

# Rekindling a Legacy

Though tragedy interrupted a family tradition for a moment in time, the Wingerts of Arkansas are reconnecting to their Angus roots.

by Kimberly McGuire

Ross Wingert's great-great-grandparents received a registered Angus heifer as a wedding gift in 1898. Shortly after, the Kansas newlyweds purchased a registered bull for \$200. The Angus pair stirred excitement among passersby. In an article written about the family in 1963, it was noted that in the early 1900s people would stop by to visit the cattle because "no one had ever seen black cattle before." Thus, the Wingert family's Angus tradition began — just 200 miles away from where George Grant brought home the first Angus bulls in America 25 years before.

A sixth-generation Angus breeder from Rose Bud, Ark., 11-year-old Ross is carrying on that family tradition today with his parents, Scott and Amanda Wingert, and his two younger brothers, 9-year-old Reid and 6-year-old Tanner. "Aberdeen in 2013" was his second National Junior Angus Show (NJAS).

"I was happy, nervous, scared — every emotion you can think of, that was me," Ross says of his first NJAS last year. He left Louisville with a 12th-place ribbon from a class of 13 heifers, placing where many juniors, especially first timers, end up with a homegrown heifer. Discouraging to some, Ross took this as motivation to learn more and work harder to earn a spot at the top of his class.

In Kansas City he showed the same heifer he did last year, this time earning champion results.

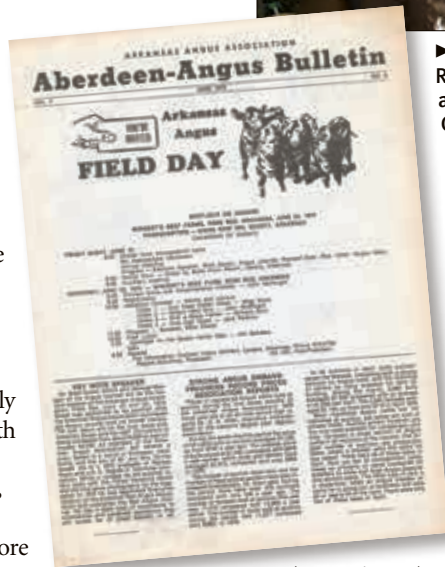
## Angus roots

In 1951, a devastating flood consumed the Wingert family's home in Emporia, Kan. Ross



► Above: The family celebrates with Ross Wingert as he is awarded a Belle Point Ranch Angus Star for extra effort. Pictured are (front row, from left) Tanner, Ross and Reid Wingert; (back row, from left) grandmother Pat Brooks; great-aunt Cheryl Wingert Crudup; and parents Amanda and Scott Wingert.

► Left: The Wingerts hosted the Arkansas Angus Field Day in June 1979. Newly hired American Angus Association Regional Manager Richard Dyar was the keynote speaker.



(Mr. Wingert) combined innovative farming and much dedication to his land to improve what used to be acres of "cotton that was hardly worth picking."

Mr. Wingert, along with his friend and hired man, Gerald Fry, started growing soybeans as a cash crop, as well as other grains and crops. However, the family made their living selling Angus herd bulls.

Olan Wingert, Scott's grandfather and Ross's namesake, relocated the farm to Rose Bud, Ark. He bought 535 acres for just \$35 per acre. With the community expecting the family's ambitions to fail, the original Ross Wingert

"We had a reputable herd," says daughter Cheryl Wingert Crudup, Scott's aunt. "We were breeders and weren't much into showing, but we did show just to get our names out there. ... My dad always said that you only have one reputation. His theory was that you don't ruin your reputation, you only sold what was the best."

A notable purchase for the family's operation was in 1962 when Mr. Wingert and Fry partnered on the top-selling Angus bull from the University of Arkansas for \$1,110.

Mr. Wingert and Fry excelled in working with the herd's genetics. Fry managed the artificial insemination (AI) work and began embryo transplant (ET) work for the farm, uncommon for the 1970s. The eldest son,

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Stanley Wingert, was actually one of the first individuals to AI a cow, Cheryl recalls.

The Wingerts hosted the Arkansas Angus Field Day in June 1979. Regional Manager Richard Dyar, who had just joined the American Angus Association staff in fall 1978, visited the farm in the spring to prepare for the field day and got acquainted with the family. He was one of the keynote speakers at the event.

