

COOKIN' UP CAB IN DES MOINES

The All-American *Certified Angus Beef*® Cook-Off returns to its birthplace.

Story & photos by **Shelby Mettlen**, assistant editor

Forty years ago, the American Angus Auxiliary's Beef Education booth at the National Western Stock Show in Denver was experiencing a challenge. Traditionally a 10-day event, the National Western extended to two weeks, and Auxiliary members ran short on time to commit to the event. Serving up beef education to a variety of audiences, the booth was a main attraction at the show,

and the event's main promoter and executor, the Auxiliary's Beef Education Committee, needed a way to bring the idea back home.

Lifelong Auxiliary member Anne Patton Schubert says which direction to take was unclear, but the idea of encouraging young members of the Angus business to be more involved in beef education seemed like the way to go.

The year was 1983, and Patton Schubert was president of the Auxiliary. It wasn't quite George Orwell's *1984*, but the economy was leaving farm families with slumped shoulders. Summer show season needed a boost.

That year, the first All-American *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) Cook-Off, originally called the Great Ground Round Cook-Off, was hosted during the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) on the grounds of the cooking competition's flagship city, Des Moines, Iowa.

A definite success

The event took place outside, on the grass, and it was "very simple," Patton Schubert says. The Cook-Off was intended to give youngsters a chance to become comfortable talking about the *Certified Angus Beef* brand.

"We wanted to do a contest to honor both our recipe and showmanship winners," she says. "Not just this cooked product, but also the best presented and supported with information."

That's how it became a song-and-dance skit program as well as a cooking contest, Patton Schubert says. Awards are given



►Nebraska juniors followed the Yellow Brick Road to Des Moines, Iowa, for the All-American *Certified Angus Beef* Cook-Off, where they served up a steak dish, Wizard of Oz-inspired skit and plenty of laughs.



►Preparation is key, and it's all hands on deck. Junior mom Heather Smith, Stromsburg, Neb., pins the "Hereford Queen" ribbon onto a Nebraska junior for her part in the team's Wizard of Oz-inspired skit.



►Aspiring actress and Palisade, Neb., native Reagan Skow helps out the Tin Man in her role as the Cowardly Lion in the Nebraska Intermediate team's Oz-inspired skit for the All-American *Certified Angus Beef* Cook-Off.

for the best skit and the best dish in each of three age divisions: junior, intermediate and senior.

“So, you could have a wonderful option in terms of meat, but not so good in the skit, or vice versa — and we saw that in that first year,” she laughs. “There were some that were just not quite right, but a lot of fun. We’ve tried to make it a fun event, encouraging our youngsters to do this.”

Initially, she wasn’t really sure where the event would go, she admits, “but our idea was anything we could do to encourage them to be good spokespersons for our breed would be helpful.”

Thirty-four years later, it seems to have worked out.

This year, nearly 180 young people on 36 teams broke out their best public speaking and culinary skills to take part in the competition.

That’s a few more than 1983’s 11 contestants.

The Land of CAB

Five young Nebraskans followed the Yellow Brick Road to Des Moines where they performed a skit based on the Wizard of Oz. Cast as Dorothy was Rachel Smith of Stromsburg, Neb. — she carted along Toto, who, (plot twist!) just so happened to be a CAB-qualifying “cow.”

It’s not the first time the extroverted 14-year-old has tackled the Cook-Off. Smith has participated in the competition since her first NJAS.

“We had a steak that was stuffed with bell peppers, spinach and feta cheese, and then we had the signature CAB seasoning



► Fourteen-year-old Rachel Smith, Stromsburg, Neb., carted along Toto the Cow in her role as Dorothy from the Wizard of Oz for the Nebraska Intermediate team’s skit in the All-American *Certified Angus Beef*® Cook-Off. For more on the Cook-Off, watch this segment of *The Angus Report*: <https://youtu.be/kLyRjep3XVI?t=6m>

Trying on the Chef’s Challenge

In its first few years, the All-American *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) Cook-Off included an adult division. Anne Lampe’s father, Paul St. Blanc, whose memory is honored by the prestigious Black Kettle Award, participated in the first Cook-Off.

A few years ago, as the division began to dwindle, the Auxiliary and CAB created the Chef’s Challenge, designed for adults and National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) members ages 17 to 21. Sans skits, the Chef’s Challenge is modeled after The Food Network’s popular series *Chopped*.

“Really it was the *Certified Angus Beef* program’s urging to try something like this,” says Anne Patton Schubert.

Participants in the Chef’s Challenge are notified of the cut of beef and “secret ingredients” 24 hours in advance and prepare a dish for judges at the same time as the Cook-Off.

“We try to do that to give our older NJAA members a chance to be a little bit more cooking-oriented, and it does not require a skit,” Patton Schubert says. “We don’t even have the recipe until they finish.”

“Some of the older juniors have embraced this contest as a way to practice their cooking skills and creativity in the kitchen,” Lampe says.



PHOTO BY SHAUNA ROSE HERMEL

► The Chef’s Challenge gives older National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) members and adults the opportunity to showcase their culinary skills.

on top,” Smith explains of her team’s dish. “We wanted something that was elegant but different than something you would normally see.”

Sixteen-year-old Palisade, Neb., native Reagan Skow gave her best roar as the Cowardly Lion. The budding actress played the same character in her school play this year, and couldn’t pass up the opportunity to do it again for the contest.

“My family has always been really involved

in cattle and the showing, but it’s stuff like this that really makes the National Junior Angus Show memorable,” Skow says. “I really enjoy acting, and this lets me get out of my shell and do that.”

Smith says she finds the most value in learning the 10 quality specifications of CAB.

