



The abrupt summons came as no surprise that day at Fort Detrick in 1968. Jim Riemann, then a young second lieutenant in the Army, knew why his commanding officer — a ruthless and cold man — was about to bawl him out.

“He’d ordered me to start a post newspaper, and I said, ‘Yes, sir!’” recalls

Riemann, seated behind his desk last November at the Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) headquarters in Wooster, Ohio. “I had everything ready on time and took it to the press. But the guys had no idea I needed the paper printed by the next day. I realized I’d never told them my deadline!”

Aghast but resolved to take responsibility, Riemann wrote a memo to the commanding

officer. The officer’s secretary, though, handed it to an assistant instead.

“He summoned me immediately and said, ‘Do you know what kind of trouble you’re going to get into, Riemann? Are you sure you want to do this?’ I knew I had to tell the truth.

“Later that day, the commanding officer ordered me to his office. ‘I read your memo, and I want to thank you,’ he told me. ‘You’re the first person who’s stepped up and admitted a mistake. I want to compliment you on that.’”

Some four decades later, Riemann still remembers the surprise and immense relief he felt that day. He’ll also never forget the lifelong lesson the experience taught him.

“When you tell the truth, you never have to change your story,” he says simply.

Honest to a fault, humble to the core, Jim Riemann stood at the helm of the world’s largest branded beef company as president for seven years before his retirement last fall. Talk with anyone who knows him, and you’ll hear people say the same words over and over again to describe his nature and character: Down-to-earth. Hard-working. Servant leader.

“Title doesn’t mean anything to Jim,” says Brett Erickson, director of CAB’s Value-Added Products Division. “He will bend over backwards to help a customer.”

Case in point: CAB was the official branded beef supplier for the 2002 Olympic Winter Games in Salt Lake City, Utah. As a result, Riemann and staff spent a month there, manning a CAB hospitality program and welcoming nonstop waves of corporate guests. It wasn’t unusual to see Riemann



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“Jim is unassuming. He works hard to stay out of the spotlight. He’s very real, very sincere.”

**— Brent Eichar,
senior vice president**

slushing his way through the snow, lugging suitcases up steps to lodge rooms.

“He humbled himself and did what needed to be done,” Erickson says. “He taught me then never be too proud of who you are to take care of the customer first.”

Midwestern roots

Born in 1942, M. James “Jim” Riemann was raised in central Kansas on a small farm with two brothers and a sister.

“I grew up showing Angus cattle,” he says. “The best thing my parents ever did was to get all of us involved with 4-H and later FFA. We enjoyed winning our classes, so we all developed a competitive spirit. But we were also taught to have compassion for those who didn’t place. It was a good lesson that taught us to help others do better in life whenever we had the opportunity.”

In 1960, he graduated from Claflin High School and headed for Kansas State University (K-State), financed with money he’d earned as a farmhand. In 1965, he graduated with a bachelor’s degree in agricultural education. “It took me four and a half years to get my degree because I had an

opportunity to join the International Farm Youth Exchange Program,” he says.

That opportunity affected his personal life in a huge way.

“I went to Washington, D.C., first for orientation with other delegates, including a young lady from Michigan by the name of Nancy Jelinek,” he says, smiling.

By chance, both were part of a group sent to farms in India, where the love-struck pair exchanged letters and met once during their six-month stay. Back home again, “I’d say we had three dates in one and a half years,” Riemann says. During Christmas 1965, he and Nancy — by then a home economics teacher at a Michigan high school — announced their engagement and set a June 1966 wedding date.

The following January, Jim started graduate school at K-State. Then came the draft notice from the Army. “I was told to report to duty June 11, so we had to move up the wedding to June 7,” Riemann says.

Military years

After basic training in Missouri, the young soldier transferred to Virginia and later to Georgia, where he began Infantry Officer Training School in December 1966. The following summer, he was commissioned as a second lieutenant and transferred to Alabama.

His last assignment sent him to Fort Detrick in Maryland. For one and a half years, he was part of the special staff of the post’s commanding officer before being promoted to company commander.

“I finished as a first lieutenant and was going to be promoted to captain,” Riemann says. “I came close to making the military my career. But I still wanted to be in agriculture, which I loved. So, I called Dr. Don Kropf, my meats judging coach at Kansas State, and asked him if he thought I could get into graduate school there. There was this long pause, and finally Don said, ‘Well, I guess we can take a chance.’”



Bibs, bibs, bibs

Whenever new babies arrived, CAB staff always knew they’d soon see Jim Riemann’s wife.

