

# A Very Four-tunate Family

Double your pleasure, double your fun, but quadruple?

Story & photos by *Alaina Burt*

**F**our on the floor and four-wheel drive translate into power. Using four stars denotes a good rating. Large roads have four lanes, and everyone wants to know the answer to the \$64,000 question. Indiana's Rieker family knows the strength of quad power.

Greg and Julie Rieker live in Columbus, Ind., and are the proud parents of five children. Their oldest, Christoph, is 17 and preparing for his

senior year of high school. Next come four soon-to-be sixth graders — Zachary, Baron, Steven and Katarina, all born Oct. 8, 1992. These four are often referred to as the quads. Their parents accompanied the vivacious 11-year-olds to this year's National Junior Angus Show (NJAS), along with Julie's parents, Jerry and Monica Otte.

This year marked the quads' fifth NJAS, but they have only been showing cattle since 2002. In 1999 the family traveled to the NJAS in Tulsa, Okla., to see what exactly the NJAS entailed. That first year, Christoph entered posters, but decided to compete with cattle at the NJAS in Des

Moines, Iowa, in 2000. Showing cattle and attending the NJAS has been a family affair ever since.

## 4WD family power

Having four children the same age has its advantages when it comes to competition. At the NJAS, the quads found their competitive edge by joining together and participating in the junior fresh meats division of the Auxiliary-sponsored All-American *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) Cook-Off.

The Rieker family has participated in two Cook-Off competitions in previous years, placing second both times. This year their team took home first in showmanship and first overall in the junior fresh meats division.

All of the quads like this competition. Zachary starts, "You make people laugh and you ..."

"get to taste the meat when you're done," Baron interrupts.

Imagine how helpful it is to have eight helping hands to feed, wash and care for cattle. The picture gets even better when it

comes to fitting a heifer for the showing.

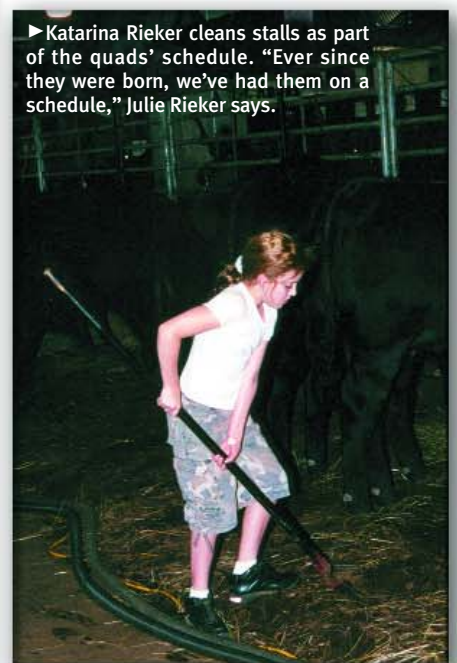
"Fitting legs we learned from Mom at preview this year," Baron says. When preparing Katarina's heifer Saturday of the NJAS, each grabbed a comb and adhesive and began demonstrating the skills their mom taught them, with Katarina and Zachary on one side, Baron and Steven on the other.

Katarina says she likes grooming and putting shiny stuff on faces because that's her part in getting heifers ready for the showing.

Along with participating in the Cook-Off, the quads also competed in this year's



► **Above and right:** With four sets of hands, getting a heifer ready for the showing is a breeze. The quads learned how to fit legs from their mom at Indiana's preview show.



► Katarina Rieker cleans stalls as part of the quads' schedule. "Ever since they were born, we've had them on a schedule," Julie Rieker says.

National Junior Angus Association (NJAA)/*Angus Journal* Photo Contest. Previously, the four have entered the poster contest. At next year's NJAS in Denver, Colo., Julie and her family are going to observe the team sales competition in hopes of one day having another powerful family team in that contest as well.

### Four-star rating

The Rieker family has a positive outlook on the NJAA and showing cattle.

"We just show for fun," Zachary says.

Julie realizes the numerous logistical challenges associated with having four kids in the showing at once. To avoid that situation, the quads usually don't compete against each other. Their mom tries to get heifers of different ages, Baron explains.

Brotherly support in the ring is sometimes helpful, Katarina says. "Sometimes I feel better when I'm with them because they'd be there to help me."

This year, Steven says, he was just happy that his heifer behaved in the showing. That's important for them because from the judge's viewpoint it's hard to see any of the quads, since their animals outsize them.

Each child has different criteria for picking an animal to show. Steven says he wanted to show a bull this year, but he decided not to because his mom would rather he show a heifer. Zachary is showing one of his grandpa's heifers this year. In Christoph's absence, his bred-and-owned heifer has become Katarina's, who says she tends to like smaller, more tame heifers.

"Baron likes aggressive heifers; he doesn't show any fear," Greg says.

And Baron is the only person his heifer will walk for, Julie remarks.



► **Above:** It takes a large crew to attend the NJAS with quadruplets. The quads' family includes (back row, from left) Jerry and Monica Otte, grandparents; Julie and Greg Rieker, parents; and (front row, from left), Zachary, Baron, Steven and Katarina Rieker.

The quads received their Bronze awards this year, and Zachary says he is looking forward to getting the Silver and Gold awards.

"You want all three," he explains. "It shows you've worked to earn them."

The hard work the four put in at home and throughout the year pays off when they attend the NJAS. Steven says he enjoys feeding. "Our cattle get to know us better, and if the judges ask us what kind of feed we use, we'll know," he explains.

At the NJAS Katarina likes meeting new people, sliding down railings and seeking out candy at the numerous herdsmanhood booths, she says. Baron likes getting into mischief, including dumping a manure cart and having water fights, Julie says. "My first thought was, 'Baron did it.' I knew."

