

An Angus Mentor

Missouri's Doc Smith retires after nearly 25 years of service.

Story & photos by *Corinne Patterson*



► Missouri Angus breeders say it took a special person to work with the diverse membership of their state association. Wayne "Doc" Smith, Missouri Angus fieldman for nearly 25 years, was the man for the job.

It was a challenging time, Wayne "Doc" Smith remembers of the year 1979. "The economy was no ball of fire," he says, and the Missouri Angus Association finances were slim pickings.

Doc recalls many people telling him they respected him for trying, but they feared the state association might be "too far down the tube" that October when Doc took over as fieldman.

Now, 25 years later, many Missourians will agree that it took a special kind of person to lead Missouri Angus breeders into the strong state group it is in 2004.

He's not necessarily an unsung hero; at least he wouldn't describe himself that way. But he does tell you how he sees it — and not a word more.

"I tried to thrive on a challenge," Doc says. "I think that's what kept me doing it, because I don't like to accept defeat."

Paul "Butch" Meier was on the selection committee that hired Doc nearly a quarter century ago.

"I thought he sold himself as being a very solid businessman, and he had a love for Angus cattle," Meier recalls. "He was the type of person

who could communicate with about any type of person in the Missouri Angus Association."

Before he became the fieldman, he was the local veterinarian in the small town of Winigan, Mo., for 23 years. That's where he earned his doctor nickname, taking care of mainly large animals, including many Angus cattle.

This veterinarian turned fieldman has a long laundry list of educational degrees that

American Angus Association Regional Manager Don Laughlin says could impress many employers. Perhaps this

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► Joyce Reed (left) was Doc's assistant for 17 years. She says working with Doc has been a joy, and she will miss his funny stories the most.





► Doc believes in supporting the local community. He dedicates a lot of time and effort to keeping Winigan a strong community.

diversification, from a master's in education to his doctorate in veterinary medicine, allowed him to relate to the diverse membership in Missouri.

Brian Brockman, Brookfield, Mo., says Doc saw his job on many levels, from working with tenured Angus breeders to helping youth and new breeders take a step in the right direction. "He approached his job the way that it needed to be approached — to be a lot of different things to a lot of different people," Brockman says.

A home for Missouri Angus

The small Winigan office tells the story of Doc's love and dedication for Angus breeders and the people of his small

community. After 23 years as a veterinary office, the little white-sided office with its green awning became the Missouri Angus Association office. Situated on Main Street, it overflows with Angus memorabilia and Missouri Angus history.

For the last 17 years, Joyce Reed has worked as Doc's assistant. She says the veterinary equipment got shoved

into the back rooms as Angus came in the front door.

"When I first started working, he informed me anything I need is on the desk. Let me tell you, that was no lie," Reed recalls. "Under this pile of sale catalogs and paper was an answering machine. You should have seen this thing; it had to be the first model made. It was this big box that took up half of the desk, and most of the time I would have to wrap the tape back around these big wheels by hand.

"He was always giving it (the answering machine) a warning with a few extra words. If it didn't straighten up, out the door it would go. He was true to his words," she continues. "One day he opened up the front door and threw this magnificent piece of equipment across the road. This was an eye-opening experience for me. Doc turned around to see what expression I had on my

face. The laughter began, and it has never stopped."

Laughlin says Doc's organizational skills took on a life of their own on that desk. Doc says that just before his retirement he threw out nearly 3,000 sale books from years past, many of which had made their home in piles on Doc's old metal desk. But when a breeder called asking for a picture of a specific animal, either Reed or Doc could provide what was needed.

Building strength

Howell Wheaton, Columbia, Mo., says Doc has been instrumental in making Missouri the association it is today. "He was so well-respected out of the state, which I think helped us a lot. He was able to work with all these people," Wheaton says of breeders from across the United States. "When we would elect delegates, he always had his ear to the ground, knew what was going on and was able to work with the other states so they would support our candidates."

Laughlin and many others call Doc a "master politician."

"He's never a king, but he's a king maker," Laughlin says of Doc's technique of supporting others.

Doc's ability to connect with breeders on the grassroots level truly has been the foundation of his leadership. His philosophy, that every breeder counts no matter if they have one cow or 1,000, is well-known by Missouri breeders.

"He was a good people worker. He was able to start doing things and get people to pretty much go along with him, and I think

that was one of his attributes," Wheaton says of Doc as a fieldman. "A lot of that came from the fact that he treated everybody pretty much alike, because the grassroots [people] were his strong support."

Wheaton says Doc embraced the membership, from the youngest junior member to the oldest long-time breeder.

