

Champion of Opportunity

American Angus Association President Paul Hill isn't bashful about seizing opportunity or providing it to others.

Story & photos by **Shauna Rose Hermel**

Walking through the pasture at Champion Hill, Bidwell, Ohio, is like striding down an Angus walk of fame. Managing partner Paul Hill points out an individual, describes her accolades and shares a story about the junior member who showed her then brought her back for embryo transfer. It's hard to distinguish which he is most proud of—the animal or the youth.

Hill points to another animal, and another and another. Each has its own story. It doesn't take long to realize the scope of what he has accomplished with the breeding program at Champion Hill,

the enthusiasm he has for the breed or the responsibility and sheer delight he realizes in helping juniors with their show programs.

"I've known him almost 40 years," says Ben Eggers of Sydenstricker Genetics, Mexico, Mo., "and no one has more passion for the competition, the history, the people and the Angus breed than Paul Hill."

It's this passion that motivated Hill to run for the Board of Directors of the American Angus Association.

"He has come a long way from building

fires in a small country school in Florida to doing a truly admirable job as president and chairman of the Board of the American Angus Association," says fellow Board member Bill Davis of Rollin' Rock Angus, Sydney, Mont.

But Hill was not born with a showstick in his hand in a trailer headed to some show. His path to the Boardroom is a story of timing and opportunity.

"If I have one talent," says Hill, "its being able to see opportunities and not being afraid to seize them."

Fruits of labor

Hill grew up on a peanut and cattle

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► Paul Hill says the greatest opportunity he was brave enough to seize was the opportunity to marry his wife of 38 years, Lynn Hill. A true cattleman in her own right, Lynn is an active participant in every aspect of the business.

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farm near Marianna, Fla. As a kid, he worked summers for a neighbor who raised gladiolas commercially and Polled Hereford cattle. The 150-head cow herd was managed by Roger Hardin, who introduced Hill to the role of a professional herdsman.

“Roger’s father-in-law was from southern Illinois, and they were herdsman and cattle people,” Hill explains, adding that both of Hardin’s brothers-in-law were also herdsman.

Hardin received the *Polled Hereford World* and the *Angus Journal*, Hill recalls. “I used to read them from cover to cover, and that’s how I developed my interest in the cattle thing.” Hardin was a willing teacher, and Hill seized the opportunity to learn some of the basics of raising cattle — like building fence.

In February 1966, he accompanied Hardin to a National Hereford Register of Merit Show in Athens, Ga. There he met Jack Phillips and Gail Long, who were at the show with Pennsylvania State University’s show string.

Phillips and Long shared with Hill their dream of starting a trade school that would double as a short course in animal husbandry and as a fitting service. They had already found a farm and were beginning to establish the American Herdsman Institute just south of Kansas City, Mo. When they offered him a chance to attend, it was an opportunity Hill couldn’t pass up.

He left home and high school to embark upon his dream of being a professional herdsman, learning from experience and from those along the way the philosophies that would lead him to the door of the American Angus Association.

Bound for Missouri

At 5 a.m., June 6, 1966, Paul Hill boarded a Greyhound bus, headed to Missouri. It was a memorable trip. A missed connection in Memphis meant an overnight stay in the bus depot. When the next bus to Kansas City didn’t arrive until the wee hours of the morning, Hill had to do some fancy talking to convince the bus driver not to leave the

terminal with his metal suitcase still sitting on the curb.

“I wouldn’t have that suitcase if I hadn’t been keeping close tabs on it,” he says. “That stuck with me forever. Trust people, but not all the way.”

At a stopover in Arkansas, he got his first look at fescue, the grass that would one day become a staple. “It was just daylight, and people were out mowing hay,” he recalls.

At 3 o’clock that afternoon, the bus dropped him off at a street corner in Lee’s Summit, Mo. “There wasn’t even a bus station,” he says. Metal suitcase in tow and some change in his pocket, the young lad from Florida used a pay phone to “call out to the farm” and request a ride.

“They’ll tell you I was pretty green,” he says, but they recognized his determination. Classes hadn’t started when Hill arrived, so he helped put the finishing touches on the farm, which included digging postholes through rock with the assistance of a tapping bar.

“When they couldn’t get one dug on account of the rock, Dr. Phillips would say, ‘Get Hill on it; he can run the idiot stick,’” Hill muses. “If they had something they couldn’t get done, they always put me on it.”