### Tragedy strikes

Hard times fell upon the family soon after. In 1980, Mr. Wingert died of a heart attack and his son Dennis, Scott's father, was hospitalized with a broken hip from a car accident. Following Mr. Wingert's death, Dennis bought out most of the shares of the family farm and worked to keep the farm operating as normal.

On April 1, 1980, Dennis was killed in a tragic machinery accident while operating an auger. Scott was only 18 months old.

Two weeks after Dennis's funeral, the family made the hard decision to liquidate the farm. The realization that there was no one left to manage the farm, along with

economic crisis in the United States, forced the conclusion. The two deaths and a total dispersion in the fall marked a devastating moment in the Wingert family's history. One buyer purchased the entire herd and farm, with the family keeping just 5 acres of land.

Dyar was there at every step to help the Wingerts through the dispersion.

"I remember it well," he says. "Dennis was taking over the family farm and trying to maintain this special Angus operation. I think that after Dennis lost his life, it was just too much for them."

### A son's ambition

Although Scott grew up without his family's farming operation, he still had family. He was raised in a small-town farm setting with his mother and, later on, his stepfather. He grew up in 4-H and FFA, and he had his Aunt Cheryl and Uncle Stanley looking out for him. His Grandmother Wingert bought him his first steer when he was 9.

Scott remembers that he raised whatever animals he could scrape together the money to buy. By the time he was 17, Scott decided it was time to start a herd of his own.

"I figured I'd just go to the bank, get out my money and go buy a set of commercial cows," Scott said. "My family didn't even know."

He also leased land without his family's knowledge, recalling that they weren't too happy about it when they found out. By the time Scott was 22, he had added a pair of registered Angus heifers to his herd.

"He had always heard those stories, and that's what kind of got him into it," says Cheryl, referring to raising Angus cattle. "I think he wanted a piece of it to know his dad."

### A fresh start

The Wingert family farm is in full swing again. Scott and Amanda purchased Gerald Fry's 80 acres and lease another 500 acres. Their herd consists of about 60 registered Angus and 60 commercial cows. Two years ago, they had the opportunity to buy a heifer whose bloodline is from the same herd as some that Scott's father and grandfather raised in 1961.

Scott is quick to offer credit to many people who have helped them get started and keep the operation running. A fireman in Little Rock, which is an hour away, Scott's shifts are 24 hours on and 48 hours off. While he is at work, the responsibility falls on Amanda and their three sons.

Amanda is no stranger to the farming lifestyle; she also grew up showing steers. Now a first-grade teacher, she and the boys do chores in the mornings and evenings and take care of the show animals. Scott is very appreciative of Amanda's family for helping them get started, especially her father.

Fry has worked for three generations of Wingerts, and is a trusted advisor and friend.

"In the beginning Gerald helped me with AI work and taught me a lot about running an operation," Scott says. "He has been helping us with embryo work. Now I'm doing some of that on my own."

Scott and Amanda have a show team that's been decades in the making. Ross, Reid and Tanner all started showing calves in peewee shows when they were about 2. Reid, who turned 9 this year, has been showing at the county and district levels, and will show at his first junior nationals next year in Indianapolis. Rumor has it that Reid's initial breed of choice was Brahman, but a little coaxing from his Angus-oriented family has him on the Angus track.

It's evident that all of the boys are very active and attentive in their family's business. Last year at the NJAS, Tanner, just 5 years old then, was spotted "marking heat" on his herd of plastic cows with a piece of sidewalk chalk, just like his dad does with their own cows. Amanda says Tanner often watches for heat from the front porch in the mornings before school.

Dyar says he was thrilled to see the Wingerts getting back into the Angus world.

"They're a neat family; they're trying to revive the Wingert legacy of being beef producers. Their desire and drive was just like what Dennis had."



► **Above:** Ross devotes much of his time to the barn working with his heifers and getting them ready for the showing.

► **Right:** Regional Manager Richard Dyar has been with the Wingerts through their dispersion and herd rebuilding.



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## Aberdeen in 2013

Since the 2012 NJAS, Ross clocked more hours working with his heifers in hopes to be at the top of his class.

“He spent many hours at the barn and gave up opportunities to go and do other things so he could work with his heifers,” Amanda says. “He enjoys trap shooting, and he gave up shooting the month before nationals and devoted all of his time to his heifers.”

