



Foundation Support

Record-setting heifer destined for greatness.

Story & photos by **Ed Haag**

For Ron and Myki Simek, the purchasers of the 2006 Angus Foundation Heifer Package and owners of Canyon Creek Angus, the quarter of a million dollars they paid was well worth the money.

When it comes to making business decisions, there are few better businessmen than Ron Simek. As co-founder of Tombstone Pizza, Simek had the good sense to sell the company he built from scratch to Kraft Foods.

Since then he has engaged in numerous business enterprises, including the thriving real estate company he and his wife, Myki, currently operate in Genoa, Nev.

Now, as part of a program to introduce

new, high-quality genetics into their Angus herd at Canyon Creek Angus in Cody, Wyo., the Simeks purchased the 2006 Angus Foundation Heifer Package at the annual auction in Denver, Colo., during the National Western Stock Show (NWSS). “She is an outstanding animal,” Ron says. “She’ll be a great addition to our herd.”

For the Simeks, that purchase was one way to supercharge their efforts to build one of the country’s finest Angus herds in a relatively short period of time. Their first purchases under the Canyon Creek Angus name were in May 2005 at the Woodlawn Farms dispersal sale. Since then they have actively sought superior genetics at auctions and through private treaty.

The quarter of a million dollars the Simeks paid was a record high for an Angus Foundation Heifer Package, surpassing the previous record breaker, \$101,000, received for the 2001 package.

Milford Jenkins, Angus Foundation president, attributes the price to the quality of the heifer donated by Bill and Barb Rishel of North Platte, Neb., and the generosity of the Simeks.

“This enabled us to make available \$100,000 in scholarships this year and address other educational research opportunities,” Jenkins says. “We couldn’t be more pleased.”

Jenkins notes that the competition for the heifer was fierce. Shoulderbone Plantation, owned by Robert Lanier, and Fox Run Farms, owned by Bob and Dena Baudendistel, teamed up to bring in the contending bid.

It was the third consecutive Foundation auction in which Shoulderbone Plantation was the contending bidder. For Mike Montoya, cattle manager of the White Plains, Ga., Angus herd, participating in the auction was particularly significant.

“When I was a kid I showed cattle as a junior, and it was a terrific experience,” he says. “After that, you want to see as many kids as possible benefit from the program.”

Montoya admits that another reason for bidding on the 2006 heifer was the quality of the package being offered. He notes that Foundation heifers come from the best ranches in the country, and the 2006 bred heifer was no exception.

“We are always looking for outstanding stock,” he says. “We are committed to offering our customers the best the industry has to offer.”

Highly valued bloodlines

Danny Lynn, general manager of Fox Run Farms, Mexico, Mo., was similarly impressed by the 2006 Foundation Heifer. He is quick to



PHOTO BY JIM KOCH

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point out that the Rishels have played a key role in providing Fox Run Farms with the superior genetics it now enjoys.

"When Fox Run started, the owners bought 40 bred heifers from Rishel Angus," Lynn says. "So we are well aware of the breeding behind the 2006 Foundation Heifer." He adds that the heifer package the Rishels donated for the 2006 auction was of outstanding quality.

The Rishels, who were inducted into the Angus Heritage Foundation in 2005, have been actively improving the bloodlines in their Angus herd for four decades. "Their contributions to the industry have been enormous," Jenkins says, noting the heifer package the Rishels donated exceeded even the Foundation's expectations. They added a new dimension to the package by donating a bred heifer rather than an open heifer.

The Rishels say it was only fair.

"I insisted on it being a bred heifer because we believe you have to offer something really special to those willing to spend that kind of money on a Foundation Heifer," Bill says. "A bred animal is just that much closer to the day she can start being flushed and generating a return for the buyer."

In choosing the animal to donate, the Rishels selected from their best. Bill says the heifer they selected for the auction was in the top one percentile of their herd. When asked by some how he and Barb could give away an animal of that caliber, his answer is always the same. "That brand on her left rib is our reputation," Bill says. "She will carry that the rest of her life."

ET boosts heifer prices

After 40 years in the business, reputation is not something the Rishels take for granted. In today's market, a reputation for producing

high-performance Angus seedstock is as good as money in the bank. Bill notes that the demand for quality Angus genetics is high and, with the refinement of embryo transfer (ET) techniques, the value of high-quality heifers has increased dramatically.

"Transfer is a very effective way to take the genetics of one individual and dramatically increase the number of offspring she can have in one year," he says. "It has definitely impacted quality heifer prices."