After going through the first class as a student, Hill became a staff assistant at the institute. The school’s focus was to teach participants how to be good herdsman for cattle operations. At the time, that included everything from herd management to showing. Students were taught how to observe cattle for problems, how to register



►**Above:** A doting father and grandfather, Hill says the Angus business provides a means for families to work together. Pictured are (clockwise from front) wife Lynn; grandson Maddox, daughter Sarah Schaffer, son-in-law Jason Schaffer, grandson Carter, Hill and daughter Neenah. Sarah and Neenah were active in the NJAA and the showing.

►**Right:** Showing cattle provides a sport in which the whole family can participate, Hill notes, recalling the adventures he and his family have had over the years. Sarah served as Miss American Angus and as an NJAA director and officer.



a calf and keep herd records, how to trim hooves, showmanship skills, grooming techniques, live animal evaluation, marketing and salesmanship.

In addition to cattle raised at the institute, breeders hired the institute to fit and show animals for them. They could pay by the month or transfer half ownership of the animal to the institute, which hosted its first sale in 1967. In addition to raising funds, the sales gave students experience in marketing.

Each six-week course culminated in showing the institute's string of 50-60 head at one of the country's large shows.

"The first year was pretty exciting because we had a bull (Evas Royal Supreme) that we took to the All-American Futurity that won supreme champion," Hill recalls. "That was back when you couldn't even crowd around the ring to see. It was a big deal back then."

"In 1967 we had a senior heifer calf by Sir Sam that won champion at the Charolais Congress in Kansas City," Hill recalls of the show and subsequent sale at the Muhlebach Hotel. She was the top-selling Charolais ever at that time.

"They showed her, but she never won again," says Hill, ever the competitor. "We had her fitted pretty good. She had nice hair."

In addition to the herd management, fitting and marketing, Hill absorbed himself in learning the human part of the business.

"Dr. Phillips was a great teacher," he says in admiration. "He and Gail judged a lot of shows, and he'd come home and tell you about everything at the show, the people and the personalities. Part of his deal was to teach you how to read people, and when to keep your mouth shut."

Active duty

Knowing that he would get drafted, Hill volunteered for the Army in July 1968. A demolitions specialist, he spent a tour and a half on active duty in Vietnam. On patrol, they'd come across land mines and booby traps on a daily basis, he recalls. "Our job was to either dismantle them or put a charge in them and blow them up."

Hill was twice named soldier of the month for his company, and he was awarded the Army Commendation Medal. Officially, this award is presented to a member of the Armed Forces who distinguishes himself or herself by heroism or meritorious

achievement or service. Says Hill, it's basically given to someone for looking out for their fellow soldier.

His time as a soldier was a lesson in patience, Hill says. "The biggest thing there, was to figure out survival, and patience was the thing that kept you alive."

He also learned that while the exercise was not at the time considered a military victory, it did in fact succeed in changing the mind-set of the people.

"Even though we actually lost the war,

Vietnam is the most thriving part of southeast Asia now," Hill explains. "It was run under communist rule after that — they tried to enforce it upon them — but they still have a free-enterprise system in Vietnam. When people have a chance to be free, they will never be dominated again."

The time overseas broadened Hill's view and gave him a deeper appreciation for the opportunities available in the U.S.

"When you see other things that happen in the world, it gives you a lot of appreciation for what America really is," Hill says, adding that young people today would benefit from volunteering for the Peace Corps and giving a year of service to their country. "The more we interact with other countries, the better chance we'll have an understanding of them, and them of us."

Back home

It only took Hill a couple weeks upon his return to make his way back to the herdsman institute. And there he had the chance to seize what he terms the greatest opportunity of all — his wife, Lynn.

Lynn Swanson, an Illinois girl with a degree in ruminant nutrition, had been hired by Orville Sweet to work with the performance programs at the American Polled Hereford Association in Kansas City. They met when she came out to the farm for a visit.

"Dr. Phillips said, 'That girl is way too intelligent for you,'" Hill laughs. "I



► "Years ago the mentality was that the manager would make the cattle," Hill says. "Today, the mentality is the cattle make the herdsman and the owners."



thought Lynn was very attractive, but she was smarter than hell, too. I've never been intimidated by smart people. I guess I'm too simple to be intimidated."

