportunity at hand when Ankony Shadow Isle dispersed their Highmore, S.D., and Bloomfield, Ind., herds. Within two weeks he had purchased 100 cows and 50 bred heifers. All were individuals he considered marketable, therefore profitable. Pedigrees, especially the Dynamo bloodlines, were popular and several of the cows were original members of Murray Corbin's Oklahoma herd. McMahon returned these cows to an area where they had already made a solid mark.

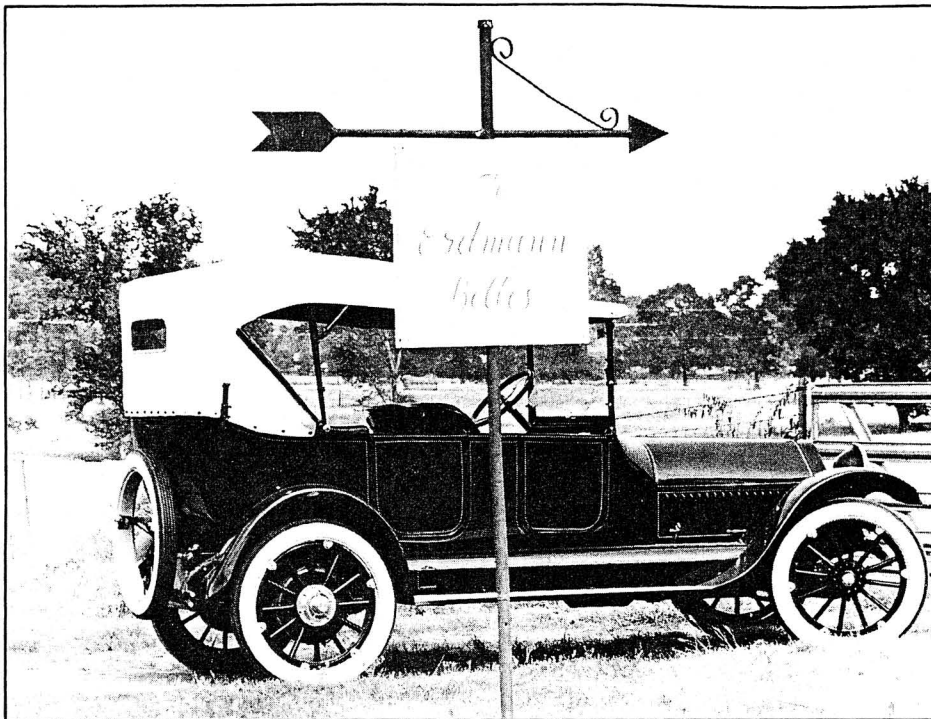
From the start, McMahon selected and bred for a singular kind of cattle—cattle that would sell. They zeroed in early on Sayre Patriot as an A.I. sire and took full advantage of his popularity (with red as well as black calves).

"We started with the Emulous line from Ankony and that gave us something to talk about. They had calves and we were off and running. We went to work on them, started promoting them . . . they turned out to be a really profitable venture for us."

And promote them Belle Point did. They started advertising in the ANGUS JOURNAL quickly and ran their first single page ad in June 1977. Following Anheuser-Busch's advertising approach, McMahon made sure other Angus breeders knew about Belle Point.

"It was easy when we started since there were very few people spending enough money to sell their cattle or operations . . . we bought several pages (in the JOURNAL) at a time. People thought we were crazy. The intent, though, was to overkill and I think it worked."





### Advertising, Merchandising

McMahon firmly believes in selling what people want. Evidenced by the grosses of five sales held within 44 months (the first of which was hosted in April 1978), he has offered just such a product. He says the high-priced individuals are easiest to sell, and by selling quality Belle Point has been able to draw people from all over the country. Advertising, after all, is the process of bringing the consumer to the product.

Merchandising, or bringing the product to the customer, is just as vital as advertising in a successful sales campaign. McMahon believes that a strong combination of the two can influence and change what people think they want or need—the cattle industry included. Clearcut proof of this approach can be seen in Belle Point's turnaround on Briarhill JJ. McMahon purchased the bull in the Briarhill Angus Farm dispersal, promoted him heavily, then cashed in on his offspring and sold the bull at a profit as well.

