

A Champion's Drive

National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest reaches 50-year milestone.

by JD Rosman, communications intern

The year was 1985. "Go out and win it, don't sit back," were the final words 17-year-old Tim Fitzgerald heard from his brother before entering the ring for showmanship finals. Eight words he will never forget, which hit home and inspired him before competing in the National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest in Tulsa, Okla.

The prestigious event — offered to a junior member just once in his or her career — is often described as one of the highest honors in the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA). In 1985, Fitzgerald was named the breed's top showman.

"Angus showmanship is bigger than bringing home a championship banner,"

Fitzgerald says. "It's that next level, and it's a dream you can grab."

Now the herd manager at Cherry Knoll Farm Inc. in West Grove, Pa., Fitzgerald grew up on his family's ranch in Nebraska. He, along with his brother and sister, attended his first National Junior Heifer Show in Wichita, Kan., in 1980. In order to go, their parents required they walk their heifers one mile every morning, then wash and brush them dry for a month before the show.

"The work happens at home," Fitzgerald says. "If you truly want to go out and get it, all the work is done at home. The blood, sweat and tears comes down to who wants it the most."

The junior showmanship competition is a

tradition now 50 years in the making.

Decades of showmen, like Fitzgerald, have put their best foot forward on the national stage, vying for the coveted showmanship recognition. Talented showmen from across the country come together to represent their state and prove they have what it takes to stand among the top 15.

What is the ultimate prize? The top showman title and receiving the Dean Hurlbut Award.

The first of many

Flashback to July 1967 in Lexington, Ky., where the tradition began: a summer afternoon with an outdoor, grass arena at the All-American Angus Futurity.

"First of all, I was nervous," admits Dean Hurlbut, founder of the national showmanship competition. "We spent a lot of time figuring out the details and procedures, and how to host the competition."

The showmanship contest was the vision of the American Angus Association's first director of junior activities. Hurlbut had been with Angus for a decade in Saint Joseph, Mo., but this was a defining moment in his career. The first national junior show had not been hosted yet, and the NJAA was still gaining traction as the breed's youth organization. It was a day he will never forget.

Unbeknownst to Hurlbut at the time, details put in place during the 1967 contest would stay with the competition during the next 50 years. Participants still have to be nominated from their states; the dress code is the same, complete with similar show harnesses; and the top five showmen receive coveted silver bowls — the symbol of the highest level of showmanship caliber.

Throughout the years, showmanship styles and the cattle may have changed, but at the core, Hurlbut believes a strong showman has a few distinct qualities: "A good showman has always been calm, been in control of their animal and has always paid attention to their animal."

These are characteristics Fitzgerald says stand true today. Now with 40 years of showing experience, Fitzgerald understands what it takes to stand among the best of the best.

"A good showman becomes one with their



► Above: The first National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest was hosted in conjunction with The All-American Angus Breeders' Futurity in Lexington, Ky., in 1967. Sam Wylie III of Nottingham, Pa., won the first contest.

► Right: Tim Fitzgerald won top honors in the 1985 showmanship contest. Pictured are Jim Rentz, presenting a check from the Hamilton James Memorial Fund; Fitzgerald; Nellie Meinders, then American Angus Auxiliary president, presenting a silver bowl; and H.L. Moss, Green Country Animal Clipper Service, presenting a show stick to the winner.





► The top 15 finalists at the 2016 National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest are (from left) Jorli Hauge; Leslie Craig; Peyton Maddox; Taylor Nikkel; Savannah Schafer; Macy Perry, second; Lauren Schur; Haley Herzog; Gracia Ramp; Courtney Young, first; Braden Henricks, fourth; Abby Collison; John Knight, third; Michelle Bockelman; and Chase Anderson, fifth.

Winners named in showmanship competition

Courtney Young of Ventura, Iowa, claimed top honors in the 50th National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest July 9 in Grand Island, Neb. As top showman, Young was presented the Dean Hurlbut Award, named after the man who organized the first showmanship competition conducted July 1967 in Lexington, Ky.

Fifty-one junior members competed for the title during the 2016 National Junior Angus Show (NJAS). The field was narrowed to 15 during the preliminary round Thursday, July 7. Those 15 finalists competed for the top five spots Saturday, July 9.