An accomplished seamstress, Nancy Riemann stitches beautiful quilts, exquisite wedding dresses and other creations in the sewing room that Riemann constructed for her in their home’s basement. Around the CAB office (and beyond), she became famous for the cute bibs she sewed from towels for new babies. Each sported the embroidered phrase of “I can’t wait to eat ...” followed by a CAB logo.

“She sent one to a CAB specialist in California when he and his wife had their first child,” says Mark Polzer, director of foodservice. “To this day, he’s never forgotten that!”

Teaching days

Riemann did get into graduate school. In 1973, he earned his master’s degree in animal science with a meat science emphasis. The next year, he was awarded a doctorate in food science with a meat science emphasis. From 1974 to 1977, Riemann taught and researched in meat science at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. While there, he was recognized three times with Outstanding Teacher awards.

In late 1977, he and Nancy moved to Michigan to join a farm partnership with her two brothers. In 1980, the Riemanns moved back to Knoxville, where he resumed his original post at the university and worked another 12 years.

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On the family front, he and Nancy welcomed daughter Kristey in 1973 and son Tim in 1976.

Meat industry start

In August 1992, Riemann moved to Wichita, Kan., to accept a position with Excel Corp. as director of a new division — beef research and development. During his seven years with the company, he focused on food safety technologies and the development of prepared and fresh beef products.

"Shortly after I started, four children died from eating undercooked burgers at a Jack-in-the-Box," he recalls. "So we wanted to make sure we never supplied beef that could lead to death from disease-causing pathogens."

Riemann succeeded by developing the beef carcass steam pasteurization system still in use today across the country and Canada. "That was the best contribution I made that benefited the beef industry," he says.

Dell Allen, Riemann's major professor at K-State, initially encouraged him to join Excel Corp., where Allen was then vice president of quality and training.

"Jim was one of the first to be hired in Excel's new research-and-development department, and he became a key player in its development," Allen says. "He hired many of the employees and mentored them into an extremely effective work group. Several people Jim hired are still there, and the company still benefits from the training he provided.

"Jim is totally honest and ethical, and one of the hardest-working, most sincere guys I've ever known," he adds. "He has the ethics of a good Kansas farm boy."

Move to CAB

Early in 1998, Larry Corah, part of CAB's executive team — and a longtime friend from Kansas State — told Riemann over lunch that Mick Colvin was retiring soon as CAB

'Kitchen table culture'

Crispy waffles and pan-fried sausage, French toast and crunchy bacon, flour tortillas stuffed with scrambled eggs and cheese — everyone looks forward to Wednesday morning breakfasts at the Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) headquarters.

"It was important to me that we came together every two weeks to talk about issues and opportunities, plus share successes," Jim Riemann, past president, explains. "Then we all knew what was going on and could be open with one another.

"We grew, and we succeeded as a team, not as Jim Riemann," he adds. "It was about putting the brand first, the team second and the individual third."

When the CAB program was first getting started, Mick Colvin and his then small staff would confer at Colvin's kitchen table. Everyone knew what was happening. As the program — and staff — grew, the tradition of biweekly

breakfasts was started to maintain that "kitchen table culture." The meals are hosted in a downstairs meeting room at the headquarters.

Every other Wednesday, five cooks report early to prepare and serve their own breakfast creation, complete with juices, fruit and coffee. Breakfast committee members are randomly drawn from CAB's employee roster, which allows people to get to know others outside their division.

After breakfast, staff with one of the 12 CAB divisions presents a department report. As president, Riemann would stand up and share information from administration before wrapping up the meeting with what became his classic, upbeat message.

"Remember," he always started with a grin. Then, right on cue, everyone would chime in and recite along with him, "You can choose what kind of day you're going to have!"

executive director. Would he be interested in the job?

Riemann shrugged off the idea; he was happy at Excel Corp.

However, when CAB invited him in March 1998 to present a seminar to staff, he agreed. The experience proved positive. "But I didn't hear anything again until October when Mick called and said I was one of four being considered for his job," says Riemann, who agreed to an interview.

After a four-hour interview at a Cleveland hotel, Colvin asked, "Jim, on a scale of one to 10, where do you stand for this job?"

"He never put himself above us — he was always one of us."

**— Vickie Catteau,
executive secretary**

"I'm a five," I told him. "I'm not looking for a new job." But when the selection committee offered me the job, then everything got real serious. The position was so different from anything I'd done before. I wasn't sure I could lead a branded beef marketing company. I sat on the offer for two weeks. Then I decided there was just one way to find out, so I said, yes, I'd give it a shot."