The Simeks agree with Rishel's assessment and have established ET as a major component in their herd development program. They

already sold the 2006 Foundation Heifer's first flush at the Show Girls Angus auction in Reno, Nev., this spring for \$37,000.

David Winninger, owner of Cow Country Genetics Inc., Cody, Wyo., has been challenged with the task of flushing and transferring the embryos. He has been directly involved in administering the procedure for more than two decades. During that period he has seen a gender shift in the market for high-quality seedstock. While high-quality bulls still command high prices, they have been joined by the top heifers and cows.

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► The 2006 Foundation Heifer's first flush produced more than 24 embryos, 14 of which were transferred into surrogate mothers.

Winner attributes this change to the fact that the purchaser can amortize his investment in a mother cow over many more offspring than possible prior to the availability of the procedure. "Before embryo transfer, a cow could only produce a single offspring a year for a total of maybe 12 in a lifetime," he says. "Now it is possible for that same cow to produce 20 to 30 offspring in a year."

The 2006 Foundation Heifer's first flush produced more than 24 embryos, 14 of which were transferred into surrogate mothers.

While embryo transfer has affected the value of the country's top heifers, its use has been largely limited to that segment of the population. Winner has observed that in most cases, only those producing the very best genetics are in a position to take advantage of the technology.

Tradition of quality

Jenkins admits that the Angus Foundation, through the incredible generosity of its members, has been a beneficiary of this trend. "The quality of our donated animals has always been extraordinary," he says. "Likewise, has been the generosity of our bidders."

He points out that since its inception in 1980, the Angus Foundation Heifer Package has been a source of pride for the Angus community.

"There is an internal committee who considers nationally recognized Angus breeders and selects the one who will be asked to donate an animal for the auction," Jenkins says. "Because it is a fundraiser, we obviously try to capitalize on the name of the donor by selecting an established, respected breeder whose Angus program is held in high esteem across the country and whose herd's genetics are in great demand."

For donors such as the Rishels, it is an opportunity to give back to an industry that has provided both a livelihood and a lifestyle.

"Bill and I were just pleased to be in a position in our life that we could afford to donate a heifer of that quality," Barb says. "It was a real honor to be asked."

Role of Foundation grows

While scholarships to worthy junior Angus members have been a major focus of the Angus Foundation, it has also been deeply involved in promoting youth leadership development, educating cattle producers and, most recently, supporting research projects that relate to the enhancement of the Angus breed and the beef industry.

"Historically, the Angus Foundation has supported Angus youth programs," Jenkins



► Ron Simek (left), purchaser of the 2006 Angus Foundation Heifer Package, talks with David Winninger, owner of Cow Country Genetics Inc., about flushing and transferring embryos.

says. "As time has passed and more resources have become available, we have expanded our support into educational programs such as the Cattleman's Boot Camp and research programs such as the [Bovine] Genome Project."

The boot camps are two-day events open to producers for the purpose of exposing them to the most recent information on production, management, nutrition, marketing and other timely beef production topics. These events are currently conducted twice a year in conjunction with a host land-grant university. In addition to the regular curriculum, an Angus Skills Lab is open to new Angus producers. The skills lab focuses on a variety of management practices, including hands-on training for artificial insemination (AI), freeze-branding and tattooing.

For Jenkins, one of the Angus Foundation's more exciting endeavors is its participation in the international Bovine Genome Project, a worldwide effort to sequence and study the bovine genome for the purpose of identifying those genes that influence production, carcass and health traits. The research involves developing DNA markers in several popular beef breeds, including Angus.

"Last September the Angus Foundation invested \$24,000 in the project," Jenkins says, adding that the funding will be used to help cover the cost of developing the DNA markers for beef cattle.

James Fisher, director of activities and junior activities for the American Angus Association, has seen substantial growth in Angus youth programs with the help of Angus Foundation funding. This applies to both the number of participants and the variety of programs and competitions.

"Participation in junior cattle shows has doubled since 1991, and we have all these other opportunities for young people to

participate in," Fisher says. "Some of these include public speaking, photography, creative writing and poster contests."

Since 1991 the number of entrants in the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) has grown from 862 to 1,560, while the number of life skills events outside of the livestock venue has increased from three to 14.

Fisher notes that one recently introduced activity that has proved very successful is the mentoring program in which first- and second-year show participants are matched with individuals who have attended the event for several years.

For Jenkins, the growth and expansion of Foundation programs can be directly attributed to the generosity of those involved in the Angus industry.

"As an organization we are certainly blessed to have such a responsive membership," he says. "You couldn't ask for a more giving bunch of people."

