

# Maryland Sisters Succeed Together

Rocky Ridge, Md., sisters exhibit hard work and sound decisions in showing success.

by Rebecca Long Chaney

Maryland is known for the Chesapeake blue crab, presidential retreat Camp David and as the home of world-famous Olympian Michael Phelps, but little do people know that not far from Baltimore and Washington, D.C., are acres and acres of farmland dotted with black cows.

A love for Angus cattle fueled by a passion for showing them has led two sisters from Maryland on the tanbark trail from nearly coast-to-coast. Jessica and Taylor Clarke of Fox Meadow Farm have been exhibiting Angus at county, state and national shows since they were 8 years old. The girls, Jessica, 16, and Taylor, 12, say this past year has been busy, and they've had a few wins, but it was

the 2007 show season that the sisters will never forget.

"Last year was an incredible year," Jessica says. "When I look back, it truly amazes me the amount of success that actually happened to me — just a normal girl who lives on a small farm in a small town. I realize that I'm really lucky, and that in 2007 I lived my dream."

Taylor said she had an "awesome year," too, and was happy to literally follow her big sister all year, taking the second-place or reserve awards to Jessica's first-place winnings.

Jessica, a high school junior, says it all started in March 2007, when her 7-month-old registered steer, Fox Meadow Farm

Renegade, was named the grand champion bred-and-owned steer at the Mid-Atlantic Junior Angus Classic (MAJAC) in Harrisonburg, Va.

"I was very surprised," she says. "I knew Renny (Renegade) was a good steer — the best I ever had — but I also knew the competition would be tough. I didn't expect him to get champion."

Taylor had a successful showing at MAJAC as well. "The next couple of shows we did even better, and results improved each time," Taylor says. "After the Eastern Regional Show, everything really set in, and I knew it was going to be an interesting year — sure enough it was."

Following the MAJAC show was the Atlantic National hosted in Timonium, Md., in April, which featured hundreds of Angus from 21 states as far away as Texas and California. The Clarkes did well again with Jessica's steer being named the grand champion bred-and-owned steer and Taylor's favorite cow, Bonnie, being named the senior champion female.

"It was the best we've ever done there," Jessica says.

In June it was off to the Eastern Regional in Harrisburg, Pa., with cattle competing from every state up and down the East Coast. Jessica exhibited the grand champion steer, the reserve grand champion steer and the reserve champion bred-and-owned heifer.

## Not easy

According to James Fisher, former director of junior activities for the American Angus Association, it was the first time he could remember in his 17 years of working with the show that the same person exhibited both the champion and reserve champion steer.

"I have watched Jessica show this steer at the Atlantic National, Eastern Regional and the National Junior Angus Show," Fisher says. "The steer is bred-and-owned by Jessica. She made the decisions on what the cow was bred to in order to produce this excellent offspring. The steer is an incredible steer, and a great example of the wonderful breeding program Jessica has developed within her herd of Angus cattle."

Fisher said Maryland youth have done well through the years, but 2007 was an exceptional year for the Clarke sisters.

"Raising and exhibiting cattle that compete and win at a regional or national level is not easy," he explains. "It takes a lot of dedication and a lot of work every day. The juniors that do this are as dedicated as any star athlete and actually may be more [dedicated] than most, because they are learning work ethic; they are learning to place the needs of the animal above their own needs; and they are willing to make the



► Above: The Clarke sisters pose at the 2007 Atlantic National with Taylor's senior champion female.



► Right: Taylor (left) and Jessica Clarke (right) captured many grand and reserve grand champion placings with their steers in 2007.

sacrifices necessary to create greater success in the future.”

Fisher says it's youth like Jessica and Taylor that continue to keep the national and Maryland junior Angus associations strong. The girls traveled with other Maryland juniors to compete in the 2007 National Junior Angus Show (NJAS).

Taylor won second place with her steer and Jessica won four first-place ribbons with two steers and two heifers. Although Renegade wasn't named champion, Jessica said dozens of other exhibitors congratulated her on having such a good steer.

“A breeder from Texas came up and said my steer looked awesome and wanted to buy him,” she recalls. “Even though my parents said it would have paid for two years of college tuition, I turned it down.”

Jessica admits that Renegade was a very special steer.

“I raised him from a calf and got really attached to him,” she says. “Probably 2007 will be the only year I ever have a calf that good.”

### Special attention

The long hours raising livestock, the hard work, the hot and frigid days, are no big deal to the Clarke sisters. “When I tell people what I do they say, ‘that sounds like a lot of work,’” Jessica says. “I tell them it's a hobby, it's fun, it's really not work — I love my cattle.”

