

# One in a Million,



## Almost

NJAA member Ruth Ann Myers is now an FFA national officer.

Story & photos by **Becky Mills**, field editor

It was a rock-star moment. The spotlight was literally on Ruth Ann Myers when she bounded on the stage of Louisville's Freedom Hall.

"I was overwhelmed. It was a very surreal moment," says the Harrodsburg, Ky., 20-year-old.

While it was all confetti and special effects Nov. 1 at the 2014 National FFA Convention, Myers' road to a regional vice president's job was filled with less glamorous sights and sounds. For instance, it was filled with early mornings and late nights in the show barn; the sleet, heat, mud and the manure of three species — lambs, market hogs and, of course, Angus heifers; and file after file of paperwork and records.

"This is the first time in 19 years our show barn has been empty," says Joe Myers, Ruth

Ann's father. In addition to Ruth Ann, her older brother, Colby, 23, also showed every year he was eligible.

"At times we had all three species in the barn at once," adds their mother, Toni.

While junior livestock shows might seem a world apart from a National FFA Organization office, Myers and her mentors say the skills are definitely transferable.

### Growing up Angus

"Showing in general takes a lot of work and determination," says Ruth Ann. "There was also the recordkeeping."

She should know. She showed her first lamb when she was 4 and starting showing heifers at 6.

"She grew up in it," says Joe. Normally the heifers she and Colby showed were eligible for the bred-and-owned (B&O) division at American Angus Association shows, coming from the family's registered-Angus herd. While Joe worked as an ag teacher early in his career, then as a manager for purebred Angus operations, and now in sire acquisitions for Select Sires, he, Toni, Colby and Ruth Ann have kept the operation going.

She didn't stop at showing, either. At the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS), she competed in judging, quiz bowl and the Auxiliary-sponsored All-American *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) Cook-Off.

Her awards, honors and offices include being in the top five in B&O classes at the NJAS, reserve champion owned heifer at the Kentucky Preview Show and champion owned heifer at the Central Kentucky Angus Show. She was also a state officer in the Kentucky Junior Angus Association, as well as a princess and queen in the state association.

She received her Gold Award at this year's NJAS, but because of her FFA duties, she wasn't on hand for the first time since she's been eligible to show.

"Our first family vacation was to a junior national Angus show," she recalls.

Angus breeder Charlie Boyd II says, "There is no question her involvement in Angus cattle helped her succeed. Ruth Ann is a prime example of how the Angus junior programs and activities help young people. The American Angus Association has the strongest junior program in the beef business."

The May's Lick, Ky., cattleman adds, "Ruth Ann had interaction with many other talented young people, and they had a positive influence on her."

### FFA journey

Ruth Ann wasn't exactly a latecomer to FFA, either. She started attending FFA events long before she was officially eligible in the ninth grade. When asked what drew her to FFA, Ruth Ann simply pointed across the room to her mom. "Her, obviously."

Toni first taught agriculture and was an FFA advisor in Montgomery County until Joe took the manager's job at Anderson Circle Farms in 2007. Then the family moved to Harrodsburg, where Toni teaches animal science, horticulture and is one of two FFA advisors in Boyle County with Matt Whitaker.

"I've always been around FFA," says Ruth Ann. "This is the first time in 15 years I

haven't been able to go to FFA camp. We didn't go to family vacations. We went to shows or FFA camp."

Toni says, "When

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she was 7 or 8, she'd show the older campers around."

The head start served her well. She had the state champion FFA market hog for three years, made it to the second level in the state with her Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) in her market hog enterprise, and conducted workshops about agriculture for other students as part of her SAE in ag education.

Her FFA officer career started early, too. She was a committee chair in her local FFA in the ninth grade, and later became assistant reporter, reporter and president. "I graduated from high school and a few weeks later was elected state vice president," said Ruth Ann.

The over-achiever completed her freshman year at the University of Kentucky while serving as state vice president. Then the bug bit for more.

"A national office had not been my goal," says Ruth Ann. "I thought it was out of my reach, but after the state office, I worked my tail off preparing to run."

