

# The Write Way



**N**ational Junior Angus Association (NJAA) members explored topics about themselves, the NJAA and the Angus business as a whole for the fourth annual Creative Writing Contest.

Writers in the junior division were asked to describe their role models within the junior Angus program, while contestants in the intermediate division were to explain how involvement in leadership activities is vital to success in the NJAA and in life. Entries to the

senior division evaluated current issues in the beef industry to forecast the future of the Angus breed.

Essays were judged on content, organization and style.

Thirty-nine entries were submitted this year. The following are the top essays from each division.

## Junior Division:

*Topic: Who has been your role model in the junior Angus programs and why?*

by **Tanner Rayl**, Hutchinson, Kan.

Have you ever known someone who you just seem to connect with? Someone who has interests the same as yours? Someone who enjoys teaching you, and that you like being around? This person to me is John McCurry. He knows a lot about the business breed of Angus and has taught many others about this. Let me tell you why John is my role model.

Three years ago I decided to begin my registered Angus herd. I was clueless of what I was doing in the beginning, until I was introduced to John McCurry. He sold me two registered Angus cow-calf pairs. With most business transactions such as this, the last you see of the seller is when the

cattle are delivered. Not in this case.

John taught me how to feed and work with the cattle to tame them.

**John has a way of helping and advising me that builds my self-confidence.**

After the calves were born, he came over and helped me weigh them. As they grew, John was a frequent visitor, giving me hands-on advice about feeding, breeding, showing and clipping my cattle.

He kept me informed about shows and deadlines, even hauling my cattle for me.

He has encouraged me to be active in all the state and national junior Angus events. John has a way of helping and advising me that builds my self-confidence.

I truly admire John McCurry because he



**Tanner Rayl**

has been active in the Kansas Junior Angus Association and the National Junior Angus Association, serving on the national Board. He is a great mentor, because I believe he knows *everything* there is to know about Angus cattle. John is always good to

put up with me tagging along with him, both at shows and around the farm.

My herd has now grown to eight head of Angus cattle, of which I will be showing three at this year's National Junior Angus Show in Denver, Colo. I will also be competing in many of the other contests thanks to John's encouragement and influence. I know John will be there also ... he always is! That is why he is my role model.

## Intermediate Division:

*Topic: Explain how your involvement in leadership programs is vital to your success in the NJAA and in life.*

by **Allyson McGuire**, Fort Smith, Ark.

Participation in leadership programs within both the National Junior Angus Association and elsewhere is vital to my success in Angus and in life. Not only has it developed me into the person I am today, it has also inspired me to reach out and be a leader.

Fortunately, I belong to a family where the success and support of Angus programs is unmistakable. I've had the unique opportunity to grow up in two very different environments, living a double life as "cowgirl" and "city girl" at the same time.

Unlike any of the 1,500 students in my high school, I show

cattle and have been involved in the Angus business for most of my life. The experiences I've encountered and friendships I've formed as a junior Angus member helped develop my personality and confidence. At the same time, the NJAA is providing me with skills that are sharpening my sense of purpose and direction in life. I feel these achievements wouldn't have been entirely possible without involvement in the leadership programs.

Attending a high school where 4-H and FFA were not supported and rarely understood, I gained a great deal of education through membership in the



**Allyson McGuire**

NJAA. I attribute my success in high school directly to involvement in leadership programs within the NJAA and elsewhere.

Through attending leadership conferences and training sessions, I found a sense of independence I'd never had before. Because of these experiences, I took opportunities presented to me and became a leader for my peers. I surprised even myself and was elected a class president, a student council member, and a leader in other clubs and activities. Without the chance to develop through leadership programs, my personal accomplishments in high school wouldn't have been as significant.

Just as importantly, my success in the junior Angus programs increased as a result of my participation in leadership roles. Through these leadership opportunities, I have learned how to be a leader from the



**Senior Division:**

*Topic: As you evaluate the current issues in the beef industry and the information available to you as an Angus breeder, where do you see the Angus breed in five years?*

by **Emily McCurry, Burrton, Kan.**

Shiny new trucks! Loans being paid off! Expansion of farm operations. All signs of a profitable beef industry — the Angus breed included. Good times have prevailed in recent years and we are enjoying the rewards thus far. Considering how entrenched we get in day-to-day events, envisioning the industry and the Angus breed five years from now requires a more omniscient viewpoint if we want to see these trends continue.

Jim McAdams, current National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) president, addresses the broader issue with the following thoughts well worth repeating: "... the future lies in building demand by producing the safest, highest-quality beef anywhere and doing it better than anybody. This increasing demand will allow for increased production and increased profits. The goal is to increase demand faster than we increase supplies, thus allowing our industry to grow and prosper." The same can be said for the Angus breed — grow and prosper.

The Angus breed has risen to its current



**Emily McCurry**

market share due to the visionary leadership of the American Angus Association. Let's take a trip down memory lane to see when Angus started to "differentiate" itself from the other beef breeds. First, Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) was created when the industry lowered the quality standards of beef to create more "Choice"

product. Secondly, the Association performance programs were enhanced and pursued as a result of the loss of market share to the "exotic" breeds of cattle that were imported into the U.S. in the late 1960s. Third, the Association went to great lengths to gather and document their gene pool with information to allow Angus breeders the ability to accurately select and breed cattle to perform more efficiently from conception to consumption. This database is what allowed the Angus breeders of America to create the most predictable cattle that the world has ever seen. All these were in response to market trends that could have made our breed less desirable in the marketplace.