Taylor has learned from her older sister the ins and outs of raising beef cattle and has also adopted the practice of — ‘let's spoil them rotten.’ Every day the eighth-grader hand-feeds her Angus and Braunvieh animals alfalfa cubes as a treat.

“They love them,” she says.

Special care is exactly what they get at Fox Meadow Farm, 40 acres nestled near the base of the Catoctin Mountains — home to Camp David, the presidential retreat.

“Renny got his own private stall all summer last year with fans on him to keep his coat of hair in good condition,” Jessica reminisces. “Every night I rinsed him, conditioned his hair and blew it out.”

Their hard work continued to pay off in 2007 when the girls won the premier breeder and exhibitor banners for the first time at the Maryland Angus Breeders' Show in August. They competed against seasoned breeders from the state. Renegade was the grand champion steer and Taylor's steer, Sir Trenton, was the reserve champion.

The sisters made solid merchandising and breeding decisions to get where they are today. Jessica credits her cousin Chad Hahn for instilling in her a love for Angus cattle.

“Chad got me into Angus cattle,” she says. “He taught me how to show, what to do and what not to do. I'd never have Renny if I hadn't bought Renny's mother from Chad.”



► **Left:** “Jessica is extremely competitive and takes a serious approach that I like to see in older exhibitors,” says Dale Spencer of Nebraska, 2007 judge for the Frederick County Fair.

► **Below:** “I always watch my sister show and she helps me,” Taylor Clarke says. “I also learn a lot during the fitting and showing competition because my mom gives me tips.”

Taylor looks up to her older sister for advice, direction and show techniques.

“I always watch my sister show, and she helps me,” Taylor says. “I also learn a lot during the fitting and showing competition because my mom gives me tips.”

The sisters ended their 2007 show season at their own Frederick County Fair, which featured 166 steers. Their abilities were quickly noticed by Judge Dale Spencer of Nebraska.

“I was really impressed with the quality of cattle those two sisters led in front of me, starting with the showmanship classes, then the open show and finishing with the steer classes,” Spencer says. “Not being familiar with breeders of the area, I didn't have any knowledge of the girls, but their abilities and cattle quality surfaced very quickly. Their steers are right for the times, their size and performance were right on, and they had excellent muscle, with impressive rib and capacity.”

Jessica and Taylor both had first-place steers in the champion drive that day, but they were just edged out for the champion and reserve champion Angus honors. But it wasn't a disappointment for the girls, as they captured an honor considered by many to be the top award any cattle exhibitor can receive.

Jessica's Renny was named the grand champion bred-and-owned steer and Taylor's Sir Trenton was named the reserve grand champion bred-and-owned steer.

“Bred-and-owned cattle are the fruition of 4-H'ers efforts,” Spencer says. “It was the foresight to make the right genetic choices for AI (artificial insemination) and, most importantly, that the junior or 4-H exhibitor got their heifer bred when she needed to be bred, which shows good management as well as fertility in the female they exhibited prior to raising a calf for the bred-and-owned show.”

Spencer admired both of the girls' showing skills and style.

“Taylor, the younger sister, is still having a lot of fun and does a great job for her age,” he says. “Jessica is extremely competitive and takes a serious approach that I like to see in older exhibitors. They are both the kind of kids that make judging 4-H and junior shows so enjoyable.”



By far the most difficult part of raising beef cattle for the girls is selling their steers.

“The day my steer was sold in the county 4-H livestock sale was one of the hardest days of my life,” Jessica recalls. “And people say, ‘It's just a steer, you will have another one next year.’ But that's not true at all. I raised Renny from a calf. Thanks to my steer, last year was a once-in-a-lifetime experience.”

The girls credit their parents, Becky and Tim Clarke, for providing them with so many opportunities.

“Jessica and Taylor had a phenomenal year — one that is likely not to be repeated,” Becky says. “They finally got a taste of how it feels in the winner's circle. They have always worked really hard with their animals, and it was nice to see it pay off in 2007.”

Whether the girls come home with champion ribbons or not, they have extremely proud parents.

“They are doing the work themselves,” Becky says. “They've learned so much responsibility from planning the breeding of their cows to purchases and from health care to financial decisions.”

Allowing the girls to make their own cattle decisions has encouraged them to dream big.

“My goal has always been to do good in the Angus industry and produce cattle that can compete all over the country,” Jessica says. “I feel like I've accomplished my goal and look forward to continuing my work with Angus cattle.”