Another opportunity was presented when Hill fitted Cartier of Wye at the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) in Denver, Colo., for James Hicks, who owned Briarhill Angus Farms of Union Springs, Ala. Hicks and manager Kenneth Haines took Hill to dinner and asked him to join Briarhill as herdsman.

Seizing another opportunity, he started his career as a herdsman for Briarhill in April 1971. He and Lynn were married that

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November. Daughters Sarah and Neenah were born during his 10-year stint there.

Putting education to work

Briarhill was home to a herd of 750 Angus cows. They used the showring to advertise and market seedstock, launching Hill's reputation as one of the premier fitters in the breed.

"If you could win with a bull, you could sell all the semen you could collect," Hill recalls of the days before expected progeny differences (EPDs). "As data got to be more important, whether they won became less significant."

Angus cattle were small back then, Hill recalls, and everybody in the country was trying to make them bigger. Rapid progress meant rapid herd turnover, so few females were sold, except to the stockyards.

"We had a tremendous bull market though," he says. "I spent a lot of time with commercial people merchandising bulls." In addition to selling bulls private treaty,

Hill would take semi loads to sales in Ocala and Okeechobee, Fla. Back then, he says, every bull was broke to lead and fitted. And, without EPDs, the Extension grading system, which focused a lot on structure, played a big role in how people evaluated bulls.

"A lot of people think all I've ever done is show cattle, but I sold an awful lot of commercial bulls at Briarhill," he says. He also got in on the ground floor of progeny testing, as Briarhill participated in a multi-year research project at Auburn University, evaluating the production efficiency of female lines.

He helped Briarhill launch its first production sale in 1971. When Haines retired, Hill seized the opportunity to become general manager. Hill put greater emphasis on sales and marketing, capping off his success with the \$150,000 sale of part interest in General JJ Patton.

After Briarhill dispersed in May 1981, Hill managed herds in Connecticut, South

Carolina and Virginia. During that time, Sarah and Neenah became active in the National Junior Angus Association and the showring, and Hill participated in the various state associations. But he missed the emphasis on the breeding program that he had had at Briarhill.

Champion Hill

"When I came here to Ohio in 1990, I wanted to go back to the basics that made me successful at Briarhill, and Marshall and I were both in synch on our philosophy," Hill says of his business partner Marshall Reynolds. At first working for Reynolds as manager of the Bidwell, Ohio, operation, their agreement was to form a partnership if, after getting to know each other, they both agreed.

About three years later they partnered in Champion Hill, named for the partnership of Reynolds' Champion Industries and Hill. The name became prophetic, as the Ohio hill country resembling foothills of the Appalachian Mountains soon became home to champion Angus bloodlines.

Hill credits the success of Champion Hill to his partner. "I had a lot of experience under my belt when I came to this place and he and I formed Champion Hill," he says, "but I couldn't have made it a reality without him providing not only the land, but the business sense. He's an entrepreneur."

The respect is noticeable as Hill recounts Reynolds's start. A student at Marshall University in Huntington, W.Va., Reynolds earned his living cleaning up around the printing machines at night. The owner took a liking to Reynolds and after two years asked him to quit school and to work for him full time. A few years later, in 1964,



►Above: Jay Stout, shown checking heat with Hill amongst a pen of donors, has worked for Hill nearly 15 years. Says co-worker Jon Davis, "He's Paul's favorite; he gets things done."

►Right: Brad Keirns, assistant herdsman at Champion Hill, recently married a picture-shy Amanda. Paul and Lynn consider those in their employ an extension of the family.



he sold Reynolds the Chapman Printing business.

Getting the money to buy the printing business was no simple task. No bank in West Virginia would loan Reynolds the money, even with a cosigner. He had to go to Virginia to secure a loan.

"Twenty years later he owned the bank in West Virginia that wouldn't loan him the money," Hill says, grinning with obvious admiration. Today, Reynolds' Champion Industries Inc. is a publicly traded institution with more than \$100 million in yearly revenue.

"Marshall's deal is to buy a business and to have somebody run it or involved who is an expert in that field," Hill says. "That's where I come in."

Without Reynolds' patience, Hill admits, he probably wouldn't have seen the fledgling operation through to a profitable business.