So, how does this affect the Angus breed

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in the next five years and beyond? According to Mark Gardiner, Gardiner Angus Ranch, Ashland, Kan., the ability of the American Angus Association to "improve, enhance and, most importantly for the membership, to use the genetic information to compete in

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example of others and now serve as a leader for my state Angus association.

I started out as a very involved member of the Arkansas Junior Angus Association, then held the offices of reporter, historian, secretary, vice president, and currently serve as president. My success in the NJAA is a direct result of attending numerous Leaders Engaged in Angus Development (LEAD) conferences and National Junior Angus Shows and events. The opportunity to make friends from around the country has contributed to my achievements and presented me with goals for the future.

My involvement in leadership programs

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has been vital to my success in the NJAA because it has proven to me that I am capable of anything I work hard enough to accomplish. Each year, I reach new goals in the NJAA and in life. These stepping-stones can be attributed to reaching out and accepting help, using the skills I've learned while being open to new ways of learning. Without the motivation of other leaders to create a spark within me, I doubt I could possibly be where I am today.

As I evaluate my life so far, measuring the success I have gained from leadership programs, I realize it is impossible to place a value on

such a thing. It is apparent to me that what I have gained from studying leaders in every setting, in every shape and form, to actually

learning to become a leader myself, is priceless. I realize that the only way to truly understand how greatly I have been influenced by my involvement in leadership is to give back and watch new leaders learn and develop, just like I did. My success in the NJAA will ultimately be measured by what I'm able to give back to this organization that's done so much for me.

Leadership programs not only teach the skills of a leader, but they encourage greater aspirations of their participants and continue to raise the bar for success in young people today. Without the example set through leadership programs, many young people would be left without guidance and inspiration to become greater leaders. In my experience, my success in the NJAA and in life has been greatly influenced by accepting the challenge of leadership opportunities. My rewards are a sense of pride, confidence and motivation.



► Writing about their role models within the junior Angus program, winners of the junior division of the NJAS Creative Writing Contest are **Tanner Rayl** (left), Hutchinson, Kan., first, and **Kimberly McGuire**, Fort Smith, Ark., second. Not pictured is **Joy Powers**, Moneta, Va., third.



► Winners in the intermediate division of the NJAS Creative Writing Contest are (from left) **Allyson McGuire**, Fort Smith, Ark., first; **Britney Creamer**, Montrose, Colo., second; and **Gretchen Ettredge**, Pilot Point, Texas, third. Writers in the intermediate division explained how involvement in leadership activities is vital to success in the NJAA and in life.



► In the senior division of the NJAS Creative Writing Contest, competitors evaluated current issues in the beef industry to forecast the future of the Angus breed. Winners include (from left) **Emily McCurry**, Burrton, Kan., first; **Chelsea Frost**, Tallula, Ill., second; and **Tammy Ettredge**, Pilot Point, Texas, third.

the commercial marketplace, will be vital?"

The goal is set, so how do we get there? First, we have to address the stumbling blocks that hinder our progression, namely industry division, complacency and corporate competition.

Daunting tasks even for the best of organizations.

Complacency is easy to comprehend. When things are going well, why rock the boat? The cyclical nature of the cattle industry says otherwise. "With the cattle cycle continuing, lower prices will come eventually. With the lower prices comes lower revenue," says Barry Dunn, executive director and endowed chair for the King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management, who was quoted in the May 2005 issue of *Drovers*. "There's a whole package of things to improve productivity without increasing spending," says Dunn. Using the current tools of the American Angus Association benefits Angus producers and those purchasing Angus genetics. It behooves the Association to continue to evaluate and challenge itself to pursue tools that will continue to set the Angus breed apart by thinking "out of the box."

All tied up in knots. That summarizes the beef marketing strategy at this point in time and the second of our stumbling blocks to achieve future goals. "The industry is in limbo, guessing on when certain events will happen, waiting for judges to rule and policy to be set," according to Tom Toll, Kansas Livestock Association president, in his recent editorial in the May/June 2005 issue of the *Kansas Stockman*.

Toll continues by saying, "Lawsuits brought about by a vocal few have created a situation that questions the safety of all beef and throws sound science out the window in favor of perceived short-term economic gains. This has the potential to negatively impact our domestic market. It already has closed doors to our export markets, and has done nothing to positively enhance relationships with our trading partners."

These are current issues that will set policy for the beef industry, and

the Angus breed, for decades to come. As Gardiner states, "Regardless of which political group Angus breeders believe in, it behooves us all to work out our differences and work together, because with this division we erode what little political collateral that we do have."

The last stumbling block to achieving future goals for the Angus breed: corporate competition. As stated earlier, the American Angus Association and its leadership began the journey to differentiate itself from other beef breeds in the 1970s by initiating visionary programs, and the result is a powerful and accurate database and, ultimately, a genetic pool that gives a competitive advantage others would gladly like to own or control. This phenomenon already occurred in the pork and poultry industries that are controlled by a few. The beef industry is the only protein today that still allows everyone access to the genetic information that the industry demands. The Angus breed will have to compete with these information systems, and, ultimately, our ability to compete and have superior genetic selections systems will be the test of whether or not the American Angus Association and the Angus breed will survive.

The goal is set. How we get there depends on how we handle the stumbling blocks that hinder our progression — industry division, complacency and corporate competition. Daunting tasks, but with the leadership and foresight of the American Angus Association and other organizations, these will be addressed to allow for a profitable beef industry and a profitable future that will let us buy those shiny new trucks, pay off loans and expand farm operations.