It all boils down to having fun. Steven says he likes trying to get Baron wet in water fights. Zachary says he just likes taking care of his own cow.

### Four-lane road to the future

It's not hard to see that Zachary, Baron, Steven and Katarina are going places. Already they have an idea of what they would like to do when they grow up. Before looking at the future, it's important to look at what's influenced them up to this point in their lives.

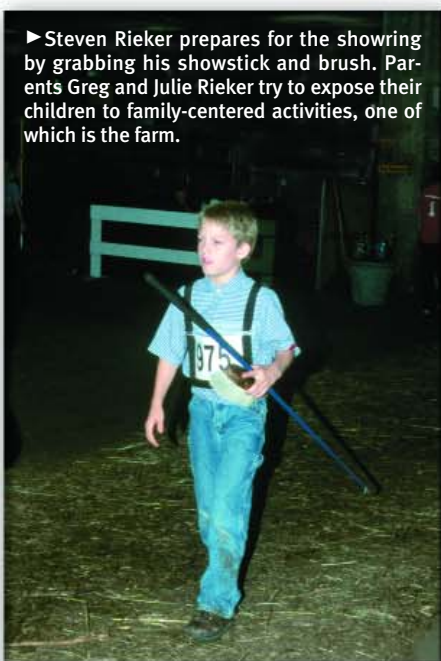
The adventure of raising and showing cattle began in 1989 when Jerry Otte, Greg and Julie purchased four Angus cow-calf pairs and one bull. With that purchase came a natural progression into the NJAA. Julie and Greg own land next to the Ottes' farm, Red Barn Angus, and work the land together with her parents. The family lives about 25 miles from the farm, and they commute there quite often.

Katarina says she is thankful for her grandpa's involvement. "I'm the only one who knows how to tie a cow out of all four of us," she says with obvious pride. "My grandpa taught me how to tie."

The NJAA became important to Christoph, who was the first to show cattle and helped the quads find their footing. Each of them looks up to Christoph. His first contribution to his younger brothers and sister was when he was 6 years old.

"Christoph really chipped in and helped when he could," Greg reflects about his oldest son. "It had to be hard on him, too. He

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► Steven Rieker prepares for the showing by grabbing his showstick and brush. Parents Greg and Julie Rieker try to expose their children to family-centered activities, one of which is the farm.

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handled it really well.” Christoph helped teach the quads how to wash and brush cattle, as well as how to lead their very first heifers.

This past year Christoph joined the 38th military police (MP) company of the Indiana Army National Guard. He was unable to attend the NJAS

because he was at boot camp in Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.

Zachary says that when he grows up, he would like to be in the Air Force and fly airplanes. He’s looking forward to going to the NJAS next year in Denver, Colo., because his family is going to stop at the Air Force Academy.

Katarina says Zachary is good at sports. Football and basketball are two of his favorites. At home, Zachary likes playing outside and working with animals.

Baron, the second oldest of the quads, is a ham for the camera. When he’s at home he likes to drive John Deere tractors, grill steaks and wash heifers. When Baron grows up, he says he’d like to be a farmer and a soldier in the Army.

“Baron is more of the show type,” Katarina says, pointing out that he’s not more experienced; he just seems like it.

Baron is “a live wire, a lot like my father,” Greg adds.

Steven says he would like to become a sergeant in the Marine Corps. “[You] get to fight for your country and you get to see action. [You] get to go to boot camp like Christoph did,” he explains. Steven enjoys shooting, which he learned from his dad and oldest brother.

“Steven is really into sports,” Katarina says, adding that he enjoys wrestling the most. “He has a lot of enthusiasm for it.”

All three brothers have been wrestling for one year, explains Greg, who adds that Steven is a lot like Julie’s father, Jerry, who is very calm.

Being the only girl in the family, Katarina says she sometimes wishes she had a sister. When she grows up, she would like to become a veterinarian, or a nurse like her mom. Katarina and her mom have a special bond, and every fall they have a mother-daughter getaway. But the special treatment stops there. Katarina often receives the brunt of her brothers’ tricks and teases. At home she enjoys brushing the family’s two dogs and crafting.

### The big question

How does this family make everything work? It’s not easy, they’ll tell you. Greg is a senior chemical engineer at Tredegar, a company that works with plastics. Julie is a registered nurse at Riley Children’s Hospital, where she works in the newborn intensive care unit (ICU). When she thinks about her family, she laughs. “I think it’s special, but I guess I consider myself a mom of five kids.”

The key to keeping this family moving in the right direction is keeping them on schedule. “Ever since they were born we’ve had them on a schedule, and they function so much better,” Julie says. Even at shows they have a routine to get chores accomplished.

As a father, Greg is concerned that each child receives enough attention. “You know kids are getting short-changed [compared to] what a single child would have.”

Julie adds, “I try to treat them like they’re each individual.”

Looking back, the most fearful time is behind them. Greg recalls his feelings of apprehension were most intense early in the quads’ life, at age 2, when they started exploring and getting into things. It’s a whole new experience with every age they reach, he says, adding, “As they’ve gotten older, it’s gotten easier because they can take care of themselves.”

Strong family bonds also help. “[We] try to do a lot of family-centered activities. Obviously, the farm is one of them,” Greg states.

It’s good to know that agriculture is a safe place for this family to live and grow. What’s even more special is that they have found a home where each individual can shine within the NJAA.

► Zachary and Katarina, along with their mom, Julie, help set the table in preparation for their third Cook-Off competition.



PHOTO BY CORINNE PATTERSON



► The quads competed in the junior fresh meat division representing Indiana. The team took first in showmanship and first overall with their *SpongeBob™ SquarePants* skit.