

It Starts With a Gift

With great delight, Milford Jenkins shares 10-plus years with the Angus Foundation.

by Jena McReil, digital editor

Few individuals greet each day with the same passion as Angus Foundation President Milford Jenkins. Rarely without a smile, he strives to better the cattle business and agriculture industry by connecting people with the dreams they hold dear. For some, that's finding ways to leave a lasting impact on the next generation. For others, it's receiving critical support to make higher education possible.

"The opportunity to continue to make a difference in people's lives is the reason I get out of bed each morning — to be a servant to others," Jenkins says. "Whether that's a donor seeking to make a contribution, a state association looking to create an endowment fund or awarding scholarships to Angus youth."

Those who know Jenkins best would agree that his zealous personality makes him a perfect fit for his career. Yet growing up in rural Oklahoma, he always thought he would become a teacher. A third-generation rancher, Jenkins attended Oklahoma State University (OSU) to study vocational agriculture. He recalls staying up late at his FarmHouse fraternity, talking with friends about future aspirations. His centered on the classroom.

Being actively involved in FFA and 4-H himself, exhibiting Angus steers, heifers, and lambs, Jenkins understood the value of youth participation in agriculture. In the early 1980s, he served as the Oklahoma State FFA president and credits the organization for teaching him valuable leadership skills he puts into practice every day.

Following graduation from OSU in 1987, he spent a year teaching in Prague, Okla., where he met his wife of 26 years, Peggy. While being an instructor and FFA chapter advisor was a treasured experience, Jenkins moved on to serve as the executive director and lobbyist for an agricultural cooperative trade association in Oklahoma before finding his calling in fundraising and development.

A true OSU Cowboy, Jenkins is known for his orange wardrobe, especially his wristwatch and neck ties. When an opportunity came up to join the development team at his alma mater's foundation and their colleges of agriculture

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PHOTOS BY CARRIE HEITMAN

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and veterinary medicine, an esteemed mentor and good friend in the position, searching for a successor, strongly urged Jenkins to apply.

He had no professional experience in fundraising and no previous inclination to return to campus to work. Yet what he did have was the most critical element: dedication to the cause.

Jenkins began his role at OSU in early 1990 and would spend more than 14 years working in that capacity. He carried the orange banner by calling on alumni, foundations and companies to support charitable initiatives through the colleges and university.

“One of those ‘ah-ha’ moments for me was at my first scholarship banquet,” Jenkins says. “When I could actually see the smiles on the faces of everyone involved. Everyone I’d worked with, from helping supporters achieve their goals in charitable giving, and the students receiving generous funds to help pay for their college educations. I’ll never forget that.”

He was hooked.



► Jenkins, pictured at the 2014 Angus Night on the Mountain, is always quick to acknowledge the support of fundraising event hosts, in this case Tom and Lois Ames of Spruce Mountain Ranch.

A move to Missouri

It was a late afternoon in mid-November 2003 when Milford Jenkins made a trip to

the mailbox and, to much delight, found his monthly *Angus Journal*. Although he made his living miles from the family’s Angus ranch, Jenkins remained involved in the operation and was a devoted reader of the American Angus Association’s publication. He would anxiously wait for the magazine to arrive each month and read it cover to cover.

Then he would set the book aside and go back to raising money for OSU.

Yet in that November issue, a particular article caught his attention. It was a column, written by former Association executive John Crouch, about the Board of Directors deciding to hire a staff director for the still-growing Angus Foundation. He read the column over and over again, and showed it to Peggy. She could see her husband was quite intrigued by the article, and they talked about it briefly, but discussion was left at that.

Fast forward to the next week: Milford returned home from a business trip in Oklahoma City and discovered he had

Growing up Angus

Milford is a popular name in the Jenkins family. The first Milford Jenkins settled the family’s ranch near the Oklahoma panhandle, just 6 miles from the Texas state line. His sons, Donald Ray and Milford “Duane” Jenkins, started the Angus herd in 1948, when they purchased their first registered-Angus heifers from W.E. Gamble in Hennessey, Okla., for an FFA project.

Donald Ray — Angus Foundation President Milford Jenkins’ dad — purchased a lifetime membership to the American Aberdeen-Angus Breeders’ Association in 1950 for \$20. He was 17 years old.

After high school graduation, Donald Ray attended Oklahoma A&M University for two years, where he studied animal husbandry. In 1956, he was drafted by the U.S. Army and stationed in Germany. A year later, Donald Ray was honorably discharged on family hardship after his father passed away. He returned to run the family farm, just north of Shattuck, Okla. Soon after, he met his future wife Judy, who was attending Southwestern Oklahoma State University, and they married in May 1960.

