

Calm, Cool & Collected

Junior Angus advisors from across the country share their behind-the-scenes tips for helping participants have an enjoyable week at the NJAS.

Story & photos by *Kindra Gordon*

► Show committee chairwoman Carla Malson advises future show hosts to delegate assignments to volunteers and advises against micromanaging.



While there was record-breaking heat in Denver, Colo., during the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) July 17-23, participants, parents and advisors were able to stay calm, relatively cool and collected thanks to heaps of advance planning and preparation for the event.

As chair of the committee responsible for organizing the weeklong competition, Carla Malson of Parma, Idaho, says her committee kept one primary goal in mind during planning — for everyone to have a great time.

“We didn’t want anyone to worry about how things were getting done behind the scenes. We just wanted to make it easy and enjoyable for everyone who attended,” says Malson, who operates Malson Angus Ranch with her husband, Mark, and their five children — three of whom participated in this year’s NJAS.

Just a few of the many details to help the show flow smoothly included having extra volunteers in the unloading area to assist when cattle arrived, providing nearly \$100,000 in free meals and

snacks to participants throughout the week, as well as offering an activity area just for younger kids with movies, games, beanbags, and a carnival-style jumping tent and cushioned slide.

Malson reports that three years of planning went into the 2005 NJAS, but she admits she had one slight advantage. Since

Denver hosted the NJAS in 2001, she was able to tap a lot of the same volunteers and committee members. “We had a lot of committee members in place, and from that experience many of us knew what we liked and how to go about putting this together,” she says.

States plan ahead, too

Many of the state junior Angus association advisors share that their key to an enjoyable, low-stress week is also due to advance planning.

Mississippi’s Connie Walker and Cary Childs, who were named junior advisors of the year in 2002, say they begin planning for the NJAS nearly a year in advance and aim to keep participants informed. “We give the juniors a list of potential costs and what to expect if they attend. The key is keeping them informed so they know what to do to get ready,” says Walker, who is an Extension 4-H youth agent.

She and Childs, who have been the state’s advisors for 11 years, put out a quarterly newsletter to help maintain the communication flow between advisors, parents and juniors. They intend to develop a Web site to provide information about the NJAS and other activities to junior association members in the near future.

With the communication that takes place before the NJAS, Walker says the week goes much smoother. “The juniors know what to do when they get here because they know what we expect of them,” she says. This year Mississippi had 10 juniors and 24 animals make the 1,200- to 1,400-mile trip to Denver.

Walker and Childs say the juniors attending the NJAS from their state this year were “old pros.” Childs, who operates Cary Farms, adds that parents are also important in keeping everyone on track for the week. And, when newer members attend an NJAS, those who have more experience are always willing to pitch in and help them along.

Regarding the advisor’s role, Walker says it is important to be organized and to be



► Cary Childs (left) and Connie Walker, who were named junior advisors of the year in 2002, say they begin planning for the NJAS nearly a year in advance and aim to keep their Mississippi juniors informed.

► Virginia’s 15 participants were really paying attention to how things were done so they could take some of those ideas back to their state for next year as they host the 2006 Eastern Regional in Harrisonburg, says junior advisor Dinah Johnston.



► Missouri advisors Tracy (left) and Todd Ragsdale say trying to make sure everyone gets enough sleep so they are in a good mood is important for a smooth week.



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consistent with the things she does. "That way the parents and juniors know what to expect from me as well."

Schedules and organization

From Missouri, junior advisors Todd and Tracy Ragsdale, Ragsdale Cattle Co., Paris, Mo., credit a great junior officer team for keeping their state contingent of 45 kids and 78 head of cattle organized in Denver.

On the first day of the show, Missouri hosted a meeting where all participants from the state signed up for two shifts during the week on a work schedule. Responsibilities during the work shift included making sure the cattle and stalls were clean, keeping the aisles swept and manning the state's booth.

The Ragsdales, who are in their third year as advisors for their state junior Angus association, also had their 16-year-old daughter and 13-year-old son participating in NJAS activities. From a parent's point of view, they say trying to make sure everyone gets enough sleep so they are in a good mood is important for a smooth week.

Todd adds, "There is a lot of work during the week, but we try to give everybody some time to do their own fun things as well, so they enjoy being here. That's important."

Tracy says the help of other advisors, parents and past advisors is also an important element in keeping things flowing smoothly. "Everyone just pitches in, and that helps," she says.

Virginia junior Angus advisor Dinah Johnston reports that her state also sets schedules to get everyone ready for NJAS. They host a pre-show workday where all the kids get together, and everyone signs up to be on a committee for the events and contests.

"This year we strived to get the juniors to develop their own system of organization," says Johnston, who is finishing her third and final year as one of Virginia's junior advisors. "This event is not about parents and advisors. It is about the kids learning responsibility, because someday they will be out on their own."

She credits the state's junior officer team with taking the reins and using their leadership skills to delegate responsibilities to participants. "As advisors we are always here in the background, but we want the kids to work this out, and that's what we allow them to do," Johnston says.

She adds that camaraderie and teamwork are also big keys to success. "We have juniors spread out across the state, but they come to

2005 NJAS by the numbers

Number of juniors exhibiting cattle — 694

Approximate number of entries exhibited in live show — 1,053

Approximate number of contest participants — 300

Approximate amount of money (including donated food items) spent for meals — \$100,000

Number of states with participants at NJAS — 36

Approximate amount of money raised to host the show — \$225,000

Preparation time to organize the show — 3 years

State with the most exhibitors entered — Kansas (66)

State with the least number of exhibitors entered — Rhode Island (1)

this event each year and they gel. Herdsmanship is important to them, and they work together," she notes.

As part of that unity, Johnston adds that Virginia juniors who don't bring animals still pitch in and help in the barn and around the showing. She also witnessed many of the state's older members helping younger, new members with contests and events.

Virginia's 15 participants at this year's NJAS also had a vested interest in the event, as they will be hosting the 2006 Eastern Regional in Harrisonburg, Va., with the theme "Virginia is for Angus Lovers." Johnston says the kids were really paying attention to how things were done so they could take some of those ideas back to their state for next year.

Most importantly, she emphasizes, there needs to be a focus on fun at the event, too. "We try to follow a schedule, but this has to be a fun and enjoyable experience at the same time. We tell our juniors the cattle and stalls must be taken care of, they need to be on time to events, but they should also have fun while they are here."

An adrenaline rush

By week's end, everyone at the NJAS is more than a little tired, but participants have also had the week of a lifetime. Malson says she was pleased most of the activities went according to plan.

Asked how she gets through such an overwhelming week, she says, "Most of the work goes into it prior. Once you arrive, it is just the small details. You go on adrenaline." With three kids of her own showing and participating in events during the week, Malson thanked her husband for being a huge help.

As parting advice to future NJAS committees, Malson says, "Use the people who want to volunteer. Delegate — don't micromanage, or you'll be over the edge."



PHOTO BY SHEILA STANNARD

► Volunteers were available in the unloading area to assist when cattle arrived.



PHOTO BY SHAUNA ROSE HERMEL

► An activity area entertained youngsters with movies, games, beanbags and a carnival-style jumping tent and cushioned slide.



► Sponsors provided nearly \$100,000 in free meals and snacks to participants throughout the week.



PHOTO BY SHAUNA ROSE HERMEL