Today, McMahon's efforts are directed at making this industry look for the "Erdmann Belles" and their offspring. Two years ago he decided promotion of his line of cattle had run its course; Belle Point needed a new twist to keep on top at sales, shows, test stations or other events. The solution was a group of heifers purchased from the heart of the Erdmann Angus Ranch breeding pro-

gram. Belle Point brought "a little bit of Wetonka (S.D.) to Lavaca." Over the past year, all energies have been geared to nurture the aura of the "Belles."

Why? To sell more cattle, of course. McMahon expects the "Belles" to turn profitable quickly through the sale of embryos, the first of which were featured in last month's sale. He expects this simply because he believes in his product. In his mind, the females represent the best. Based on that, he will convince as many breeders as possible the industry should be moving towards his cattle. He wants to be one step ahead of fellow cattlemen.

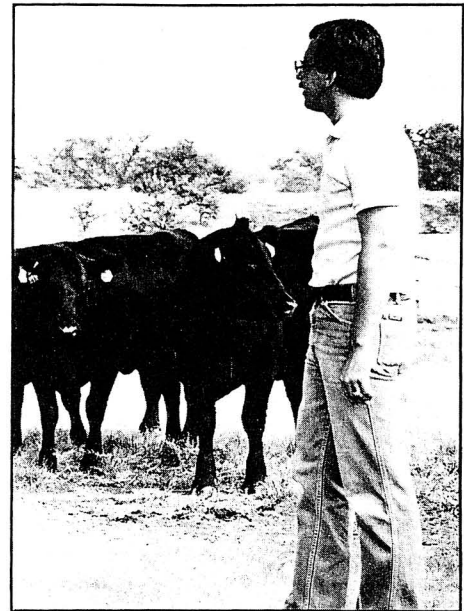
### It's a People Business

And that is a matter of creating interest. His is an offensive game plan and it has worked well. Truthfulness and fair dealing is still foremost in the business of selling, though.

"After all," McMahon says, "it's a people business. Whether you're selling beer or cats or horses or cattle, the business is built on trust. If you don't believe in a guy, you don't need to trade with him."

McMahon borrowed a governing motto to make his feelings clear on that point; the Sears, Roebuck and Company sign hangs in his feed store and is printed in each catalog as well (in place of the American Angus Assn. terms and conditions). It reads: Satis-

*Sell more cattle. Everything at Belle Point centers around those three words—from the sign at the gate to management of the cattle within the pasture. When a herd tour starts off in this kind of setting, it leaves an impression . . . and that is the name of the game. David Jr. (below) gives a run down on a few of the featured "Belles".*



faction guaranteed or your money back. Nothing complicated about that, and they stand behind it. If Belle Point cattle are not just what the customer believed, McMahon will take them back.

It is all a matter of good public relations . . . and all a means of selling more cattle. It does not stop with selling. Belle Point puts its name on many buyers' lists since McMahon sees supporting other breeders to be a form of promotion as well as a way to stay on top. He has also made a point to spend money with the juniors and auxiliary groups; whether the bidding is on ads or paintings.

Just getting out to shows and sales is vital in keeping one step ahead, too. The entire family participates here and they each know the Belle Point product—David, Mary Ann and four of the children attended the Graham School in Garnett, Kan., which enforced college agricultural educations with some practical application. But belief in Belle Point cattle is most important. The optimism and enthusiasm of the entire family is obvious and effective.

### Part of the Plan

Promote. Support. In David McMahon's mind, this includes the whole gamut—from traveling to Angus shows and sales across the country, to making Belle Point an important sponsor in many community affairs, to stepping in and helping the National Junior Angus Assn. raise money for their Angus Foundation Fund.

It is all a part of promotion—professional promotion with a goal in mind. It is all a part of making the Belle Point name well-known and respected as a source of quality. The McMahon family does it well. **AJ**

## Satisfaction Guaranteed or Your Money Back

*This guarantee is issued to all Belle Point customers—it is printed in every sale catalog and hangs in McMahon's feed store. David McMahon borrowed the message from Sears, Roebuck and Company.*