



PHOTO BY ANDY REST

Take It To The Top

Young NJAA leaders “Take it to the Top” at annual leadership conference.

Story & photos by *Shelia Stannard*

National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) members from 33 states and Canada participated in the LEAD (Leaders Engaged in Angus Development) Conference Aug. 1-4 in Billings, Mont. The 215 youth and advisors enhanced their interpersonal talents while learning more leadership skills and touring the “Big Sky” country of Montana. “Take it to the Top” was this year’s theme for LEAD, which is funded through the Angus Foundation and designed for NJAA members 14 to 21 years old.

Motivational speaker Alvin Law kicked off the conference with a strong message, challenging the youth to look at all sides of situations they are in and noting that life always has two sides.

“Reality sometimes really sucks, and it doesn’t always have an answer,” said Law, who was born without arms as a result of the drug Thalidomide.

“Attitude isn’t something we are born with; it is something we develop. Most people look at the wrong side of life and need to stop judging themselves by looking in the mirror,” Law continued, as he encouraged the audience to look inside themselves for their own special gift. “It’s not what you don’t have; it’s what you do have. In each and every one of us is an amazing ability.”

Law demonstrated his own amazing abilities by playing a self-composed song on the piano with his feet. He also played a snare drum, holding

the drum sticks between his toes and talked about overcoming his own daily challenges in doing everyday tasks armless.

The first evening concluded with a welcome from Montana Junior Angus Association President Emily Kading and an overview of Montana history and Angus industry success by Andy Rest, American Angus Association regional manager.

One and a half days of touring the diverse state of Montana followed the opening session. The four buses of young Angus leaders made stops at the Northern International Livestock Exposition (NILE), Billings Livestock Commission and Genex Hawkeye West bull stud, all in or near Billings.

The group also learned about feed efficiency research using GrowSafe® technology at Midland Bull Test at Columbus. An afternoon of rafting the Stillwater and Yellowstone rivers was a highlight for many of the attendees, most of whom had never been to Montana.

Other tour stops included ORIGen Genetics, Huntley; the Little Big Horn Battlefield, and Vermilion Ranch, where the group heard from longtime livestock marketer Pat Goggins.

“LEAD is a wonderful event for young people,” Goggins said with conviction, as four of his own grandchildren participated in this year’s event. “This is the cream of the crop, and the Angus future is in good hands.”

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The NJAA Board of Directors conducted four workshops that covered etiquette, interviewing skills, industry knowledge and the current agriculture market. “Angus Jeopardy” was a parody of the popular game show, where teams provided the questions to topics such as “ROV Shows,” “Registrations” and “AAA Board.”

“Money Talks” was a workshop that discussed the current economic factors affecting agriculture and provided small groups real-life scenarios to consider.

The attendees were given the chance to record their future career strengths, weaknesses and goals before completing a mock interview in the workshop, “Will You Crack Under Pressure,” where they refined their personal interviewing skills. Dining, airplane and relationship etiquette were the focus of “Mind Your P’s & Q’s.”

During the final session of LEAD, Kim Anderson challenged the group to evaluate their personal leadership style. She compared

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►Above and right: Junior Angus members learn the value of teamwork during icebreakers the opening night at LEAD. Ben Tokach and Mandy Jacobs work with teammates to maintain the “human table.” Austin Thummel helps two of his teammates across the “peanut butter river” in an effort to minimize the number of people whose feet touched the floor.



►Left, right and below: Motivational speaker Alvin Law kept the group mesmerized while he told about challenges in his life that he turned into opportunities.



►Newly elected NJAA director Andrew Rogen leads a small-group discussion. The attendees break into six groups to share ideas on fundraising, membership recruitment and retention, and communications.



► **Left and above:** The annual NJAA Board skit has become a popular closing to the first night at LEAD. This year, Board members portrayed well-known Angus leaders and others to interview for the position of American Angus Association CEO.



► **Left:** Montana Junior Angus Association members welcomed all attendees to the LEAD Conference with a gift bag.



► **Right:** The Northern International Livestock Exhibition (NILE) and Billings Ag Chamber welcomed the group during the day of tours and provided a pancake breakfast at the NILE complex.



► **Bob Cook** talks with **Ben Van Dyke** and **Walt Stinson** during the stop at the auction market.

► **Above and below:** The seats were packed at Billings Livestock Commission as **Joe Goggins** discussed the history and advantages of marketing livestock through an auction market system.



► A tour at **Genex Hawkeye West** gave the group a chance to see several top bulls in one facility.



► **Leo McDonnell** describes the **Midland Bull Test**, a performance testing leader, and the **GrowSafe** system the McDonnell family has implemented, collecting individual feed intake data.



► **Pitchfork fondue**, steak fried in hot oil, was a treat for the group at dinner.

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people to thermostats and thermometers — either reflecting the climate around them or setting the climate for others.

“Our challenge as leaders is to be more like a thermostat and set the climate,” challenged Anderson, a leadership program specialist with the University of Georgia Fanning Institute. She added that thermometers are reactive, and it is always better to be proactive like the thermostat.

In addition to the workshops, speakers and tours, LEAD is an opportunity for youth and advisors to exchange ideas to take back to their states, while building lifelong friendships with others with a similar interest. LEAD is planned annually for NJAA members by the NJAA Board.



►Jenessa Monson welcomes her peers to her family’s Angus operation, Lantana Angus.



►A rural church and a “Big Sky” sunset served as the backdrop for vespers, conducted by the newly elected NJAA directors. They each told of a personal story from one of the letters from “vesper” and encouraged the group with the following characteristics: Vision, Enthusiasm, Strength, Perfection, Excellence and Risk.



►Above and below: “Will You Crack Under Pressure?” gave the participants an opportunity to explore their professional strengths, weaknesses and career goals while conducting mock interviews.



►Above and below: NJAA Jeopardy tested knowledge in several categories, including registrations, ROV shows, NJAA Board and American Angus Association Board. Teams were formed to work together to come up with the correct question.



►“Mind your P’s and Q’s” provided a demonstration of etiquette. Here, Mallory Trospen encourages the demonstration of proper airplane etiquette. Dining and relationship matters were also discussed.





► **Above and below:** Mallory Trosper visits with ORGen COO Turk Stovall as juniors suit up to go through the barn at ORGen. They also saw the storage and shipping tanks.



► **Above and left:** Livestock marketing icon Pat Goggins welcomed LEAD Conference attendees to Vermilion Ranch, where they participated in cattle weight guessing, took a hayrack ride and enjoyed the scenery and a steak dinner.



► A stop at the Battlefield of Little Big Horn gave an inside look at American history.



► **Left and above:** Kim Anderson challenged the group to set their leadership style to resemble thermostats vs. thermometers and take a proactive instead of a reactive approach.



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► **Above and left:** A 13-mile rafting trip down the Stillwater and Yellowstone rivers was a highlight for many during the hot Montana summer.