

The Road to the Green Coat

A look into the world of three NJAA board candidates leading up to 2013 National Junior Angus Show.

Story & photos by *Lynsey Meharg, intern*

The National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) is full of junior members who have a drive to succeed and a heart for service. Through service projects, the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) mentoring program and other opportunities, NJAA members can make a difference in their communities, their states and on the national level.

For 12 NJAA members, those acts of service develop into a two-year adventure that leads across the nation and exposes them to thousands of Angus enthusiasts while presenting tremendous opportunities. The NJAA Board of Directors are the planners, workforce and representation of the NJAA, and many junior members grow up dreaming of one day serving the Association by wearing the green coat.

The process

"There are several defining moments [that] shape the direction our lives take. My first opening ceremonies, winning a contest at nationals, running for Miss American Angus and being elected to the board were such events in my life," says Megan Ahearn, a member of the 2011-2013 junior board from Wills Point, Texas. "My time spent on the board has been focused on serving the membership to ensure juniors create a similar experience they can cherish. I hope that they have gained as much from me as I have from them."

The primary responsibility of an NJAA board member is to serve the NJAA in local, district, state, regional and national activities in a manner that will inform, motivate and inspire current and potential NJAA members,

Angus breeders, parents, community leaders, teachers and leaders in business and industry to achieve the aim and purposes of the organization and the goals of the national association.

"Being a board member is one of those experiences in life that shows your personal character," says Daniel McFarland of Keithville, La., who serves as the current vice chairman for the NJAA board. "I feel that this experience so far has had a monumental effect on who I am."

To become a candidate for the NJAA board, junior members must be elected by their state associations. Once elected, a state advisor must submit their name in writing to the director of junior activities for the American Angus Association.

After the name has been submitted, an application packet is mailed to the junior board candidate. Receiving the packet begins months of preparation for candidates leading to elections at the NJAS.

The paths that led these junior members to run for the junior board vary greatly; however, each expressed a genuine desire to make an impact on the NJAA, just as other board members have made

on them. Though their specific stories are quite different, these members attended the 2013 NJAS knowing their lives might be changed forever.

Will Fiske

As a seventh-generation cattleman growing up in Virginia, Will Fiske has developed a passion for the beef industry and the NJAA that has encouraged him to push himself to the limits of his comfort zone in order to continue his personal growth.

"All the involvement that's offered through NJAA is what shapes junior members," says Fiske, a native of Greenville, Va. "Whether you grab it by the horns or let it pass you by determines what you get out of your time as an NJAA member."

For Fiske, the NJAA affects youth through more than the contests and opportunities. He says he believes the people involved in the



► **Above:** Fiske and NJAA member Quannah Gardiner caught up in the Hale Arena hospitality area between shows.

► **Left:** State displays that tie into the theme of the NJAS are just one way that states can promote their junior board candidates. The Virginia display included a board proclaiming "Aberdeen Angus roots run deep in Virginia," as well as a picture of their candidate, Will Fiske.



Angus breed succeed in shaping youth through their actions, whether intentional or not.

“The skills and tools the NJAA gives them prepares them and sharpens their character,” Fiske says. “That’s all great, but I really think it’s about meeting all the people. It’s a family atmosphere. This association is full of people that really care.”

After being selected as the board candidate

at the Virginia Junior Angus Association annual meeting in February, Fiske began several months of preparation for the NJAS. Saying running for the junior board has been a thought “forever,” Fiske campaigned for the board position speaking from the heart instead of memorizing a prepared speech.

“I’m not perfect,” Fiske says. “I didn’t want to portray myself as someone I’m not.”

As a Zoetis HD50K intern last year, Fiske realized that helping people in the agriculture industry, in any capacity, is his passion.

“Being a link between those producers and the information about the product made me feel really good, because I was helping them in some small form,” Fiske says.

The relationships between board members and junior members are what make the impact, Fiske says, and he hopes to continue to develop those relationships during his term of service.

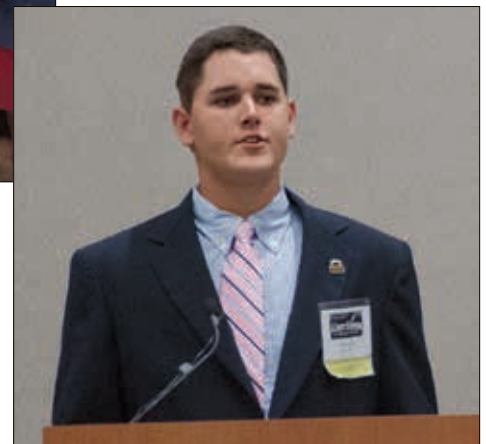
“I want to make sure there’s still a connection between the board and our juniors,” Fiske says. “The relationships you build as a board member with our juniors not only gives you the opportunity to discover people, but it also allows you to



► **Left:** Cory Watt, a member of the South Carolina Junior Angus Association, hugs South Carolina’s retiring junior board member, Sally Yon, after the new junior board was announced during the awards ceremony.

► **Below:** During the Candidate/Delegate Dinner, each candidate gave a prepared speech, answered two impromptu questions and participated in roundtable discussions with NJAA delegates.

PHOTOS BY KASEY BROWN



pick up during the year where you left off at junior show. We’re on the same wavelength.”

According to Fiske, the green coats really encourage members to step outside their comfort zones but still make them feel comfortable. His advice to younger members is exactly that: to step outside their comfort zones.

