

Ready To Fly



► Logan Lastovica will trade his life on the farm for a life of service and duty as he joins the U.S. Air Force.

Hard work, academics and character earn Texas junior Air Force Academy appointment.

Story & photos by **Sheryl Smith-Rodgers**

Dozens of livestock trophies crowd the top of a small oak table in Logan Lastovica's bedroom. On a wire around the ceiling, wooden clothespins hold one champion ribbon after another. Under the table, more ribbons and award plaques lay jumbled in a pile.

"I just haven't had time to do anything with them," Logan explains with a shy smile.

No wonder. The 18-year-old native of Fredericksburg, Texas, keeps a tight schedule. In the past year, he showed Angus around the state, served as a platoon commander with the Navy Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (NJROTC), worked as president of his county's 4-H Club and helped his father on the family's Angus farm.

That's just for starters.

He also ran every morning to keep in shape, practiced regularly with the corps' marksmanship team and served as secretary of the Texas Junior Angus Association (TJAA).

Dizzy yet? Sometimes his parents, Robert and Abban, feel that way.

In early June, Logan — a National Merit Scholar who ranked 10th out of 208 in his



►Packing his bag to leave home and join the U.S. Air Force, Logan Lastovica realizes it's time to step out of his farm boots and into the boots of a soldier.

class — graduated with honors from Fredericksburg High School. He'd already set his sights on attending either a military academy or a state university. A stellar résumé ultimately helped him achieve his heart's desire of being appointed to the U.S. Air Force Academy. On June 25, the young man waved goodbye to his family and boarded a jet to Colorado Springs, Colo.

Lastovica Angus Farm

It's Logan's last Saturday at home before he leaves for the academy. Graciously, he's made time in his hectic schedule to talk with a writer from the *Angus Journal* before he goes. Once he enrolls at the military institute, he'll have no telephone or e-mail contact with family or friends until at least August. (Yes, he's a little nervous, Logan admits later to his visitor, but excited, too.)

After introductions and a quick handshake, the two climb into the family's maroon Ford pickup, and Logan drives down the gravel driveway. They're going to see some of his family's cattle.

Logan's father, a Fredericksburg

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veterinarian, bought his first Angus heifer through a calf scramble program in 1977. His family started in the registered Angus business in 1963. Today, Lastovica Angus Farm breeds outstanding Angus cattle through an intensive artificial insemination (AI) and embryo transfer (ET) program. Their current herd — closed for the past 15 years — is descended from former show heifer projects. Logan's sisters, Mollie and Mattie, also work with the Angus.

"We lease three places for our cattle," Logan explains, en route to a pasture that's seven miles away. "We have 50 mother cows. We've always had Angus cattle. So when I started showing cattle, I stuck with it. The first Angus heifer I showed was one that Dad had on the open show circuit. Then I showed her at our county fair. I was maybe 6 or 7 years old. I think I won the class.

"Showing Angus has always given me something to do," he adds. "It taught me to work hard and reach goals."

He also learned another skill: how to manage his own finances. Each year, he'd plow about half his winnings back into the animals. The other half he invested in mutual funds. "Toward the end of the show season, I'd sit down with my broker and decide what we needed to do," he says as he steers the truck across a bumpy pasture. "I couldn't tell you which mutual funds to buy, but I do have a general idea of how they work."

As soon as the truck stops, a small herd of Angus cows amble over. Logan unloads a bag of feed and drops some on the ground. While the others munch away, one moseys up close to the young man and sniffs the open bag in his arms. She's apparently hoping for a personal handout. Logan smiles.

Academic achiever

At Fredericksburg High School, Logan excelled in all his classes. In fact, last March, he was named a finalist in the 2007-2008 National Merit Scholarship

competition. As a finalist, he ranked among 15,000 students in the nation who made the top 0.5% on the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT).

Thanks to his high grades, Logan was set to attend Texas A&M University (TAMU) in College Station on a full scholarship. Still, he kept hoping he'd receive an appointment to the Air Force Academy.

"My grandfather, Bill Lindsey, was in the Air Force, and I looked up to him a lot," Logan says. "I've always been interested in flying, too. I plan to major in aeronautical engineering. My ultimate goal is to fly fighter jets."

Aiming for the academy

Toward the end of his junior year, he submitted an "academy nomination

application" through the office of Congressman Mike Conaway in San Angelo.

Candidates are selected based on their SAT and ACT test scores, class rank, grade point averages (GPAs), extracurricular activities, leadership potential and motivation. In addition to taking tests and writing essays, Logan also went before a review board.

"We drove to San Antonio for an interview with a lieutenant colonel," he recalls. "Definitely, nearly all my leadership qualifications came from my work with the junior Angus association and 4-H, so that was most of my résumé. It took a lot of explaining to the Air Force people about Angus." Logan pauses to smile. "They know about student councils and sports, but they needed a little translation as to what I'd done."

Word came in late spring that Logan's dream had come true: He'd soon be a cadet at the U.S. Air Force Academy.

