

Easterner Shines in the West

Chad Hahn wins Maryland the Jack White Showmanship Award Buckle for the first time.

Story & photos by Jen Biser

The highlight of many National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) members' Angus careers is representing their state and competing before their peers and Angus breeders across the country in the National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest.

It's a chance that only happens once, and each candidate must first win a seat within his or her state in order to compete in the national contest, which is conducted each year in conjunction with the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS).

With only two representatives from each state allowed to compete, competition is

tough. And, only one showman each year can lay claim to the Jake White Memorial Belt Buckle that signifies a national champion.

The only way is up

This year's winner has been working toward this goal ever since he was 8 years old, showing in 4-H. Chad Hahn, 20, of Rocky Ridge, Md., is this year's champion.

"It just feels great. Today was just luck, but this tops all other achievements," Chad says. "I have been wanting this since I was a little kid, probably since my second year after I started showing, and I think it is great to take it back to Maryland."

Chester Kerns, Chad's stepdad, says, "In this competition, you need all of the luck you can get."

Chad says showmanship offers a lot more than the chance to show yourself — it gives him the opportunity to present his animal and the hard work he has put into it.

"Showmanship is the main reason I really

like showing," Chad says. "If you can't show your heifer, then you might as well not even take her out in the ring. Knowing how to show lets you show her off to the judge."

Chad has learned how to overcome many obstacles through his time as a junior. Perhaps one of the most common has been "nerve control."

"Whenever I go into the showring, I get too tense, and I work myself too hard," Chad says. "I have had to learn to go in there and relax."

Setting reasonable expectations is important to the success of any goal, and Chad has followed that plan to realize his greatest achievement.

"I have learned not to expect too much too fast, but to go in there and go for what you would least like to improve upon, and just go from there. Take little steps, and, in working toward the little steps, you'll accomplish what you want," Chad says. "If you try to change too much it will be hard, because you might end up getting choked



► **Above:** Showmanship winner Chad Hahn says controlling his nerves before a competition is a challenge he has had to overcome.

► **Right:** Showmanship is a true test of one's ability to present him- or herself in the best possible light, without names or reputations. Identified only by a number, contestants take their showsticks, experience and luck to the showing.



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up, and it won't end up how you want."

Chad's mom, Patty Kerns, says, "Chad knows what he does wrong as well as anyone. He is his own worst critic, but he learns from his mistakes. He gets very tense when it comes down to the final, but yesterday and today, he looked very relaxed out there."

Patty remembers when Chad first started competing in showmanship; he stood at the bottom of the class. "We know what it is to be last," she says. "He's just tried to improve from that, and when you're on the bottom, there's only one way to go."

A shared experience

In offering advice to younger showmen, Chad says, "The best thing to do is to watch the older people and watch what they do, take pointers, and then practice at home."

"I think it would be a good idea to have someone do a video about showmanship, and then let kids watch it and learn from it," he adds. "The showmanship clinic that they had out here was a good idea for the younger kids."

Chad has shared his knowledge of the showing and of showmanship with those around him, and with one person in particular — his 13-year-old cousin, Jessica Clarke.

"When Jessica first started showing, she wasn't doing well. She would 'fall asleep' in the showing and not pay attention. So, her mother asked me if I would help her out. Ever since I did, she has been winning her division in showmanship, not only in the state, but in the region as well. Now, she knows what to do, and she's going to be a good showman when she gets older," Chad says.

Jessica says, "Just about every show, Chad goes up to the ring with me and helps me. He tells me what I need to do to make the animal look better, so that I can place better. Even in showmanship, he goes up and gives me pointers."

She says Chad helps her out at home and teaches her things she needs to know in the showing. "One of the things that I just learned was how to walk a heifer into a setup, and that has helped me a lot and kept me from picking at their feet," she explains.



► Jessica Clarke (left) congratulates her cousin Chad Hahn at the conclusion of the National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest, the finals of which were Saturday, July 23, in Denver, Colo. Chad has been assisting Jessica with her showmanship skills.

Jessica says she definitely intends to follow in her role model's footsteps and compete in the national showmanship contest when she gets older. She entered the NJAS creative writing contest with an essay about her Angus role model, Chad.

Jessica says she wants to help other members, like her younger sister, in the same way Chad has helped her.

Patty said she thinks it helped him to realize just how much the younger kids look up to Chad by Jessica writing about him.

"It makes me feel good about myself, that I actually did something to help somebody out, to help them reach their goals," Chad says.

Setting goals is what has driven Chad throughout his career with the NJAA, but his next goal will be outside the showing.

"I have one more year to show at the junior Angus show, and next year I am going to just relax and have fun. I have hit my goals," Chad says of his NJAA career. "I might like to get a division or reserve division at the national show, but I know that there is a lot of competition. I am not going to set too many goals for next year. I am happy where I'm at."

His next goal, he says, is to build a top-quality herd, with some nice heifers to sell and to retain for his own herd.

Family support

Chad Hahn comes from a 26-acre farm in Rocky Ridge, Md., where he and his family raise 20 head of registered Angus cattle. Chad has been showing in National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) events since he was 9 years old and has been attending the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) since 1997.

"We do this for a hobby because we enjoy it," his mother, Patty Kerns, says. "We enjoy the people, and he's been able to show some of his own bred-and-owned animals and built his herd, and he does very well with them."

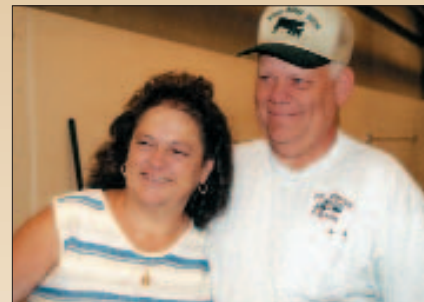
Chad's involvement has been and still is a family affair; the initial reason for raising cattle was to help him pay for school. His stepfather, Chester Kerns, agrees as Patty says, "We've never bought an animal or put a dollar into them. We've put in a lot of time, but he has bought all of the feed and all his equipment. He has built it on his own."

Chad spent a semester at Frederick Community College and decided that a degree wasn't for him. Since he was 16, Chad has been working full-time and is currently an employee at Keilholtz Trucking Service Inc., owned by his grandfather.

"Kids gotta have their parents behind them some, as far as I am concerned," Patty says. "You don't need a degree to be successful, as long as it is something you love. It's been a lot of fun; we've enjoyed it. His goal is to finish the junior Angus program, and I hate to see him get out next year," Patty says. "Chester and I plan on still going to the shows because we have two nieces who are still showing, and we are going to follow them through."

Chester says the greatest thing about the NJAA has been meeting people from all over who are kind and willing to help.

"It means a lot to come out here, and if not for the parents, a lot of kids wouldn't be here right now," Chad says. "The support that I have received has been the biggest thing that has helped me achieve my goals. It's not about winning, it's about helping and supporting the younger kids who look up to you."



► Showmanship winner Chad Hahn's parents, Patty (left) and Chester, say they have assisted him with time and moral support, but Chad has built a financially self-sustaining Angus program.