“I know them all, so now I can tell people about them,” she says.

Skow agrees.

This year, she says she learned “how it all intertwines, and how the quality specifications go together to make one great brand.”

Both Smith and Skow show cattle at NJAS, but “it’s so much more than just showing cattle,” Skow points out.

“Not everyone gets the opportunity to excel in the showing, but everyone gets the chance to excel in something else with the National Junior Angus Association,” she says.

Encouraging the conversation

“The kids love it,” Anne Lampe, co-chairman of the event and Auxiliary past president, says of the Cook-Off.

“It’s a very fun, upbeat event,” adds Patton Schubert. “We try to encourage the judges to look at it the same way. We don’t need the scientific background. They don’t need to have a Ph.D. in nutrition or carcass data. We want the judges to have a conversation with them, not an interrogation.”

Fifteen judges with experience spanning widely across the industry were brought in to critique the contest. Zach Quick, marketing manager with Meredith AgriMedia in Des Moines, Iowa, served as a judge for the contest’s perhaps most unique category — frankfurters.

Quick admits a lot of one of America’s

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favorites — hot dogs — were involved, but points out that a stroganoff with cream sauce stood out. Cook-Off participants rarely lack creativity.

No matter the food, Quick says it's the energy the kids have that makes the contest fun.

"You could just tell that they were passionate about their topic and the fact that they're here," he says. "I think all the kids put

100% effort into it. A lot of passion, but a lot of nerves at the same time, too."

It was Quick's first time judging the contest, and his first time attending NJAS.

"Initially, I just thought I was going to be eating a bunch of great food," he admits, "but after I started in, I quickly realized that there was a lot more behind it. There were a lot of kids that have put a lot of time and effort into these skits to really profile CAB in

the best light possible and to highlight their backgrounds, and to incorporate that into each one of their skits."

Quick agrees that the contest encourages young people to get a jump on their public speaking and presentation skills, but even more importantly, it prepares them to lead the pasture-to-plate conversation with consumers.

"I think, specifically in this industry, everyone does a really nice job of talking to one another, but when you need to take that conversation and actually have that with a consumer, I think that's kind of where we start to fall a little short," Quick observes. "So, the fact that we have these kids now, that have been tasked to put together a presentation regarding that, you can see that they're a little nervous in their presentations, but it's great practice. By the time they're the ones that actually have to lead these conversations, I think they'll be great advocates for the industry."

Bringing it back to Des Moines

Planning for the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) doesn't happen overnight. Chairperson Mary Greiman and her husband, Ted, as well as Tricia and Colby Holmes started planning to have the event in Des Moines, Iowa, three years ago.

Greiman describes it as "a bucket-list kind of thing."

All four have been active in the American Angus Association, and Greiman wanted to host the event "just to say we did."

"It's fun, and we're lucky because we have lots of good volunteers," she explains, "not just in Iowa, but nationwide." She gives a nod to Anne Lampe and Anne Patton Schubert, affectionately dubbed "the Annes" by their peers, for their work with the All-American *Certified Angus Beef*® Cook-Off.

Ted's father, Don Greiman, participated in the first Cook-Off, called the Great Ground Round Cook-Off, in 1983 in Des Moines.

Greiman and her team kept in contact with the Annes to keep things running smoothly, she says.

"It's a ton of work for them and all the participants," she explains. With costumes, table decorations, recipes and food, Greiman likens it to "controlled chaos."

NJAS in Iowa

"It is so exciting to be hosting this," Greiman says. "What a great group of kids and families. We've all looked forward to having them come here." The only downside of hosting is not having the time to spend visiting with friends and family, she says.

Greiman has nothing but praise for this year's group of NJAS participants.

"They're smart kids, competent kids; they do so well in both the contests and the showing," she says. "A lot of my friends judged the contests, so it's awesome when they come up and say, 'Wow, what an impressive set of kids.'"

The National Junior Angus Show brings the Angus family together. Iowa is thrilled to be able to provide the opportunity and place for everyone to meet and reconnect, Greiman says.

"It's rewarding to hear they enjoyed something or tried something new," she says. "We tried a 5K/1K race this year, and it was a big hit. We also moved the socials to the beginning of the week, which I think went well. It would be really fantastic if, like the Cook-Off, we started these new events and they are successful for shows down the road. It's been a lot of work, but it's been a lot of fun as well. We hope everyone has had a fantastic time 'Winning with the Angus team' in Iowa!"



PHOTO BY LEANN SCHLEICHER

► This year, the National Junior Angus Show, hosted in Des Moines, Iowa, gave attendees the opportunity to participate in the show's first 5K/1K race.

Shaping tomorrow's beef leaders

Essentially, shaping future beef leaders is the whole idea.

"We first started really promoting the *Certified Angus Beef* angle of it, training the kids about *Certified Angus Beef*, to be able to talk to their consumers and their peers about it," Lampe says.

In the early years, it was common for participants to get a little scientific, she says. Now, it's more about practicing for that conversation with the consumer.

"We tell them to practice, hoping they'll go out into their communities or out into their schools and do the skits, and just know what our product is," she says.

The Cook-Off can even help kids in other contests.

"We thought, if they enjoy the Cook-Off, they'd be excellent at the public speaking contest because they got over the stage fright, because they're wearing a costume," Patton Schubert jokes.

The enthusiasm is evident. The kids are passionate. In three and a half decades, the Cook-Off has become arguably the most recognized event at NJAS.

The loyalty to the Angus breed is not to be taken lightly.

"*Certified Angus Beef* is the best beef around," Skow quips, still in costume.

And, just like Smith says, "Don't forget to save some leftovers for me!"