"We've had a lot of young people from Fredericksburg who've received appointments to the Air Force Academy, and Logan is maintaining that tradition," Congressman Conaway said in a phone interview. "He's an outstanding young man."

Strong values

With no doubt, Conaway's right about Logan's character. Just ask his father.

"He's a strong Christian and a young man who has unquestionable character," Robert shares on the phone after his son's departure. "He's his own person in all the right ways. He never does anything that's morally or ethically questionable. He's got very, very good values, and he applies them to how he lives. He's very brilliant, and he doesn't judge people or try to fit in with certain crowds. He has very high standards and lives by

them every day. That's why he'll make a good cadet and an officer in the military.

"Logan has had to balance a lot of things,"



► A gentle friend sneaks some food from Logan's arms.



► The trophy room in the Lastovica house reminds Logan of past accomplishments. Logan's younger sister sees it as a challenge to be like her big brother.

Robert adds. "He's learned to multitask. A lot of the activities he's been involved in will make him a good, productive citizen."

Abban, Logan's mother and a third-grade teacher, remembers how curious Logan was throughout his childhood, starting at an early age.

"He was always seeking knowledge," she says. "You'd ask him a question and get a dissertation in reply. His kindergarten teacher, who works with me, has told me that he was the only kindergartener who taught her something every day."

"Logan always took his toys apart and turned them into something else," she adds. "I remember how his tricycle became a wheel-and-axle for something else he made. He'll definitely make a great aeronautical engineer."

As far as being a big brother, Logan evidently does well at that, too.

"He's a good leader and a good brother, most of the time," quips Mattie, his 12-year-old sister. "I think it's cool that he's in the Air Force Academy. It's a big honor for him to go."

"He's someone who doesn't follow the crowd," says his other sister, Mollie, who's 16. "He was there when I was pressured to do things, and he'd tell me not to. Yes, he set the bar for me, and I'm always trying to fill his shoes. We argued sometimes, but we always worked together to get things done. We respected each other and our differences."

Junior Angus associations

Seemingly, everyone who's ever worked with or been acquainted with Logan agrees that he's headed for success in life.

"Logan is a good kid, and he knows his business and his animals," says Barbara Ettredge, an advisor with the TJAA who worked with Logan throughout his years with the organization. "That's in part because he was raised in the Angus business, and he was also in 4-H and participated in livestock judging teams at the state and national level."

Logan joined the TJAA as a third-grader. In addition to being secretary, he also served as a second vice president, first vice president and a national voting delegate. While a member of the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA), Logan attended three Leaders Engaged in Angus Development (LEAD) conferences. In 2003 and 2007, Logan and Ettredge's daughter, Gretchen, were part of teams that won quiz bowl competitions. He also participated every year in the team sales competition.



► In honor of his graduation, Logan planned an outdoor adventure vacation in Oregon for his family.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE LASTOVICA FAMILY

"I was thoroughly impressed with his knowledge," Barbara says. "He knew a lot of technical details from his meat and livestock judging experience and from his dad being a [veterinarian]."

"I was excited when I heard he'd been selected to go to the Air Force Academy," adds Barbara, who helps manage Circle E Farms near Pilot Point, Texas, with her husband, Mike. "I work as a high school counselor, and I know that all branches of the military look for well-rounded young adults. Logan's activities with Angus certainly were a plus. It takes a lot of time to work with animals and prepare for competitions. You can't be successful in all areas without putting time into them all and learning how to manage your time well."

Jared Murnin, a regional manager with the American Angus Association, thinks just as highly of the young Texan. "Logan is a hardworking young man," he says. "He's very nice and well-mannered. Showing Angus is a family affair for the Lastovicas. They all do the work and go to shows together."

Hill Country 4-H Club

At the age of 6, Logan joined his local chapter of 4-H. That first year, he showed a Boer Spanish meat goat that won reserve grand champion at the county fair.

"He had an excellent 4-H and showing career with us," says Bill Botard, a Gillespie County Extension agent. "He was one of our Gold Star winners in the past. He's always

polite, and I've never seen him get upset. He's even-tempered and willing to help when asked. He always worked hard with his Angus heifers. I admire young people like him who are willing to go to a military academy. It's wonderful that there are still people out there who are willing to take care of the rest of us."

Onward to a bright future

Meanwhile, Logan turns the pickup toward home, where he later escorts his visitor to a pen behind the Lastovicas' home. From a metal shed, two Angus heifers step into the sunshine while another lounges beneath a shady pecan tree.

"Angus is such a big part of my life that it's hard to explain," Logan says. "I do remember when my first show steer chased me! I was about 10 years old. I'd walked him halfway along when he started running and headbutting me. I dropped that halter and ran the other way. I jumped up on a fence and didn't clear it." He chuckles. "I've had worse things happen to me than that over the years."

The interview's finished, and Logan shakes hands goodbye. Tomorrow, his family and friends will gather at the Lastovica home for a farewell party. Then he'll be gone, starting his new life as a cadet at the U.S. Air Force Academy.

No doubt, the future holds even more trophies and awards for Logan Lastovica. Just wait and see.