Scott notes that they have learned a lot about caring for show animals since last year. One person who has offered a lot of help and advice is Kelly Smith of Checkerhill Angus in West Plains, Mo. Kelly grew up in Arkansas and showed with Scott’s family. Like Dyar, he was excited to see the Wingert family back on the scene.

Kelly has been very supportive of the Wingerts and, as a longtime feed salesman, has helped them tremendously with their feeding program, Scott says. “Kelly and his boys have been very good to us, not only with getting us on the right track with our nutrition, but also with encouraging the boys and getting us started.”

A special bonus at the NJAS for the Wingerts was that Aunt Cheryl lives in Kansas City. She and her daughters were at the show to watch Ross, along with Scott’s mother who doesn’t miss a show. Cheryl got to see several Angus friends she hadn’t seen in a long time.

Remember the heifer that placed 12th in a class of 13? A year of hard work definitely paid off for Ross and his heifer, WC Jane A24, a September 2011 daughter of SAV Bismarck 5682. Ross showed two bred-and-owned (B&O) heifers this year, testimony to their family’s commitment to their own breeding program.

Ross reports that when the judge pulled him into first place in his class, he was certain that the judge meant the girl in front of him and didn’t move forward. To his surprise the judge came back to him.

When asked what he did after being pulled into first, Ross grins, “I just stood there. I



► **Above:** Senior B&O champion, **WC Jane A24**, by Ross Wingert, Rose Bud, Ark., improved from her 12th-place showing at last year’s NJAS. Much of the improvement is a testament to hard work in the barn.

► **Left:** Showing Angus cattle has been a family tradition for generations. Dennis Wingert shows his calf at the Arkansas State Fair in October 1959.

didn’t know what to do.” Being the last class of the day in the B&O show, Ross stayed in the ring for the division championship. The only

person in his family he could find outside the ring was his great-aunt Cheryl, who was a good coach and was happy to fill the role.

In the division championship, the cattle were lined up while the judge made his remarks. Ross says he didn’t really know what to do, but just kept showing. When the judge walked between his heifer and the young man’s heifer in front of him, Ross thought he was choosing the heifer ahead of him as champion. Then the judge “kind of got a funny look on his face and turned around and came back to me!”

“I was extremely proud of him,” says Amanda. “It was rewarding to see all of his hard work pay off.” After hearing Ross’s daily regimen for Jane and his other heifers, hard work doesn’t even begin to cover it.

“Reid and Tanner were very excited, just as excited as if it had been them,” says Amanda. “They have helped Ross a lot at the barn with his heifers.”

Winning B&O Senior Champion at the NJAS was a complete surprise to Ross and his family, and a wonderful thrill for Aunt Cheryl and family friends, such as Julie (McMahon) French and Susan (McMahon) Taylor of Belle Point Ranch, Lavaca, Ark., who showed cattle with Cheryl growing up. Scott says the Taylor girls have been so good to welcome the boys into Arkansas Angus and bring them out of their shyness.

Add to that list of friends and cheerleaders

Arkansas junior advisor Kirk Boecker.

“Kirk has done so much for us and for our organization. He just works so hard,” Scott shares.

Their supporters shared in the excitement of Ross’s win.

“To me, it is so exciting to see a young man from a young family who has raised a calf at his own home win a division,” Susan says. “Anymore, it seems that you have to have a high-dollar heifer who gets high-dollar care to be able to win. It is so refreshing, and I think everyone just feels good about it.”

Of course, Ross received a Belle Point Ranch Angus Star for his extra effort and for believing in WC Jane.

As an added compliment to his hard work, an interested buyer offered to purchase WC Jane from the Wingerts at this year’s NJAS. Hard work and attention go far in the ways of success. For now, the Wingerts have decided to keep Jane in the family and plan to bring her to Indianapolis for next year’s NJAS as a cow-calf pair.

“It was cool for Ross to win in bred-and-owned because that’s what we did,” says Cheryl. “We didn’t buy our heifers or bulls, we raised them.”

Ross says that although he felt more at ease going into the ring this time around, he was definitely still nervous. After such a successful time at NJAS, a young exhibitor could easily claim his favorite part of showing is the idea of winning, but not Ross. When asked what exactly he loved most about being in the Angus business, he answers, “Getting to carry on a family tradition.”