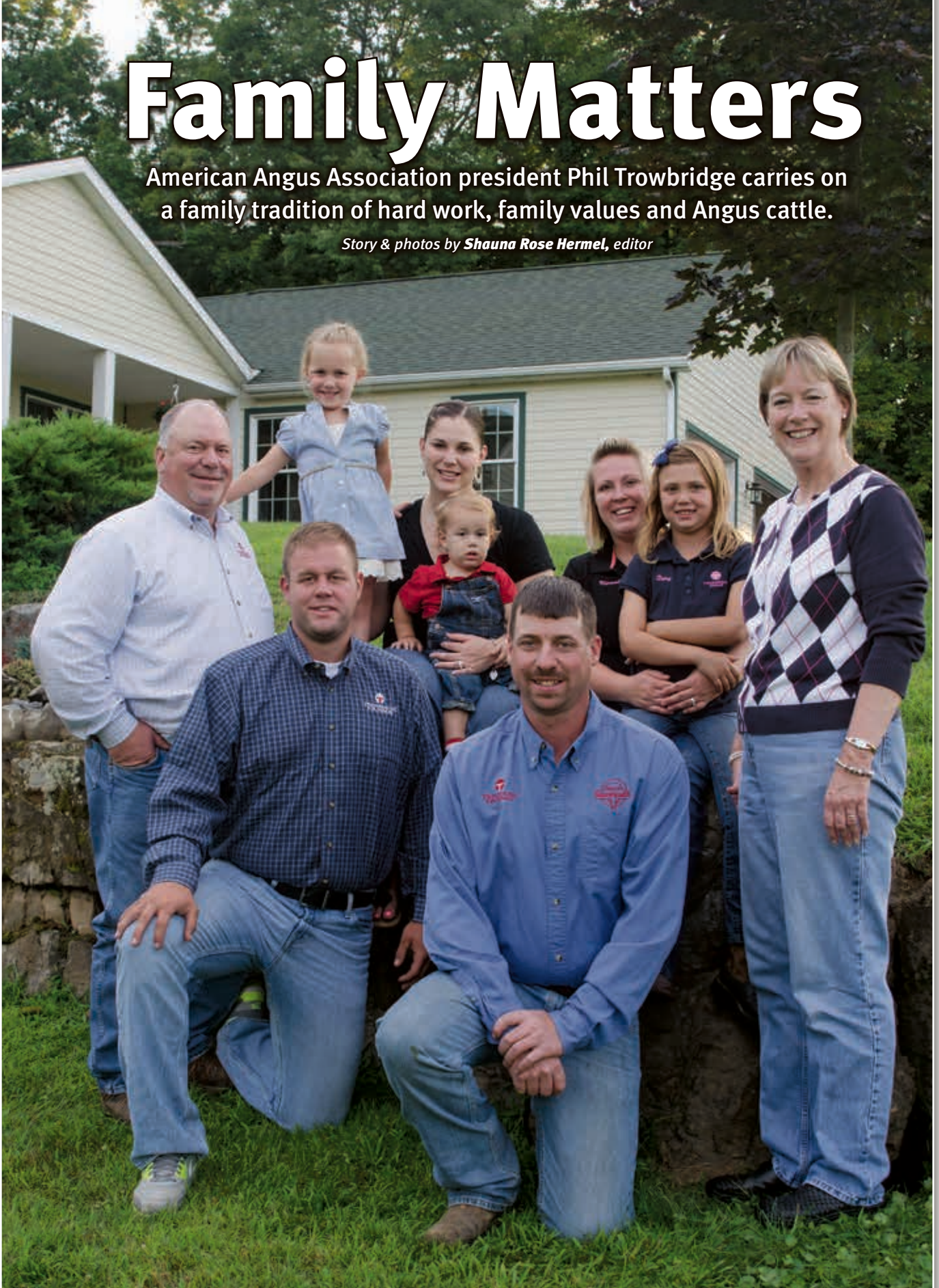


Family Matters

American Angus Association president Phil Trowbridge carries on a family tradition of hard work, family values and Angus cattle.