A lion’s share of his success is due to the lessons learned from his family, says Milford. “I will always owe a huge debt of gratitude to my parents and family for instilling the work ethic, values and integrity that remain my center each day.”

Upon meeting his dad, who is known as a quiet and reserved gentleman, many might ask, “Where did the gregarious and extroverted Milford come from?”

While quite the opposite in personality, they are very much the same in their love for Angus cattle, dedication to farming and ranching, hard work and determination.

“Angus cattle and wheat put a couple Jenkins boys through

college,” Jenkins says. “To give back to the breed that has given me so much, and continues to give to our family as they derive a livelihood on the farm, is a true honor.”

Both Milford and his older brother, Dennie, hold bachelor’s degrees in agricultural education. Dennie attended Oklahoma Panhandle State University (OPSU) and taught for six years in Arnett, Okla. In 1991, Dennie returned to the farm full-time after earning a master’s degree in agricultural economics at OSU. Milford completed his master’s degree in agricultural education at OSU in 1998.

On a normal year, their family would graze about 125 mama cows on their dryland native buffalo-grass pastures. Of course, the historic drought changed the way ranchers view “normal.” 2011 was an extremely challenging time for Jenkins Angus Farm, but summer rains this year and favorable market conditions have spread optimism in the area. They sell 40-50 bulls private treaty throughout the year, as well as participate in several different consignment sales.

It’s due to his experience with Angus cattle and his family’s continued involvement today that Milford Jenkins brings such passion and enthusiasm to his role with the Angus Foundation. He understands the hard work that goes into sustaining a quality Angus operation, and the support it takes to protect that lifestyle for future generations.

“Blending my agriculture and Angus cattle background with 14-plus years of fundraising experience has been a tremendous opportunity,” Jenkins says. “When I started with the Angus Foundation, I was excited to be part of helping build the organization’s efforts from the ground up.”

received a phone call from the American Angus Association. They were looking for applicants for the Angus Foundation position and wondered if he knew of anyone who might be interested.

“That was truly one of those divine moments,” Jenkins recalls. “I remember hearing, as clear as could be, the Lord’s voice telling me, ‘Milford, this is where I want you to go.’”

He, Peggy, and their daughter, Dallas, who was a sixth grader at the time, had no reason to leave Stillwater. They had rewarding professional careers, enjoyed being involved in the community and were located in close proximity to both of their families.

No reason, except that he knew it was the right move.

A few years prior, Jenkins had been traveling north through Kansas City for donor visits in Nebraska. About an hour north of Kansas City, at Exit 47 on Interstate 29, he noticed a road sign with the words “Frederick Avenue,” familiar to all who register Angus cattle.

The name, of course, was the return mailing address of many publications and letters to his mailbox back home in Oklahoma. He had never visited Saint Joseph or the American Angus Association before and felt the sudden urge to turn around and see where the building was located. After a quick drive through the parking lot on a frigidly cold day, he thought, “You know, this would be a neat place to work.”

Now, almost 15 years later, he walks through that same parking lot on his way into the office. Saint Joseph became home for the Jenkins family in May 2004. It’s where daughter Dallas attended high school and to where she ventures back during breaks in her studies at OSU. She’s preparing for graduation in May 2015 with a bachelor’s degree in hotel and restaurant administration.

They had no reason to leave Stillwater, yet it was the beginning of many positive memories and accomplishments for both their family and the Angus Foundation.

“Still today, after nearly 25 years of being in the fundraising profession, one of my highlights each year is seeing all the smiles on faces at the National Junior Angus Show when the scholarships are presented.”

— Milford Jenkins



PHOTO COURTESY OF PEGGY JENKINS

► Oklahoma State University pride runs deep in the Jenkins family. Peggy, Dallas and Milford always welcome a trip to Boone Pickens Stadium to cheer on the Cowboys in Stillwater.

Foundation for the future

When Jenkins started as the director of development for the Angus Foundation, total assets for the organization were nearly \$2 million. A number that showed tremendous potential, given the number of supporters

expressing their charitable interest in the fundraising branch of the American Angus Association.

“It starts with a gift,” Jenkins says. “A couple, individual or company that is wishing to help others and sees a need that they can fill. Our role at the Angus Foundation is to facilitate that process. I’m just a cheerleader on the sidelines.”

Today, the Angus Foundation’s total assets sit around \$8.5 million. Thanks go to a dedicated group of donors who

are committed to advancing the future of education, youth and research.