“I would tell them to chase their dreams and the things they’ve always wanted to do, but never have — to get uncomfortable, but to always remember they have the support of the green coats, advisors and the people of the association,” he says.

As a candidate, Fiske recalls a moment at Eastern Regionals where he and fellow candidate Cory Watt pulled a group of timid juniors into the center of the dance floor.

“Seeing the kids change and their confidence grow, that’s the difference,” Fiske stated. “I want to be that difference.”

Cory Watt

Life is full of challenges, and many say those challenges will forever change an individual’s outlook on life. Cory Watt of

Iva, S.C., can personally validate that old adage.

As a sophomore in high school, within a month Cory lost his best friend in a car accident and a cousin was diagnosed with lymphoma. When Cory began having intense headaches, his doctor attributed the migraines to the stress of his life. However, when a second opinion was sought, Cory discovered he had brain cancer on Oct. 31, 2007.

“It tremendously changed me as a person,” Watt says. “Those challenges brought me out of my shell and have allowed me to share my story.”

One piece of advice particularly affected Watt in the days after his diagnosis.

“My father would say, ‘Boy, you can’t worry about the things you can’t change,’” Watt says. “That taught me that you have to live life to the fullest, and you can’t worry about the things you have no control over.”

Watt credits his struggles, as well as the opportunities provided through NJAA, for preparing him to vie for a position on the board.

“Preparation for something like this starts early on when you first start showing,” Watt says. “Being involved in the activities and contests provided through NJAA gets you out

“Remember, being a National Junior Angus Association board member is a privilege to serve the juniors of the NJAA. It is a humbling experience and should only be pursued by those who are doing it for the junior members and not for their own personal gain.”

— Junior Board Responsibilities Handbook

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Aberdeen in twenty-thirteen

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of your comfort zone and breaks you out of your shell.”

As a junior member and a board candidate, Watt shared one thought on the true effect the NJAA has on its members.

“Being a part of the Angus breed has taught me hard work, responsibility and dedication,” Watt says. “I feel like those three characteristics are what it takes to be successful.”

As for what motivated him to run for junior board, Watt says that during the struggles he faced as a high school student, he realized the effect the board was having on him.

“I always looked up to the green coats,” Watt says. “I want to be that person for these juniors. I want to be there for them like those green coats were for me.”

Tylee Jo Williams

Dynamite really does come in small packages, and that line is especially true when describing Tylee Jo Williams. Before she was old enough to begin showing cattle on her own, the Rio Vista, Texas, junior recalls her frustration over being too young to walk her calves into the ring when her family exhibited cattle at open shows.

“I would always get so mad when I was told I was too little to show on my own!” Williams laughs.

Having the opportunity to grow up on a west Texas Angus ranch played a role in shaping Williams into the young woman she is today, but she credits two other groups of people with having the biggest effect on her life: the NJAA and her family.

“The history my family has in Angus is what made this important to me. My grandparents would be proud that I’m continuing the involvement just like they did,” Williams says. “All I’ve grown up with my whole life is Angus cattle.”

In 1971, Jerry and Kay Williams, Tylee’s grandparents, founded the Texas Junior Angus Association. This junior association would later offer their grandchildren opportunities never before available in their state. In January, at the Fort Worth Stock



► **Left:** Candidates were included on the list of signatures required for the Mentoring Program at NJAS. Throughout the week, junior members sought out candidates for signatures, giving the candidates a chance to meet and build relationships with NJAA members.

► **Below:** Tylee Jo Williams receives a congratulatory hug from Director of Activities, Events and Education Robin Ruff while her mother, Nikolyn Williams, looks on.



Show Junior Angus Show, Williams was selected as the Texas board candidate through a runoff. The preparation that has gone into her candidacy since has been hard work, but she credits her time in the NJAA with helping prepare her.

“I was involved in 4-H and FFA, but the NJAA has always been a huge part of my life,” Williams says. “You spend your life preparing, building skills through the NJAA, but it’s all about what you have to offer and how you can change the board.”

As for what makes a good junior board candidate, Williams feels that it is crucial for board candidates and members to be outgoing enough to interact one-on-one with members so that they are encouraged to become involved in the NJAA.

“We have to let them know that they’re our main focus and are very important to us,” she says.

Regardless of the election’s outcome, Williams says she would remain loyal to her breed and to the association she feels has shaped her into the person she is today.

“It’s learning responsibility, experiencing life lessons and meeting people from across the country,” Williams says. “I want to show people how passionate I am about this association. No matter what happens with the junior board, I will always be involved in the Angus breed.”

Perspective

During the week of the NJAS, Fiske, Watt and Williams each campaigned to become one of the six new NJAA directors elected at Wednesday’s NJAA annual meeting. All three succeeded. Throughout the events, competitions and speeches, these individuals made room in their schedules to spend time with curious juniors, whether it was a quick conversation or mentoring a younger member, because of their genuine passion for the NJAA.

Former junior board member and current director of American Angus Association junior activities, Jaclyn Upperman may have best put into words what the juniors experienced during NJAS.

“The week is a nerve-racking but incredible five days. It’s like a whirlwind; it comes to an end so suddenly, and usually you don’t remember many things from the week. As candidates they are always on their ‘A’ game,” says Upperman. “However, I would think the greatest part of being a candidate is meeting and creating friendships with other juniors while learning what the junior membership wants to see in the NJAA.”



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