



Small Army, Big Results

Regional Angus Association raises big bucks for scholarships.

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

In 2001, Neal Richardson donated a heifer to the East Tennessee Angus Association scholarship fund. The generous gesture could have ended there. However, the Lancing, Tenn., cattleman was also a member of the fledgling Upper Cumberland Angus Association (UCAA) and says, “I got the idea we should do the same.”

The UCAA board of directors agreed with Richardson, and in 2001 they made it official. Richardson donated a yearling heifer, a scholarship was awarded, and the program took off like a match thrown in the middle of a stack of Tennessee lighter knots. Now, the UCAA gives four \$2,000 scholarships a year. In 2018, they’ll be up to five. The grand total, as of the April 2017 scholarship presentations, was \$108,000.

► Father-daughter team Richard and Kristen Brown work together on their Cookeville, Tenn., Angus operation. A National Junior Angus Association member, Kristen has been the recipient of a scholarship from the Upper Cumberland Angus Association two years in a row.



What's in a name?

As passionate as the members of the Upper Cumberland Angus Association (UCAA) are about their scholarship program, they are probably even more passionate about the name of the scholarships. Each one is officially known as the Tommy Burks Memorial Scholarship.

In addition to serving as a Tennessee state senator for 28 years, Burks was a full-time cattle, tobacco and hay farmer from Eastern Putnam County.

"Senator Burks was a staunch supporter of agriculture and Tennessee Technological University," says Sam Tays, scholarship chairman of the UCAA.

Tragically, Burks was murdered by a political opponent in 1998. His wife, Charlotte, won his seat as a write-in candidate and

continued to be re-elected until she retired in 2016. Each year, she would come to the UCAA banquet and have her picture taken with the scholarship recipients.

Originally, the scholarship was limited to students entering the ag program at Tennessee Tech. It is now open to any Tennessee student entering or attending any college or university.

While the qualifications changed, members of the UCAA are just as adamant as ever about the name of the scholarships. "If you met him, you'd never know he was a state senator," says UCAA board member David Hunter. "He was a farmer. He was one of us."

UCAA board member Neal Richardson agrees. "Even through today, it is easy for us to call it the Tommy Burks scholarship."

The UCAA gives four \$2,000 scholarships a year. In 2018, they'll be up to five. The grand total, as of the April 2017 scholarship presentations, was \$108,000.

UCAA scholarship chairman Sam Tays takes none of the credit.

"It takes an army," says the Cookeville auctioneer and Angus breeder. What Tays doesn't say is that it is a very small army. While the official roster lists around 50 members, Tays says there are only 28-30 active members, and most of the heavy lifting is done by the nine-member board.

Apparently, folks in the Upper Cumberland region don't say "no" very often. Besides the heifer, businesses donate merchandise and services, semen companies donate semen, farm co-ops donate everything from motor oil to tons of feed. The live auction is hosted on a Friday night in April, the same night as the UCAA annual meeting and banquet. The next day, the donated heifer, now a bred heifer, leads the UCAA Spring Time Select Sale, a 60-lot sale of screened, high-quality member-consigned females.

"Almost everybody overbids during the Friday night auction and on the heifer," says Tays.

"We have a lot of fun," adds board member and Angus breeder David Holt.

"The auction on Friday night makes about as much as the heifer," says UCAA secretary-treasurer and Angus breeder Doug Maynard.

As for the heifer, there is no need to worry about that part of the fundraising.

"We have so much support for this program, we have a waiting list of people who

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want to donate,” says Richardson. “We already have enough for six or eight more years.”

Youth aspect

The generosity of Angus breeders apparently doesn't have a minimum age requirement. Cookeville Angus breeder Kristen Brown, now 19, donated one of her heifers when she was a sophomore in high school. Apparently, also, karma is alive and well, because Brown received UCAA scholarships in April 2016 and 2017.

Competition is stiff for the scholarships. Tays says 20-30 students apply per year. Still, Brown was a natural choice. A quick glance at her list of accomplishments and one has to wonder when she eats or sleeps. An active part of her family's Spring Oak Angus operation, she started showing before she hit kindergarten. According to her father, UCAA President Richard Brown, the fourth-generation Angus breeder does everything on the farm but the actual artificial insemination (AI).

“It got in her blood at an early age,” he says.

While her family also includes her mother, Tina, and younger sister, Whitney, her father says he and Kristen are the only ones to catch the cattle bug.

Kristen uses her work ethic and skills off the farm, too. As soon as she was old enough, she joined 4-H, FFA, the Tennessee Junior Angus Association and the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA). Besides showing Angus heifers in all of the organizations, she

participated in every activity from livestock judging to public speaking to serving as the Tennessee Junior Angus Association queen and president. Back to showing, her heifers won championships from the local to state level. Ditto for showmanship awards.

That same work ethic has served her well as a freshman at the University of Tennessee (UT). An animal science major and ag business minor, she works at the Angus operation at UT's East Tennessee Research and Education Center and is on the UT Beef Show Team. She is also co-chairman of the UT Block & Bridle Rocky Top Cattle Show. Not surprisingly, she was named outstanding freshman in the UT animal science department.

Her achievements have helped her rack up scholarships. Still, applying for the UCAA scholarship was a given.

“The people in the UCAA have impacted my life,” says Kristen. “I knew I had them to support me.”

When she thanked the UCAA scholarship committee (Tays, Maynord and Pikeville Angus breeder Nate Houser), as well as the



► Sam Tays, chairman of the scholarship committee of the UCAA, says 20-30 students apply for the scholarships.

rest of the board, it is evident the support goes both ways. She has been an integral part of the UCAA spring sale.

David Holt says, “You’ve been through the thick and thin with us.”

When she graduates from UT, Kristen hopes to make livestock — more specifically, cattle — her profession.

“That’s where my passion is,” she says.

While she doesn't know where she'll land as far as a day job, she has plans for Spring Oak Angus. Now the operation consists of around 50 registered Angus and 25

commercial cows.

Kristen says, “Hopefully, when I graduate, the registered herd can grow.”

Thanks to the UCAA scholarships, more students have been able to realize their passions. While the scholarship committee hopes the recipients will stay in agriculture, they are also proud of the dentist, doctor and school teachers who received a financial boost from UCAA.

Says Richardson: “It is good to think we helped some of these young folks get started on their careers.”



Editor's Note: *Becky Mills is a freelance writer and cattlewoman from Cuthbert, Ga.*



► While the official roster lists around 50 members, there are only 28-30 active members, and most of the heavy lifting is done by the nine-member board. Pictured are (front row, from left) Doug Maynord, Richard Brown, David Holt, (back row, from left) David Hunter, Sam Tays, Neal Richardson, Ralph Mills and Nate Houser. Not pictured is Andy McBride.