"We got in pretty deep financially," Hill recalls of those early years. "He kept encouraging me that it takes a while to make a profit. I probably wouldn't have had the courage without his business expertise and knowledge of how to start things and how to make them work."

Reynolds still plays an active role in Champion Hill, and the partners discuss the business at length, but Hill is charged with making decisions on a day-to-day basis.

Giving back

Appreciation for the opportunities presented to both men in their youth lends understanding to their emphasis on returning the favor by presenting opportunities to young men and women.

One of the first interns with whom Hill had the opportunity to work was Tim Hussman, who took an internship with Briarhill through the American Angus Association. Hussman later became a Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) assistant director and is currently a distributor of the brand through Los Angeles-based Newport Meat Co. (see "CAB Turns 30," page 193).

In Mark Duffell, Hill found a student who thrived on the same desire to be a herdsman. "Mark is one of the great cattle managers of our business," he says of Duffell.

"If it were not for Paul and his confidence in me as a young man, I would not be where I am today," says Duffell, now managing partner at Whitestone Farm, Aldie, Va. "Paul took me under his wing at Hayes Star Ranch

in Travelers Rest, S.C., and then at Northcote Farm in Lynchburg, Va.

"Paul spent hours upon hours schooling and mentoring me on how to become a successful manager," he continues. "He taught me that sincerity and compassion in relating to people, as well as depth of knowledge, are key ingredients in building a thriving Angus operation. I have always admired Paul for his uncanny ability to identify young people who have the desire to become innovative and progressive leaders in our industry. He has always made himself available to support and encourage the type of talent we need in the Angus business."

Hill remembers the day he met Kelly Schaff. "It was his first trip to Denver. A lot of people wouldn't get their cattle up for him, but I got every one of mine up, and he knew every animal we had and its pedigree — as a 12-year-old kid," Hill says. "He and I became friends that day, and we've been friends ever since."

In fact, the two formed a genetic partnership that allows Champion Hill to select proven 6- and 7-year-old cows to use for its donor program and Schaff Angus Valley, Saint

Anthony, N.D., the opportunity to market in partnership bulls born at Champion Hill.

"Paul Hill is a positive, forward-thinking gentleman with an unbridled passion for life, youth and Angus cattle," Schaff says. "His depth of vision, character and integrity are concepts that inspired me since my youth and outlined the principles that are the foundation for our cattle operation. Paul Hill is my mentor, a true and respected friend, and a role model for myself and other young cattlemen in the breed."

Whether it's starting the Gallia County Junior Preview Show, donating heifer pregnancies to raise money for the Atlantic National Merit Award Program to provide scholarships, serving as an advisor for the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) or helping a young junior member one-on-one, Hill has gone out of his way to provide to youth an opportunity to succeed.

Champion for youth

"I really never had any desire to run for the Board until 10 or 12 years ago, when the girls were finishing up their show careers," Hill says. "As good as our junior program was, I saw a few things I thought I could improve upon if I were on the Board, and I thought I could get a better understanding of the breed through the experience."



►Jon and Melissa (Pickrell) Davis, shown with daughter Maggie, are shining examples of the strength of the NJAA program in preparing youth for future endeavors. John has worked at Champion Hill since 1998.

Hill and his contemporaries were baptized by fire their first year as Board members, facing a member ethics violation and an internal tug-of-war between entities at their first meeting. As the nation reeled in uncertainty from the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on New York City and the Pentagon, the Angus world got another shock. Little more than a month after 9-11, Executive Secretary Richard "Dick" Spader, a friend and adviser, died unexpectedly. The Board launched the process of selecting a replacement.

While many join the Board hoping to get involved with CAB by participating on its Board, Hill didn't. In fact, he's one of the only directors to not have served at least a term on that Board during his tenure.

He did not come on the Board planning to leave a mark within the Breed Improvement Committee. There were plenty of other directors quite capable and willing to do that, he says.

He saw his opportunity to make a difference in strengthening the Association's junior programs.

"His intent was to be proactive for juniors and in raising money for the junior program," says fellow Board member John Schurr, Schurrtop Farms, Farnam, Neb. "When a Foundation fundraising project was ongoing, Paul was always at the forefront. With his intentions furthered by the addition of Milford Jenkins to the staff, Paul Hill is the main reason the Foundation has been so successful."

Fellow officer Jay King of Sauk Valley Angus, Rock Falls, Ill., describes Hill as a "champion" for youth during his tenure on the Board.