Story & photos by *Shauna Rose Hermel*, editor



► President Phil Trowbridge says he ran for the American Angus Association Board of Directors in 2004 to ensure his children had the opportunity to continue to raise Angus cattle. Pictured are (kneeling, from left) son-in-law Michael Alix; son P.J.; (back row, from left) Phil; granddaughter Taylor; daughter Amy, holding grandson Tucker; daughter-in-law Miranda, holding granddaughter Daisy; and wife Annie. CONTINUED ON PAGE 44

Visit the show barn at 4 o'clock on a weekday afternoon and you're sure to find yourself in the midst of chaos, says American Angus Association President Phil Trowbridge, smiling in pure enjoyment. That's about the time the youngsters start showing up at Trowbridge Angus, Ghent, N.Y., to tend to their livestock projects.

This afternoon Phil's granddaughter Daisy and fellow Clover Bud Patrick Stark are leading the calves they will show at the county fair. Daisy's mom, Miranda, and Patrick's aunt, Ilene, help adjust halters, give showmanship tips and tail the calves as the young showmen practice their technique.

Phil watches patiently, grabbing a rope halter to help Daisy replace her bull calf's

show halter. It's time for "Frank" to go back to the barn and for Daisy to bring out her favorite — Joy.

The cow has a special place in the hearts of the whole family, says Phil, who explains that Daisy became attached to her as a calf soon after his son, P.J., started dating Miranda. The couple is now married.

A twin, Joy was rejected by her mother. "I tried putting her on another cow and then the calf got really sick. By then, Daisy had fallen in love with her," Phil explains, wincing as he says he didn't know how to tell this little girl, whom he was just getting to know, that the calf might not make it.

"We didn't treat the calf any differently than any other," he continues, explaining Joy

had no eye reflex and required intravenous (IV) therapy. "I just don't like losing calves, and I'm a really sore loser."

That's lucky for Joy and Daisy, who this summer were preparing for their fourth showing at the Columbia County Fair, where Joy had already won supreme champion female in the open show three years in a row. Daisy, 8, won't be old enough to show in the 4-H show until next year.

Overseeing the county 4-H livestock projects the last 23 years is a natural fit for Phil, allowing him to combine his three passions — family, Angus cattle and youth.

Growing up Trowbridge

"4-H was almost like a right of passage at my house," says Phil, the eighth of nine children.

"We had a pretty unique upbringing," he says, fondly recalling his childhood at the home farm near Corfu, N.Y. With his father working at a local hydraulic plant and his mother working as a nurse, the younger generation was expected to work at home rather than take off-farm jobs. The girls maintained the house. The boys ran the outside, with the oldest boy at home managing the farm.

"I took over that responsibility when I was a freshman in high school," Phil says, noting that the farm included Angus cattle, vegetables and capons. "You ran the checkbook, you ran the fertilizer, you did everything."

Working together as a family and being granted that level of responsibility instilled a strong work ethic in Phil and his siblings, he says. "I always appreciated what [my dad] did by letting us do that."

His parents encouraged Phil's interest in the family's Angus herd, which was started in 1954, and his participation in 4-H.

"We had a lot of family support. Our folks encouraged us to do things, though they never did it for us," he says. "I always wanted to show cattle, so I got started showing cattle." He has shown at the state fair since he was 8 years old, missing only two or three years.



► **Above:** Phil takes obvious enjoyment in working cattle with his family, including granddaughter Daisy, who seems to be a natural with the cattle.

► **Right:** When P.J. and Amy were old enough to participate, Phil began a 4-H livestock program that he continues to oversee today. While the young 4-Hers do the work, many don't have a place to keep the animals at home, so Phil provides the facilities.



While they never got paid for working at home, they did get an education. His parents paid for all nine of their children to attend Catholic school from kindergarten through high school and for two years of postsecondary education.

“That’s 135 years worth of education that they paid for,” he says.

After high school, Phil chose to attend Alfred State College, majoring in animal science, in Alfred, N.Y. The school was close enough that he could go home to the farm every weekend he was not judging on the livestock team.

At college, he met his wife, Annie, who was majoring in medical office systems.

Working at Gallaghers

Phil started working as a herdsman for Jerome “Jerry” Brody at Gallagher’s Angus Farm, Ghent, N.Y., May 23, 1976 — the day after he graduated from Alfred State. He and Annie were married the following March.