Young at heart

Doc is known for his big heart when it comes to youth. While he doesn't have children of his own,

Missouri Angus breeders say Doc has thousands of "Angus kids." Brockman says



► In 2001 Doc was inducted into the Angus Heritage Foundation. After being recognized at the American Angus Association Annual Banquet in Louisville, Ky., Angus enthusiasts who have benefited from Doc's mentoring gathered for a photo.

the way he related to youth, no matter what the age and no matter what the need, is something that is very special in Doc's character.

"When you needed more motivation, he could provide that motivation. That would be the biggest thing he ever did for me," Brockman says. Doc supported him and was instrumental in helping Brockman find the courage and strength to run for the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) Board, of which he was vice chairman in 1995.

Brockman has returned to his family farm and continues to produce Angus cattle. He says Doc was a grandfather figure to many juniors, and he has fond memories of being around Doc.

Doc passed the Brockmere Farm in direct route to the Ozark Empire Fair each year, Brockman says, and one summer he got caught.

"My sister was the Missouri Angus Queen, so I was going to take her down there to hand out ribbons and do all the regular queenly duties," Brockman remembers. Just as brother and sister were putting their suitcases in the trunk, they saw Doc drive by and thought they should carpool with him. "We only rode 30 minutes of a four-hour trip alone, and the whole rest of the time my sister and I rode down with Doc. I did the driving, and he was just glad to do it and glad to have the company. We tagged along with him and Don (Laughlin) the rest of the week."

Growing up as a junior member and remaining in the breed today has allowed Darla Eggers, Mexico, Mo., to appreciate what Doc always "just took care of" for Missouri breeders.

"He has always had a love for the kids and the junior association," Eggers says. "He was always there to help us with our projects and activities. You could tell he genuinely cared about us and took a sincere interest in whatever we did — collectively as an association and individually as people.

"I can still see him, in one of his first years on the job, at our junior dance/social at the preview show," she continues. "I don't think he missed dancing to a single song all night. He was a big kid!"

John Moffitt, Kirksville, Mo., breeder and 2003-2004 Missouri president, grew up in the community with Doc.

"Doc always took time to make a kid feel good," Moffitt says. "As a child, I attended a country school that was only a quarter-mile from our house. I can remember many times walking home from school and Doc

stopping to give me a ride, even if I was almost home. The ride didn't mean nearly as much to me as getting to see Doc and receiving the handful of caramel candy he would give me."

Wouldn't miss it for the world

Doc loves a good auction as much as he loves his Angus steaks. Doc traveled across the state tacking 50,000-60,000 miles per year on his vehicles to get to the many sales and events. The finances weren't always there for him to find a motel room, so he spent many nights sleeping in his Ford Bronco.

Doc has many stories of ringing for auctioneers across the state. He even went to auctioneer school to become a better crier. Meier says Doc has helped many young ringmen and auctioneers in the state of Missouri and the Midwest get their starts. "It's just his nature to be kind, helpful and thoughtful for anybody who's concerned," Meier adds.

"He's been a good ringman. At one of our first sales we had, we were fortunate to have him as a ringman because we had a brand new auctioneer. It was his first sale, and Doc Smith was there helping him," Meier continues. "Doc ended up buying the first seven lots of the sale just to help the auctioneer get going. And, after that, [the sale] turned out to be very successful."

Rural way of life

Moffitt says Doc can't help but find a way to support others and says, it's "maybe a little like a disease or an addiction. Doc has always been a community-type person. His educational background no doubt could have taken him to a far more lucrative career. However, his love of cattle and the rural community took him down other roads."

Doc enjoys small-town living, and he can be found at the community-owned café during most noon hours.

"Doc brought his love of cattle, community and kids to all of the Angus breeders. He served our local community as a veterinarian through all of my youth. Like most rural communities, there is always need for leaders and workers. Doc is always both. He umpired our ball games, supported our 4-H projects, school functions and all other worthwhile community projects," Moffitt says.



► Doc's trademark is his red suspenders.

Doc officially ended his tenure with the Missouri Angus Association in February, but it won't be the last time he spends his time with Angus breeders.

Doc's wife, Evelyn, has been a member of the American Angus Association since 1932. His first Angus heifer, purchased as an FFA project, put him in the Angus cattle business in 1947. The couple lives on Evelyn's childhood farm, and they still wake up each morning knowing there are Angus cows to feed and tend.

"I'll probably still go to a few cattle sales. We've still got a few cows at the farm. I'll probably fight with the old lady more than anything," Doc says, jokingly, and adds they've been fighting for 51 years. Only for a moment, Doc gets serious and admits they get along great. "I run one way, and she runs the other."

Missouri Angus breeders put together a Feb. 7 sale to thank Doc for all of his support. Nearly 100 consignments were dedicated, including cow-calf pairs, replacement heifers, semen packages, embryo packages, art prints, a puppy and even pumpkin bread.

Laughlin says the number of people who came to the sale speaks volumes for the respect Missourians have for Doc, and adds, "a lot of the people who were there wouldn't have come if it weren't to support Doc."