Funds collected through the Angus Foundation benefit a number of educational activities and events throughout the year, industry-leading research projects, and unrivaled financial support for the next generation of Angus breed leaders.

With each passing year, Jenkins says the excitement never gets old. Each donor and each recipient is a special experience he is proud to witness.

Through the ambitious *Vision of Value: Campaign for Angus* — which was directed by Jenkins and resulted in \$7.6 million in pledges, outright cash gifts and planned giving commitments from 2004 to 2011 — the Angus Foundation continues to grow in its efforts to support the breed’s future leaders, fund research aimed toward improving the cattle industry, and provide leadership training and educational opportunities for Association members of all ages.

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“Still today, after nearly 25 years of being in the fundraising profession, one of my highlights each year is seeing all the smiles on faces at the National Junior Angus Show when the scholarships are presented,” Jenkins says. “That’s further validated in reading the heartfelt thank-you notes our office receives from the recipients and their parents, as well as those from Angus breeders and commercial producers impacted by programs and initiatives supported by the Angus Foundation.”

Ultimately, Jenkins says, every initiative comes down to a personal relationship.

“People give to people — no different than people buying Angus cattle from people they trust and have confidence,” Jenkins says. “The Angus Foundation’s staff, directors and volunteers over the years have been fortunate to build relationships to realize charitable resources in support of National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) programs, seminars that help young Angus breeders become more economically viable and prosperous, and research to improve critical areas, such as nutrition, genetics and cow herd health.”

By all accounts, the Angus Foundation has been successful in achieving goals set before the organization.

- ▶ More than \$2.1 million in scholarships, since 1998, have been awarded to more than 1,100 undergraduate and graduate students through the Angus Foundation.
- ▶ More than 3,350 NJAA members, since 1994, have attended the Leaders Engaged in Angus Development (LEAD) Conference.
- ▶ A total of 140 Beef Leaders Institute (BLI) participants, since it was implemented in 2008, have attended and benefitted from the educational event.
- ▶ More than 1,050 Angus breeders and commercial producers, since 2005, have attended the Cattlemen’s Boot Camps.
- ▶ Since 2005, more than \$1 million has been invested in research in genetic evaluation, genomic sequencing, marbling development, hair shedding, beef cow biological efficiency, single nucleotide polymorphism (SNP) characterization and other research at the guidance of the American Angus



▶ “Every step of the way, Peggy, Dallas and our families have been my constant source of support and encouragement, professionally and personally,” Jenkins says.

Association for the benefit of the thousands of members and the beef cattle industry.

“We can look at numbers all day, but the true measure of the Angus Foundation’s value comes down to an individual impact on someone’s life. That is worth so much more,” Jenkins says. “If I can have an impact on just one person during this journey, it

will have been time well spent.”

It could be a 14-year-old NJAA member attending their first LEAD conference, and taking their first trip across the country, making lifetime friendships and memories.

It could be a young American Angus Association member who receives first-hand knowledge on how the entire beef production chain operates while at BLI, and why what they do on the farm or ranch matters.

Or, it could be the son or daughter of an Angus rancher who will be the first generation in the family to graduate from college.

That’s the mission of the Angus Foundation: to be the driving force behind the experiences and education that will set the Angus breed and its membership up for success; to connect those who desire to give financially with those who will thrive upon those gifts; and to prepare a better future for cattle ranchers and farmers.

“Every gift makes a difference,” says Jenkins with conviction. “Every donor, no matter what size of contribution, is equally important in our effort to improve and protect the Angus breed for generations to come.”



Q&A with Milford Jenkins

Q: What’s your favorite movie of all time?

A: *Top Gun*. I could watch that movie again, again and again.

Q: What’s the most rewarding time for you as president of the Angus Foundation?

A: Seeing the smiles on the faces of both our scholarship donors and recipients during the National Junior Angus Show each year.

Q: What is the one thing Angus breeders should know about the Angus Foundation?

A: The Angus Foundation plays a very important role in enabling Angus youth to realize their dreams to attend college, empowering young producers through programs so they continue to glean knowledge and develop as leaders of tomorrow — for the Angus breed, for their communities and our country.

Q: What have you learned the most about fundraising and development during your nearly 25-year career?

A: Raising money is about listening. We must continue to understand what our members need and what they are interested in supporting, then develop how we can meet those needs, either by inventing programs or expanding current ones.

Q: What quote inspires you?

A: “You make a living by what you get, but you make a life by what you give.” — Winston Churchill