On their honeymoon (actually a cattle tour), they took a detour to Sayre Farms to visit Greg Krueger and Mark Richardson. Driving in next to the show barn, Phil discovered Sayre Patriot.

“It was love at first sight,” says Phil, who convinced his employer to buy an interest in the young bull calf. “That was pretty exciting, because I was just a kid; I was only 20 years old.”

Patriot went on to win the Angus show at the North American International Livestock Exposition (NAILE) in Louisville, Ky., that November, the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) in Denver, Colo., in January and the NAILE again in November 1978.

While Annie’s first encounter with cattle was helping Phil wash a steer for the “Little I” during college, they worked hand in hand at Gallaghers. When Phil was promoted to manager in 1979, Brody hired Annie as a secretary.

“It worked out great,” says Phil, “because then we started having children. The office was in the house, so we kind of had the best of both worlds.” P.J. was born in 1980, and Amy was born in 1982.

The next generation

As soon as P.J. and Amy were old enough to get involved, Phil organized a 4-H livestock program. He’s continued to oversee it ever since, mentoring 10-12 participants each year. For many of the youth, a 4-H livestock project is their introduction to working with farm animals.

Many of them can’t keep an animal at home, so they keep them at Phil’s. Taking



►The Trowbridges flush 10-15 donor cows a year, flushing three to five cows every 30 days. Working with their neighbors to raise embryo calves is a win-win for all parties, says Phil.

cues from his dad, though, he makes them do the work.

“Initially, I made it more of a management and working project where I would front all the money, and then they would have to keep track of all the bills and pay me back when they were done. The last two years they’ve actually built up enough funding to where they’re paying their own feed bills.”

“Like a lot of other things, it takes some mentoring,” says Phil. That’s a responsibility



►While grade-school teachers tried to convince him he’d change his mind, Phil Trowbridge says he always had a clear picture of what he wanted to do — raise Angus cattle. “I knew what I wanted to do from the get go,” he says. “That was never a question to me. I’ve talked about doing this since as long as I’ve been alive.”

Phil takes seriously, appreciating those who helped foster his interests. He’s worked with 50-60 youth through the 4-H livestock projects, and this summer he supervised his 112th intern.

The internship program got its start while Phil was working for Gallaghers. Managing 400-500 cows at the time, he hired two students from Pennsylvania State University and one from Michigan State University to help in 1981. Phil had asked the trio to castrate a set of calves. About 5 minutes later they came back to him saying they didn’t know how.

“I was shocked and aggravated,” he recalls, making known his frustration that these “top of their class” students were being taught they should make the big bucks, but weren’t being given the tools to do the job. After listening to Phil complain long enough, his oldest brother, Paul (“Big P.J.”), told him to quit complaining and do something about it, so Phil approached his employer.

After hearing him out, Brody encouraged Phil to start teaching these college students the basics through an internship program. They hired their first intern, a young woman from the University of Massachusetts, in 1982.

“She was awesome,” Phil says, expounding on how hard of a worker she was. It nearly crushed him when, in an exit interview, she said if that’s how hard you have to work to be in agriculture, she was going to change her major. “It bothered me for a long time until I decided, you know, it’s better she find out now than five or six years from now. . . . Now she’s one of the largest honey producers in all of New England.”

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Phil remains close with most of the interns, and one even shares office space at the farm. The internship was career-changing for Mike Shanahan, who originally planned to go into production agriculture. Phil actually paid for Shanahan to go to photography school in Texas, which laid the foundation for Shanahan to begin his own cattle promotions business.

“College is a time in your life where you are shaped for the future,” says Shanahan, adding that he has enjoyed learning from Phil. “I was lucky enough to see my future in the best way possible by having experiences in the areas that I was studying, and also more outside-of-the-box than I had ever planned.”

Trowbridge Angus

Phil continued the internship program after leaving Gallaghers in 2005 to begin their own operation, one that son P.J. — who Phil says “shares the curse” — could partner in and come home to.

