

50 Years of Prestige

Central Illinois Angus Preview Show still going strong.

by Barb Baylor Anderson



► CR Bardoliermere 3210 was the first Central Illinois Preview Show junior and grand champion bull for Rundles Angus Farm, El Paso. Pictured are (from left) Forrest Lemons; J.D. Shoemaker; J.B. McCorkle; Al Culver, show judge; and Warren Rundles.



► Senior and grand champion female at the first show in 1962 was Erina Erica of Timberline, shown by Timberline Farms, Congerville. Pictured are (from left) Lemons, Culver and Jack Koontz.



► At the first show in 1962, HH Evergreen Dell was junior and reserve grand champion female. She was shown by Harvey Hartter, Carlock. Pictured are (from left) Dale Baird, Culver, Lemons and Hartter.

The Central Illinois Preview Show may no longer be conducted under the majestic oaks that grew by the group's sale barn near Congerville. But when breeders sponsor their 50th show June 8, 2012, you can bet it will be just as robust as those trees. The long-time, early-season opportunity to parade some of the Midwest's best Angus before top judges is an unwavering tradition.

"We used to refer to the show as the 'Shade Tree Royale,'" says Les Reel, Central Illinois Angus Association (CIAA) member from Congerville, who was integrally involved as manager and has attended every Central Illinois Preview Show. "Ours was one of the first. We had more cattle go through our ring than the Illinois State Fair. Often our winner would also be a state fair winner."

Dale Schlipf with Tree Lane Farms in El Paso, Ill., says the initial idea for the preview show was his father's, Loren Schlipf. Dale says his dad thought of the idea while cultivating corn one spring evening. At the time, the Central Illinois Angus Association (CIAA) was very active among regional associations and one of the largest with about 200 members.

"My father was always a man of big ideas. He came home from fieldwork and said, 'I think the association should host a kick-off show to start the summer season. It would help promote the association and its cattle.' I went that night with Dad to Forrest Lemons' home (CIAA secretary-manager) to see what he thought. Of course he was excited, and said, 'Let's get it done.' The first show had more than 40 bulls and more than 80 females," Dale says.

Strong, local association

"We had big-time Angus breeders here who were very progressive. They had organized their own association back in 1937," says Rick Dickinson, Lantz & Dickinson Angus, Congerville.



► At the 1966 show, Ankonian Balaton was reserve champion bull. He was exhibited by Tree Lane Farm, El Paso, and owned with Ankony Farm, Rhinebeck, N.Y. Pictured are (from left) Judge Herman Purdy; Ebonettes Coleen Coulter, Donna Whitten, Ramona Bilyeu and Elaine Schlipf; Dale Schlipf; and Jim Rentz, presenting the trophy.

e and Performance

Some of those breeders included Dale Baird from Franklin Grove, who also was a regional manager for the American Angus Association; Irvin Bauman from Eureka; Harvey Hartter from Carlock; the Janssen Brothers from Washburn; Bill Kuhfuss from Mackinaw; Bill Kuntz from Goodfield; Illinois Senator Simon Lantz from Congerville; Forrest Lemons from Goodfield; George Meeker, Delavan; and Warren Rundles, El Paso.

In 1946, the CIAA had purchased ground near Congerville from Senator Lantz for \$200 per acre.

“Our members sold enough memberships at \$100 apiece to have enough money to put down for the mortgage,” remembers Ken Coulter, past secretary-manager for the association. “We got together and built a barn out of raw oak. We held the first-ever club calf sale in the United States that year with all heifers. All sales after that were held in our sale barn. The ground we owned became the site for our show. The last sale was in 1978, when we sold the facility.”

At the time the Central Illinois Preview Show was created in the 1960s, CIAA presidents included Coulter from Congerville, Loren Schlipf and Warren Rundles.

“Creating the preview show was a good thing for these breeders and a way to improve the Angus breed and start to get young people involved,” says Brent Henkel, Henkel Family Farms/Rundles Angus. “Many of these same herds are still in business today, and that says a lot about the longevity of the Angus business in central Illinois. We remain very forward-thinking.”

Always a top-notch show

Jim Rentz, Coldwater, Ohio, was the Illinois field representative for the *Angus Journal* at the time the show was created. He attended many of the early planning meetings.

“The show was designed to be very competitive and has remained that way,” he says. “It always had much style and class. It was notable from the start and used high-profile judges.”

The first show judge in 1962 was Al Culver from Illinois State University, followed subsequently by such judges as Walt Davies from Model Farms, Jack Frost, Herman Purdy, Les Leachman and later by judges that included Harlan Ritchie, Gary Minish, Roger Hunsley and Dan Hoag.

Les Reel says the preview show was a highly rated show on the annual circuit, with a growing number of breeders participating in the activity.

“Just as the name suggests, the show was truly an opportunity for producers to preview their herds against other herds and see what everyone had to offer. Everyone used their own bulls. You didn’t just bring one or two head, you brought an animal for every class and then decided what to take to other shows,” Dickinson says. “The show was held around the fourth of July, because back

then producers had to get their crops in before they could get cattle ready for show. The event took place outside by the oak trees because it was too hot in the sale barn.”

At the time the show was created, Rentz notes, emphasis on herd performance was beginning to intensify.



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► The CIAA had purchased ground near Congerville for \$200 per acre. The barn in which all subsequent shows and sales originated was built by the association members out of raw oak. The last sale was in 1978, when the facility was sold.

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“The measuring stick for quality and value in the 1960s was the showing. There was a lot of natural sire use. What took place in the showing translated into value for the salering,” he says. “Every central Illinois breeder participating in the show was adding value for their herds and the association. It was a sizeable show with good numbers and quality cattle. The area and association members have generated some major breed champions.”

Les Reel managed the show and the sale barn for several years. “I do believe this advanced the breed at the time,” he says. “The preview show was a great opportunity to have your genetics recognized, and certainly a drawing card for other breeders to come see what Illinois had.”

Juniors primary future focus

After the sale of the barn and ground in Congerville in 1978, the CIAA moved the show to the Woodford County Fairgrounds for a few years. The CIAA also welcomed the Illinois Junior Angus Field Day to partner with them in the mid-1980s, a tradition which continues today. The association helps cover some of the junior’s expenses of the field day.

The Preview Show moved to the newly built Reel Livestock Center in Congerville in the 1990s before moving to its present site, the McLean County Fairgrounds in Bloomington, Ill. The show is hosted earlier in June, about a month before the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS), and includes a junior show with about 100 heifers and

10-15 bull calves. Gary Dameron from Lexington, Ill., now manages the show. Buyers who purchase from the CIAA fall sale continue to receive cash back for returning to participate in the following preview show.

“The show anymore is pointed toward juniors. About 80% or 90% of the exhibitors are juniors,” Dickinson says. “For the last 20 years, we have subsidized the junior show because it is so expensive. The Illinois Angus Association also has been helping juniors with funding their field day held with the preview show. We have two judges and two shows on one weekend.”

Rentz agrees the cost of exhibiting cattle has had an effect on participation in the showing. “There is still some show-oriented attitude in the country, and that adds value to marketing our breed,” he says. “For the future, we need to look at the Angus toolbox and how these shows can be used to help advance individual breeders and the Angus breed. The Central Illinois Angus Association has played a leadership role in that to date, and I know their innovation will carry on. I am very pleased to have been part of this great tradition from the start.”

CIAA members have every intention of offering a preview show for the future in whatever format it needs to be. “We need to be ready to modify the show if necessary so it remains useful to our breeders,” Dickinson says. “Our tradition in the middle part of the state will continue.”

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— Brent Henkel