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“As chairman of the Angus Foundation, he spearheaded the \$11-million challenge to the Angus industry,” King notes. “He is devoted to the development of our youth within our breed, both as a Director and as an Angus breeder.”

“As a stalwart advocate of the Angus Foundation over the years, Paul has played a crucial role in its recent growth and development,” says Foundation President Milford Jenkins. “In addition to being a major promoter of the Vision of Value: Campaign for Angus, Paul and Lynn have financially supported the effort personally. Paul has also helped secure financial support from numerous other fellow Angus breeders, corporations and friends for our education, youth and research activities.

“The lives of countless Angus youth will forever be enriched, directly or indirectly, as a result of Paul’s enthusiasm, passion and hard work on their behalf in tirelessly championing the need for funds for

scholarships, leadership training and opportunities for them to grow and mature to lead our Angus breed, communities and country tomorrow,” he continues.

Year as president

When Hill took the reins as president of the Association in November 2008, no one could have envisioned the challenges that would lie ahead.

“The most difficult year we’ve had as a Board was during his presidency,” Schurr, who will complete his sixth year on the Board, notes, “and he’s just done a super job.”

In February, at Hill’s first full Board meeting as President, John Crouch announced his intention to retire as chief executive officer (CEO) by summer’s end.

“Paul dealt with the hiring of our new CEO in a manner that was fair, well-thought-out and that allowed input from all Board members,” says Cathy Watkins, Middletown, Ind.

“I’ve been honored to have witnessed two CEO selections,” says Association legal counsel Paul Donnelly of Stinson, Morrison, Hecker LLP, who helped oversee the hiring processes of the Association’s leader. “Each required a high degree of leadership by the President. In both instances, the Association was well-served.

“Paul was a totally fair and honest broker throughout the selection process,” Donnelly notes. “His goals were to establish a procedure to preview the candidates and to never take sides. He managed to do that while maintaining not only the respect of every member of the Board, but the integrity of the process.”

Another challenge arose in the September Board meeting as the curly calf syndrome (CCS) was brought to the Board. While the situation continues to unfold, there’s no denying the respect fellow Board members

give him for his handling and leadership of the issue.

“Paul dealt with the discovery of a genetic abnormality promptly, and encouraged thorough and timely communication to our members about this issue,” Watkins notes.

“With the identification of curly calf syndrome, Paul’s leadership has been level-headed, always with the membership of American Angus Association as his first concern,” King adds.

Throughout it all, Hill’s greatest attribute as a leader has been his desire to be inclusive and transparent, says Joe Hampton, Mount Ulla, N.C. “Paul has made the challenges the Board has faced this year manageable by ensuring all Board members have input in the decision-making process.”

Back to work and family

With his year as President coming to a close, Hill will seize the opportunity to turn his full attention back to Champion Hill. There’s a neighbor kid he wants to get started into a job.

Grandson Carter, now 5, is nearing the age to show. Sarah and Neenah joke that it won’t be long till once again they hear Paul’s mantra as they readied their heifers to show: “One more time; take her around one more time.”

With Neenah in New York City working as an accountant and Sarah a pediatrician in Indianapolis with husband Jason Schaffer and children Carter and Maddox (not to mention other family members scattered across the U.S.), Paul and Lynn have some traveling to do.

Preparations need to be made for a semi load of recipients Hill’s nephew John, who is raising cattle on the homeplace in Florida, is sending to Ohio. And Hill says he needs to return calls from Herman Laramore, a commercial breeder he has worked with for 10 years, and Cliff Lamb, who he this year

began working on a research project at the University of Florida.

Champion Hill is home to 200 donor cows and 900 recipients. With a year-round breeding program to make the most efficient use of recipients and to supply the demand for show heifer projects, there are always breeding decisions to be made and customers to be called.

Hill looks forward to seizing the next opportunity.



►Above: While Champion Hill’s showing accomplishments are well-known, if not legendary, Hill’s efforts at progeny testing for efficiency and carcass merit and his devotion to commercial bull buyers, while less visible, are no less valuable to Champion Hill’s mission.

►Right: With an intensive, year-round ET program, Champion Hill is home to 200 donor cows and 900 recipients. Hill has built a reputation for marketing junior show heifer prospects, the accolades of which are posted to the Champion Hill web site.