In November 1998, the Riemanns moved to Wooster, Ohio. For nearly a year, Riemann worked closely with Colvin and learned everything he could about the program. On the last day of September 1999, Colvin officially passed the reins to Riemann.

Within a few months as executive director, Riemann started work on his first priority: to convert the CAB program into a limited liability corporation and wholly-owned subsidiary of the American Angus Association.



“Whatever we as a staff asked Jim to do, he was willing to do it, whether it was for the organization or the community, like putting on a Santa costume or washing dishes.”

— Tracey Erickson, vice president

The new legal status was made to protect the assets of both entities from potential liability; it also changed Riemann’s title to president.

From there, Riemann guided and motivated staff throughout his seven years with the team. Under his leadership, the CAB program:

- ▶ licensed beef processing plants in Canada;
- ▶ extended product lines to include CAB brand Prime and Natural;
- ▶ established regional executive account managers who work with licensed retail and foodservice operators in 10 geographic areas;
- ▶ expanded the supply development branch to help cattle feeders and producers focus on producing high-quality cattle and increase acceptance percentages at processing plants; and
- ▶ started the Brand Builders seminars to educate producers about the program’s

goals and help them market their own operations.

A model of excellence

In 2003, the American Meat Science Association honored Riemann with its annual Distinguished Industry-Extension Service Award. “As president ... Jim combined all his abilities to create value for all segments of the beef industry, keeping beef center-of-the-plate with millions of consumers worldwide,” wrote Colvin in his nomination letter to the association.

Top quality and excellence have always mattered to Riemann. Throughout his time with CAB, he modeled a Vince Lombardi quote that’s etched on a rock he kept on his desk: “The quality of a person’s life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence.”

Erickson observed how Riemann applied that belief to something as seemingly unimportant as a hot dog.

“Jim has been extremely helpful in developing our product line, not only for quality but position, too — regardless of the process,” he says. “Whether it’s frankfurters or fully-cooked prime rib, the intent is to be the best quality and make sure that customers walk away with a ‘Wow’ experience. He set the stage and pointed us in that direction.”

Marketing with honesty

Looking back, one of Riemann’s greatest challenges as CAB president came in 2003 when the discovery of the first U.S. case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE)

closed 47 international markets within 24 hours.

“A number of our licensees wanted to tell customers that CAB products were safer than commodity beef,” he says. “We had to take a strong stand and say that CAB products were the same as other beef from a food safety standpoint and that we would not convince people that our beef was safer than unbranded beef. We had to be aggressive in explaining that this was not a food safety issue and how to correctly answer customers’ questions.

“About 15% of our products had been going to international markets,” he continues. “Instead of backing completely out, our CAB international marketing efforts intensified. As the markets opened up again, CAB products returned at a faster rate than commodity beef, and even now CAB products sell at higher rates.”

On to the next chapter

Nearing his 65th birthday, eager to spend more time at home, Riemann announced his plans to retire last October. “I’ve dreamed for a number of years about traveling around the U.S. with Nancy in our motor home,” he says. “It’s time to start living that dream.”

These days, they also enjoy visits with daughter Kristey Wiebers, husband Justin and little granddaughter, Annika. Their son, Tim, works as a clerk for a federal district judge in Kansas City, Mo.

When not on the road, Riemann stays busy with carpentry work around the house while Nancy sews. Now and then — for old time’s sake — he drops by an unlicensed fast-food eatery in Wooster and ribs employees when he orders a burger — just like he used to do regularly while CAB president.

“May I help you?” asks the voice at the drive-by menu.

“You sure can!” Riemann exclaims with delight. “I’ll take a *Certified Angus Beef*® single with everything.

“But cut the cheese, please.”

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Riemann on leadership

“I was fortunate to work under two leaders at Excel — Bill Buckner and Greg Page — who subscribed to servant-style leadership. They weren’t dictatorial. Instead, they’d ask, ‘What can I do to help you get your job done. How can I help you?’ That avoids making gophers out of people, and it helps them develop themselves and achieve goals. When people use their own thoughts and strategies and carry them out, they have more job satisfaction. That’s huge in terms of growing confidence, capabilities and contributions to a company.”

— Jim Riemann

“Jim is very down to earth and willing to step in and help. He always stayed until the last staff member left. He leads by a great example. You want to work hard because he does.”

**— Deanna Walenciak,
director of sales marketing**