While Ruth Ann may have thought it was out of her reach, her supporters didn't.

"She uses her successes and failures to help other kids," says Toni. "She is very accessible and relatable."

Stacy Vincent, Ag Education assistant professor at the University of Kentucky, says, "She is the most selfless person I know. No matter how exhausted she is, she won't take a break if there is one more person that wants to talk to her."

She adds, "An older man who used to babysit for Ruth Ann has dementia and is in a nursing home. When she heard he was having a good day, she took the time to drive to see him."

Toni notes Ruth Ann's determination. When Ruth Ann decided to run for national office, she started preparations immediately by attending a training session in Texas. Showing wisdom, she surrounded herself with people who could help her.

Angus breeder Boyd agrees, noting her



► **Above:** Toni and Joe Myers are proud their daughter, Ruth Ann (center), was elected one of six national FFA officers to represent 610,000 members.



► **Left:** Colby and Ruth Ann Myers showed Angus heifers from their family operation.

focus, awareness, thoughtfulness and preparedness, but most of all, her work ethic. He says, "Ruth Ann has integrity. She has been successful and will continue to be successful, but she will never sacrifice her integrity for success. That is rare in this day and age."

### Opening doors

Ruth Ann has needed her work ethic this year. Before she leaves office at the end of October, she will have traveled 300 days and 100,000 miles, almost all of it by plane since she is too young to rent a car. She and her fellow officers live in motels because they aren't in one place — even the national FFA headquarters in Indianapolis, Ind. — long enough for an apartment.

She isn't complaining.

"We meet with stakeholders, businesses, industries and sponsors and let them know they are making a difference," she explains. "We visit FFA members. During FFA week I was in Arizona and visited 14 different schools."

She adds, "The best part is the state conventions, how they are all different but alike, too. In Louisiana they had an alligator at the convention. But the FFA officers always have the same motives and passion for agriculture."

There was even a 10-day trip to Japan to meet with that country's Future Farmers program.

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► Angus cattle have been a constant in Ruth Ann Myers' life.





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If there is a drawback, she says, it is being away from home so much.

“They try to get us home every couple of months, and people feel sorry for us because we’re gone so much so they invite us to their homes for home-cooked meals,” she says. “FFA is a big family.”

So, what’s next for the former Kentucky Angus Queen when she leaves office at the end of October? She’ll look for an internship to fill November and December. Then she’ll go back to school at the University of Kentucky, where she’ll be a second-semester sophomore. The full-time schedule of a national FFA officer won’t even allow for online classes.

After graduation, Ruth Ann is looking forward to exploring the many opportunities her ag education degree offers.

“That is a very versatile degree,” she explains. “I can be an ag teacher, work in human resources, be a sales rep.”

Toni notes, “She has been exposed to so much.”

Ruth Ann adds, “It has been eye opening.” As part of her FFA duties, she’s met with a number of major agriculture companies. She quotes part of the FFA mission statement,

“‘FFA makes a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education.’ That is coming into play now.”

When it comes to advice for other young people, Ruth Ann is quick to say, “Never limit your goals. When I started FFA in the ninth grade, I never thought a national office was an obtainable goal. Then I had leadership positions in my chapter, then regional, then national.”

“If I can be a national officer, anybody can. I was never good at contests, but I enjoyed the interviews. I honed in on that skill. Hone in on what you’re best at.”

The former junior livestock exhibitor did, and it paid. Her University of Kentucky ag education professor Vincent recalls that Saturday in November. “I couldn’t stay for the election, so I went to the office two hours early, locked myself in and watched the election on my computer. I was a nervous wreck. When Ruth Ann won, I squealed like a little girl and danced a jig in my office.”

“Ruth Ann is our Triple Crown winner, a five-star basketball recruit and grand champion at the North American

► NJAA member Ruth Ann Myers is now a national officer in FFA.



[International Livestock Exposition],” she says.

One in a million, or close to it. Her proud mom says, “There are over 610,000 FFA members and they elect six national officers. Our Ruth Ann is one of them!”



**Editor’s Note:** *Becky Mills is a cattlemaster and freelancer from Cuthbert, Ga.*