

Herdsman of the Year

Bret Parr receives the Association's Herdsman of the Year Award.

by *Mathew Elliott*

The National Western Stock Show (NWSS) is a special time for Bret Parr. It has led to a move back to his home state of Illinois, a place to view some of the best Angus cattle in the industry and now claim to the 2009 American Angus Association's Herdsman of the Year Award.

Parr works for Weaver Angus Ranch in Peoria, Ill., where he works on everything from the show barn to hay and row crops. Because of his responsibilities at Weaver Angus Farm, Parr is not able to attend the NWSS every year, but it is a show that he always enjoys.

"I always enjoy all the different types of Angus and other breeds of cattle here," Parr says. "I really like to go down to the Yards and see all the different sire groups. Because of the large numbers at the National

Western, you can really see where the breed is going. Plus, it's also a nice time to get away from calving cows for a few days."

Parr was 11 years old when he got his start in the Angus business. His dad purchased an Angus heifer at the Illinois Futurity, and he began showing her right away. As he grew older, Parr enjoyed helping his sister with her calves, too.

"We were always competitive," Parr says. "In fact, in 1997, the last time the junior heifer show (the National Junior Angus Show [NJAS]) was in Perry, Georgia, she won the Grand Champion Owned Female."

Growing up about an hour south of Peoria in Mason City, Ill., Parr always respected the Weaver operation and saw the successes the Weavers had in the showing, sale ring and as a cattle operation. After

school, Parr moved to Hastings, Neb., to work with Quirk Land & Cattle Co.

It was on a different trip to the NWSS that Parr got his start with Weaver.

"I was out at the National Western in 2000 working for Quirk Land & Cattle Co.," he says. "I met up with Weaver Angus Farm Manager Dean Janssen, and he said they had an opening, so I sort of interviewed right there on the spot. By February 1, I was moving back to Illinois."

Hard work at home

"I just try to do the best job possible, nothing too special," Parr says of the honor of winning the Herdsman of the Year.

"The hardest work is done at home," he says. "That's something that some people have a hard time with. If you get them in good condition, everything else falls in line."

Parr credits Janssen for all he has learned about feeding and the work that has gone on at home. "I consider myself a good feeder, but really Dean has taught me a lot about how to get animals ready for a show or sale."

At Weaver Angus Farm, Parr works as part of the team.

"I do a majority of calving out the cows," he says. "I do a little work in the show barn, and showing the cattle in the summer. In the summer we have about 200 acres of hay to put up. There are some row crops that I'll help with in the fall. It's a farm operation; everyone kicks in and helps to get everything done."

Parr has a young family. Married in 2002, he and his wife now have two young boys and a little girl on the way. His oldest son, Charlie, recently got his first heifer. "Well, he's not showing yet, but he always wants to know where his heifer is," Parr says.

With his family at home and more calves being born, Parr could only stay for a couple of days in Denver. After being honored by his peers as the 2009 Herdsman of the Year, there was more work to be done at home.



PHOTO COURTESY OF AMERICAN ANGUS ASSOCIATION

► Jim Shirley (left), Association director of activities, presents the prize belt buckle to Bret Parr at the Herdsman's Banquet Jan. 12, for winning the Herdsman of the Year Award.

AJ