Three judges evaluated the juniors on their skills while handling an animal, their ability to follow instructions, and evidence of courtesy and sportsmanship in the showing. This year's showmanship judges were Doug Satree, Montague, Texas; Jennifer Carrico, Redfield, Iowa; and Colt Keffer, Fort Collins, Colo.

Following Young in the top five were second place, Macy Perry, Prather, Calif.; third place, John Knight, Montpelier Station, Va.; fourth place, Braden Henricks, Anadarko, Okla.; and fifth place, Chase Anderson, Chrisman, Ill. The top five winners each received a silver Revere bowl and a monetary award from the Hamilton James Memorial Fund.

Rounding out the top 15 were Peyton Mattox, Lexington, Ga.; Abby Collison, Rockwell City, Iowa; Gracia Ramp, Yates City, Ill.; Taylor Nikkel, Maple Hill, Kan.; Leslie Craig, Harrodsburg, Ky.; Lauren Schur, Sabillasville, Md.; Jorli Hauge, Winona, Minn.; Savannah Schafer, Nehawka, Neb.; Michelle Bockelman, Napoleon, Ohio; and Haley Herzog, Robinson, Texas.

Those receiving honorable mentions were Reid McGuire, Waverly, Ala.; Haley Throne, Lexington, Ga.; Cheyenne Jones, Franklinton, La.; Matthew Antonio, Hydes, Md.; and Wesley Johnson, Pipestone, Minn.



► Courtney Young (center) receives the Dean Hurlbut Award and a silver Revere bowl in recognition of winning the 2016 National Junior Angus Showmanship Contest. Also pictured are contest creator Dean Hurlbut (left) and American Angus Auxiliary President Shally Rogen, presenting.

animal," he says. "Showmanship is basically the building blocks for actually showing your animal, and if you don't have those aligned correctly, boy, you don't give your animal a shot."

Fast-forward to 2016

A sea of black, white and red, showmanship contestants crowd together behind the showing backdrop at the 2016 NJAS. Colors represented for more than 50 years, they are dressed in black pressed pants, crisply starched white shirts, and red contestant numbers complete with an Angus heifer silhouette. In Grand Island, Neb., 51 contestants anxiously awaited their chance to step into the showing and compete for the title of top showman.

Contestants entered the preliminary heats with their own animal. During the class,

judges asked contestants to trade animals at least once, while they were evaluated for every move — the ease in which they lead their heifer around the ring, how they respond to adversity and a concern for their fellow showmen.

Judging the contest is a prestigious honor, as well. The 2016 panel consisted of Doug Satree, Montague, Texas; Jennifer Carrico, Redfield, Iowa; and Colt Keffer, Fort Collins, Colo.

The preliminary competition involved four heats, after which the entire group marched into the showing to await the results. One by one, names were called to signify the top 15.

Applause rippled through the arena as the finalists were announced, and the celebration turned quickly to preparation for the highly competitive final round two days later.

A dream come true

"This is a legendary showmanship contest," says Courtney Young, Ventura, Iowa. "To even have this opportunity and be in the top 15 is so amazing, and I am so thankful and humble for this opportunity."

Young purchased her first Angus heifer and attended her first NJAS in 2008 when it was hosted in her home state of Iowa. She will return there next year for her final junior nationals when it's hosted in Des Moines, Iowa. She works with her family's operation, Young Cattle Co., where they raise and market quality show genetics.

"Ever since my first nationals, I sat and watched the showmanship contest and was like, 'I want to be in there one day,'" Young said. "I didn't care if I was top 15 or top five, I knew I wanted to be wearing those black

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jeans and the white shirt."

The morning of the finals, Younge and 14 other showmen entered the ring, working to become one with their animal and to show that animal to the best of their ability — one heat of showmen, one more time under the judges' scrutiny, one last chance to shine.

The judges convened and selected their top five showmen as the finalists returned their heifers to their handlers and re-entered the ring in a single line, showsticks in hand and their show number ingrained in their minds. They waited anxiously with the hope their number would be announced.

"As each name was called, things got a little bit harder. I kept hashing in my head, 'Maybe, maybe not; I don't know,' and then when they called my name I was completely shocked," Younge says. "There were so many good showmen left."