Phil and Annie had started building their own herd while working at Gallaghers, paying to graze their cows on the farm. When Brody sold out his cows in 1983, he let Phil and Annie keep their cows on the farm and use the Gallagher herd name. They changed the herd name to Trowbridge Angus when they left Gallaghers in 2005.

Annie went to night school to become a registered nurse. She worked as a hospice nurse for several years before taking a more administrative role in a local hospital in

Hudson, N.Y. Daughter Amy, her husband Michael and their children — Taylor, 3, and Tucker, 1 — live near Albany, where Amy is a registered nurse and *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) coordinator at Albany IVF and Michael works as a project manager and site inspector for Luizzi Bros. Contractors.

Phil and son P.J. partner in Trowbridge Angus, assisted by Logan Ransford, one of the youth Phil mentored in 4-H, and interns.

Of the 1,000 acres they manage, only 77 is owned. The balance consists of leased acres.

“We can run cows here as cheaply as anybody in the country, because we have a lot of second-home owners who are great people, but they don’t know exactly what they want to do with their farm, so they lease it to us,” says Phil. For some of those acres, rent is

paid in sweat equity, with the landowners counting on Phil and P.J. to maintain the property — mowing yards, controlling brush and maintaining fences.

One of the downsides to that is pastures are small, averaging 15-20 acres, says Phil. “A big group of cows for us is 30. Fortunately, the land will support about one cow per acre, grazing largely bluegrass and brome grass.”

They maintain a herd of 150 mama cows, Phil explains,

consisting of about 100 registered females and 50 recipients.

To expand their offerings they have two satellite herds — one in West Virginia and one in Massachusetts — and work with several neighbors, placing embryos in their cows. Phil obviously enjoys working with the neighboring farmers, beaming as he shows off a set of cows with a few nursing some Trowbridge embryo calves.

“You know, it’s nice because it is a little family operation that we’re able to help with,” he explains. “We have been selling his feeder calves for years, and they’ve done such a great job.”

With regard to the embryo program, says Phil, “We do all the labor. We set them up, we synch them, we implant them, we pre-check them, so he gives us a little better deal on it. But he raises them all just like they were



► **Above:** There’s a story about the curve of the mountain being the sleeping chair of Rip Van Winkle, Phil says, pointing to the Catskill Mountains, which form the foothills of the Adirondacks. “There’s a lot of history here. I like listening to people talk about it, but if it doesn’t have four legs and a tail, I don’t have much to do with it. I know that’s kind of small-minded, but I’m cows, horses, chickens, pigs, whatever. I love them. That’s what I do every day, and I have no desire to do anything else.”



► **Right:** “I love getting the opportunity to talk to kids,” says Phil. “Youth is my passion, and I’m talking about anybody less than 57. I tell them, you don’t have to get these scars; I’ve got them already.”

►Of the 1,000 acres the Trowbridges manage, only 77 are owned. The remainder are leased from neighbors, many of whom work in nearby metropolitan areas and escape to the country on weekends.

his. If we can give him a 30¢ premium on his calves, he's happy, we're happy. They're close by. We can see them. It really works pretty good.”

Marketing

There are more cattle in New York than most people would think, says Phil, proud of the fact agriculture is the No. 1 industry in the state. “It's just that they are small herds. The average herd size here is about 20.

“In this part of the world, we can't sell volume, so we have to really concentrate on quality. We've sold a lot of high-priced cows; but, on the whole, our marketplace is the bulls. This year we sold 50 some bulls in our bull sale and we averaged \$4,010. The nice part was 90% of them went to our commercial breeders in state.”

To reach those potential customers, every two or three years, the Trowbridges host a series of educational seminars.

“This year we held 14 educational meetings across the state just to get a chance to talk to our customers or potential customers,” Phil says. Promoting the meetings with postcards and in a local newspaper, they zigzag across the state hosting a lunch meeting at one sale barn and a dinner meeting at the next.

They don't have to be elaborate, Phil emphasizes, adding that they spent about \$100 to provide the meal at each meeting. If you provide something to eat and drink along with a good program, producers will attend.

“Our average attendance was in the 20s at each meeting,” says Phil, adding that the

American Angus Association helped them put together a PowerPoint to explain the ABCs of EPDs. “Then we talked about foot and leg structure and teat and udder structure.”

