



# Fostering the Love of Angus

Family shares love of cattle with foster children.

Story & photos by **Kasey Brown**, associate editor

**S**teve Jobs, Babe Ruth, Cher, Willie Nelson and John Lennon all have an important similarity. While we recognize them for their achievements, many people don't know they were all foster children. They stand testimony to the tremendous things that can happen when a caring family and a positive outlet emerge.

One such Angus family has opened its home to many foster children, and they are sharing their love of agriculture. Dwayne and Virginia Brannon of Ellsinore, Mo., have adopted 10 children and fostered many more.

Dwayne and Virginia Brannon have led a very interesting life. Many years ago, they

were interested in adopting older children, but in southeast Missouri, older children weren't being cleared for adoption due to legal issues. Instead, Dwayne explains, they became foster parents, and even trained other foster parents for 20 years. Additionally, they became a certified relief home in which they have cared for many foster children through the years. This certification allowed them to establish a group home for hard-to-place children.

Obviously, this couple has a passion for improving the lives of young people. Now retired, Dwayne worked in the division of youth services for 20 years, and Virginia taught high school English and public



► **Above:** From left, Dwayne, Virginia, Josh and Genesis Brannon enjoy being in the Angus industry and appreciate the help from members of the Heart of the Ozark Angus Association in getting them started.

► **Left:** Missouri juniors took shifts volunteering to clean the showing during the week.



speaking. They also worked to improve the benefits of foster parents. Once, Dwayne was picking up a child from the airport, but had to use vacation time to do it. As a result, he worked with the Missouri legislature to get paternity leave and parental benefits for adoptive parents.

Wanting to help more children, the Brannons were the first in their area to break ground in international adoption. Virginia says they adopted two children from the Philippines and one from Vietnam. Officially, they have adopted 10 children. She grins and says now they are starting with grandchildren. Genesis, 13, and Joshua, 12, Brannon are children of previously adopted children and Dwayne and Virginia serve as their legal guardians.

Genesis and Josh (which he prefers, but Virginia laughs and says she will always call him by his full name) have lived with Virginia and Dwayne since they were in diapers, and Virginia says they seem to love living in the country. The other kids were older when they came to the Brannons and were already city kids, but these two are taking advantage of the country lifestyle and have joined the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA).

### Joining the Angus Family

The younger Brannons have been showing cattle for four years, and this year's National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) in Kansas City, Mo., was their second junior national. Dwayne and Virginia had bought an Angus bull in the fall of 2005 and five cows in the spring of 2006. Dwayne says they are progressively trying to build their herd and are to the point they hope to start selling registered-Angus cattle. They had always gone to fairs and watched many shows, but they didn't consider showing until the kids expressed an interest.

There weren't many showing opportunities in their area — it was generally only Genesis and Josh in the ring, but the nearby Heart of the Ozark Angus Association gathered the family under its wing. Dwayne says association members helped teach them so many things about getting started showing and encouraged them to attend the NJAS.

"We've found that the Angus



►Above and below: Genesis and Josh Brannon both exhibited owned heifers at the two National Junior Angus Shows (NJAS) they have attended. They plan to go to the NJAS in Indianapolis, Ind., next year.

people are the best people in the world," says Dwayne.

Virginia adds, "We say that in all sincerity. They have really helped us get started because

we didn't know anything about showing cattle."

Genesis agrees and says, "Everyone we've met has been really nice and helpful."

Dwayne says they owe Josh Worthington, general manager of the Missouri Angus Association; Clint Hunter, auctioneer; and Wes Tiemann, American Angus Association regional manager, for paying a lot of attention to Genesis and Josh.

A national junior show could be intimidating, but Genesis and Josh jumped in with both feet. At their first NJAS last year in Louisville, Ky., they competed in public speaking, creative writing, quiz bowl and judging contests, and showed owned heifers. This year, they did the same contests, but added the team sales and the Auxiliary-sponsored All-American *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) Cook-Off. Last year, Genesis placed third in the junior division of the judging contest, and Josh placed third in the junior division of public speaking.

Virginia explains that this year they

CONTINUED ON PAGE 216



## Fostering the Love of Angus CONTINUED FROM PAGE 215

joined the quiz bowl team because there was a young girl in Missouri who wanted to start a team but didn't have people to join her, so they decided to help out. Josh says they worked together to study quite a bit last year, which paid off with having the highest scores in the written test. They didn't do as well in the finals, but he says they are much more comfortable with the buzzers this time.

Since they are so close in age and therefore compete in the same age division, Genesis says that there is a bit of sibling rivalry, but they do help each other prepare. They give their speeches to each other and to Dwayne and Virginia (especially since Virginia taught public speaking for so long), and even to visitors and their other siblings. Virginia notes that they have a son who lives in Kansas City with whom they stayed during the NJAS this year. She laughs and recalls that he thought their 4-6 minute speech was 46 minutes. He was pleasantly surprised when it was much shorter than expected.

Meeting new people is one of the Brannon children's favorite aspects of going to the NJAS. They participated in the mentoring program last year, and say that their mentors were also a brother-sister pair from Indiana. Virginia says she most appreciated that the older pair kept coming back to check on Genesis and Josh, invited them to play cards and introduced them to many people. She says they did much more than was required of them for the program.

The Brannons want to attend next year's NJAS in Indianapolis, Ind., and they intend to improve their entries in the contests. Josh says for next year, he wants to improve in the speech contest. Genesis wants to learn to



► Both Brannon children say making friends is their favorite part of the NJAS. Here, Josh gives high fives during the award ceremony.

she speak up more in the team sales contest so she can learn to sell animals. They also get to apply the skills they are learning through contests at home and school.

### Using Angus skills

Dwayne adds, "These two have learned how to assume responsibility and to be kind to others through the junior Angus program. They are very hard workers, and we are extremely proud of them."

They have good reason to be. Genesis and Josh are using their new skills in other areas of life. They teach their friends and teachers at school about showing cattle and the work involved. Josh says the other kids at school are interested in learning about it. Even though they live in a rural area, most of their classmates don't have experience with agriculture.

Genesis has used Angus cattle in one of

her social studies projects. She, her cousin and a friend presented the history of Angus in America, and the impact of the breed today. The project was successful at the county and district levels and even went to compete at the state level.

What is most impressive is that Genesis and Josh both took out loans from the Farm Service Agency (FSA) to expand their cattle herd. A speaker from FSA spoke to their 4-H club and explained the process. They formed a plan with Dwayne and Virginia, went down to the FSA office and filled out the

extensive paperwork themselves. Their extension agent checked the plan originally to make sure it was sound and helps monitor it.

With the loan money, Genesis and Josh each bought a cow-calf pair and a bred heifer, and they had enough money left to jointly buy a bred cow. They did their own bidding, and they keep records on their purchases. They plan to sell the calves to pay back the loan, and the cows will help build their herd. They explain that they consign cattle to the Heart of the Ozarks Angus Association sale in West Plains, Mo. There is a spring sale and a fall sale, so it gives them two opportunities to sell cattle. The sale consigns only registered-Angus cattle, and through this sale, the Brannons are learning more about expected progeny differences (EPDs) and dollar value indexes (\$Values).

Steve Jobs, Babe Ruth, Cher, Willie Nelson and John Lennon each had a support system. With the opportunities available through the NJAA and the support of Dwayne and Virginia Brannon, the possibilities are endless.