Fitting Hurlbut's characterization of an elite showman, Younge was calm, controlled, attentive and worked with her animal as a cohesive unit.

She will go down in history as the 50th winner of the National Junior Angus Showmanship contest. For those juniors hanging on the fence, idolizing the showmen in the ring, Younge offers this advice.

"Find a mentor or a really good showman you think shows really well. Watch them, learn from them, keep working hard and ask lots of questions," she says. "Just keep working at your showmanship every day."

Showmanship and the NJAS build great showmen, but also leaders, and prepare juniors with skills that can be applied in any walk of life. Younge attends Drake University and plans to one day be a doctor of pharmacy while staying true to her ag roots and continuing her involvement with the family operation.

Keeping with tradition, the top five showmanship winners were each presented a silver bowl, sponsored and awarded by the American Angus

► The journey to earning one of the coveted silver bowls awarded to the top five showmen begins in each contestant's home state, where two juniors can be selected as representatives.

Auxiliary. It's a prized title and possession very few can claim.

The dream lives on

Dedication and determination can describe both Fitzgerald and Younge in their journey to the showmanship competition. The miles walked each morning and time spent training heifers, every day, reflect why they will be known among the Angus breed's top young showmen.

Whether he realized it or not, when Hurlbut hosted the first showmanship contest in July 1967, he established an event that the Angus community holds to the highest standard.

A legacy of elite showmen has developed throughout the decades, and has in turn created a dream for so many juniors of the breed's youngest members. They look up to the best of the best and ensure a brighter future for the Angus breed.

It is a showmanship tradition, which has no end in sight.

"It's been quite an honor for it to last this long," Hurlbut says with a sparkle in his eye. "To see the competition the way it is — the smiles on the faces of not only the participants, but also their parents — this is important to them. It's been an honor to say I started it."



50 years of top showmen

- 1967 Sam Wylie Jr., Pennsylvania
- 1968 Billy Hyatt, Massachusetts
- 1969 Bill Sheridan, Michigan
- 1970 Mary Griswold, Oklahoma
- 1971 Pete Sweeney, Michigan
- 1972 William Conley, Massachusetts
- 1973 Debbie Fox, Kansas
- 1974 Brad Greiman, Iowa
- 1975 David Zehr, Illinois
- 1976 Debra Moltzahn, Connecticut
- 1977 Jon Smalstig, New York
- 1978 Karen Laffin, Kansas
- 1979 Kerry Bedell, California
- 1980 Mary Ferguson, Ohio
- 1981 Sheryl Knop, Iowa
- 1982 Lisa Bohlen, Michigan
- 1983 John Griswood, Oklahoma
- 1984 Rodney Morris, Illinois
- 1985 Tim Fitzgerald, Nebraska
- 1986 Mary Brandenberger, Texas
- 1987 Jill Rishel, Nebraska
- 1988 Wilhemina Cash, Pennsylvania
- 1989 Cheramie Viator, Louisiana
- 1990 Andra Janssen, California
- 1991 Brian Finnestad, Illinois
- 1992 Brady Lee, Texas
- 1993 Heather Kalino, California
- 1994 Kim Young, Washington
- 1995 Raelynn Bremer, Iowa
- 1996 Ty Krebs, Nebraska
- 1997 Brent Scarlett, North Carolina
- 1998 Julie Dameron, Illinois
- 1999 Jim Dismukes II, California
- 2000 Jessica Sawyer, Nebraska
- 2001 Rachel Postin, Georgia
- 2002 Brittnia Carlson, Iowa
- 2003 Seth Buckley, Virginia
- 2004 Blake Bloomberg, Illinois
- 2005 Chad Hahn, Maryland
- 2006 Layne Ambruster, Oklahoma
- 2007 Allison Bond, Oklahoma
- 2008 Jennifer Ann Smith, Texas
- 2009 Lindsey Grimes, Ohio
- 2010 Britney Creamer, Colorado
- 2011 JanLee Rowlett, Tennessee
- 2012 Jessica Radcliffe, Wisconsin
- 2013 Paige Wallace, Missouri
- 2014 Megan Collison, Iowa
- 2015 Allison Manchester, Kansas
- 2016 Courtney Younge, Iowa