It's the type of information cattlemen are hungry to receive, he adds,



►Local foods and community supported agriculture (CSA) are popular in the local community. Phil notes there are 25 places to buy produce within a 10-mile radius of home.

“I get to judge a lot of fairs and shows. I tell all the kids, if you're rude in a showmanship class, you won't be able to find your way out with a flashlight. I'm serious. I have a very strong sense of family, first of all, and that means you have to be nice.”

— Phil Trowbridge

and being the provider helps them market their program.

“I hear guys from all over other parts of the country tell me that they can't have a bull sale. It's all about getting out there,” Phil says. “We sell most of our bulls one at a time, but we also have a pretty doggone good bull sale.”

The Trowbridges host their bull sale the first Saturday in May at the Finger Lakes Livestock Exchange in Canandaigua, N.Y. Buyers are offered the opportunity to sell their calves in a preconditioned feeder-calf sale the first Saturday of December.

“It's a big area, a great sale barn, and we're dealing with a family,” Phil says of their choice to host the sale 200 miles west of the farm at a sale barn owned by Ronnie Parker and his family. “You just couldn't work with better guys.”

Usually, the Trowbridges invite four or five herds to participate in their annual fall female sale, but this year, with the National Angus Conference & Tour (NAC&T) coming to New York, Phil says he felt he owed it to the members in the area to broaden that invitation to a larger number.

“I like being able to help folks, and I think that's a help,” he explains, noting that about 20 herds participated this year.

Farm-city relations

Building strong relationships with his neighbors is a high priority, and one in which Phil and P.J. expend a good share of time and effort. Many of those neighbors work in New York City during the week,

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so neighbor relations include a farm-city connection.

“You know, we do some different things to encourage that,” he says, sharing that they invite anyone who adjoins their farm to a neighborhood gathering each year. They keep it simple — just hamburgers and hot dogs the Trowbridges make themselves, beverages, condiments and good conversation.

In a community that prides itself on

supporting local foods, the event has grown from 40 people attending 10 or 12 years ago to about 150, Phil says.

The Trowbridges take the extra step to maintain good relationships with

“My family memories are so much better than any of my traveling. That’s what it is all about for me.”

— Phil Trowbridge

these neighbors.

“We try to make them feel comfortable,” Phil says. “We try to not do anything that is going to annoy them.”

Such consideration may mean taking the

long way to access a pasture so as not to use their neighbor’s driveway, baling a narrower 4×6-foot big round bale to fit better on the community’s highways or even buying a single-row bale rack that can travel faster on the rural roads. Calves are weaned on Mondays so they are done bawling by the time neighbors arrive Friday to spend the weekend.

While some would be annoyed at the extra work and expense, Phil and P.J. both enjoy the friendships formed, realizing those are the relationships that will enable them to continue to farm and raise Angus cattle for generations to come.

Phil says he actually has more confidence in the next generation than his own.

“The young adults that I am around are going to make us look foolish,” he says, explaining that with their work ethic, drive and ability to multi-task, they get stuff done.

There’s nothing P.J.’s peers can’t do — from welding on steel to roofing the house to wiring the barn, he emphasizes, adding that many don’t have agricultural backgrounds. “If we need to get something done ... within two hours they’d all be here. They’ll drop what they’re doing. It’s a neat culture.”

Back to the barn

As Daisy takes Joy back to the barn and turns her loose, P.J. and Logan drive in, wrapping up a long day baling hay with the typical headaches that go along with it. P.J. takes time to visit while Daisy and her friend Patrick do the evening chores, filling feed buckets and feeding their calves under Phil’s close supervision. She’s already absorbing the Trowbridge work ethic.

Everyone is all smiles anticipating a family dinner this evening. Amy and Michael will be coming, bringing Taylor and Tucker, too. Phil chuckles, saying Taylor and Tucker were rather annoyed at him for moving their cows out of the pens by the house to allow the grass to grow a little before the sale.

Surrounded by Angus cattle, family and a few friends, Phil Trowbridge is right where he wants to be.



►The Trowbridges manage about 150 cows, including 100 registered cows and 50 recipients.



►Phil helps Daisy and Patrick do evening chores after they finish working with their show projects.

