



# Generation Gap



The NJAS has changed drastically in the last 30 years, but friendships formed there remain the same.

*Story & photos by Chelsea Good*

**C**indy DeHoff of Kansas and Susan Taylor of Arkansas first met at a National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) when they were 12 or 13. The show looked a lot different than it does now. There weren't any posters and photographs to look at. No speeches to listen to or Cook-Off skits to watch. There

also weren't any "Green Jackets" to look up to. All the show had were the basics — kids and cattle.

### **Forging friendships**

When they weren't showing or working with their cattle, Cindy and Susan ran

around in the same large group of kids at the NJAS.

"The older we got, the thicker the thieves became," Cindy says. The two girls became much closer in 1984 when Susan was elected to the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) Board of Directors and Cindy served

► **Above:** Much has changed about the NJAS since Cindy DeHoff (left) participated as a junior. More opportunities and learning experiences abound for her daughter Courtenay and her friends.



as Miss American Angus. Cindy joined Susan on the Board in 1985.

"I remember them being the best of friends and having so much fun," Susan's sister Julie McMahon French, who was on the first junior Board, says. Cindy and Susan stayed at French's apartment during a trip to Texas. It was one of their favorite Board experiences.

When Susan retired from the Board, she and Cindy began to lose touch. They went to separate colleges, got married and started families. The only contact the women had was through exchanging Christmas cards and seeing each other occasionally at the National Western Stock Show (NWSS) in Denver, Colo. This would soon change.

### Reconnected

"My dad came home from a sale one day and asked how old my oldest daughter, Claire, was," Susan says. "I told him she was 9." Susan recalls her dad smiling and saying, "Good, because I bought her a heifer."

Claire's first NJAS was in Tulsa, Okla. That was also the first NJAS that Cindy's oldest daughter, Courtenay, who is a year younger than Claire, attended. The mother-daughter pairs ran into each other in the barn.

"Susan and I introduced Courtenay and Claire and told them that they were going to be great friends," Cindy says. As they were walking away, Cindy's husband told her she couldn't make people be friends. Cindy disagreed.

The moms introduced the girls again a few years later.

"We were about 12 or 13, and Courtenay was about to go into showmanship at a show in Hutchinson, Kansas," Claire says. "She was so shy."

The two families went out to dinner that night, and Courtenay hardly said a word.

"My mom just threw me in with these girls, and they never stopped talking," Courtenay says. "I was scared."

Within the next couple of years, Courtenay began to open up and the girls really did become great friends.

"Now we can't get her to shut up," Claire jokes.

Courtenay rooms with the Taylor girls at the NJAS. Susan says it's just like having one more kid. In fact, at times it was hard to tell the difference, especially considering the fact she had a combination of seven daughters and nieces showing at one time.

**The times may have changed, but one thing both families say will always remain is the strength of the program and bonds forged with their Angus friends.**

Courtenay and Claire also shared a room at the Leaders Engaged in Angus Development (LEAD) Conference, which they both

call a great bonding experience for all of the attendees. Another opportunity where they have traveled by themselves was to Oklahoma State University's (OSU's) livestock judging camp.

"Our moms kept saying they didn't know if they wanted us in Stillwater all by ourselves," Claire says. "They must have thought we'd get in trouble like they would have."

The girls being in Stillwater is something the moms might have to adjust to. Courtenay and Claire enjoyed the camp at OSU so much they now plan on attending school there. Claire is beginning her first year at the University of Arkansas at Fort Smith and plans to transfer into OSU as a sophomore, the same year Courtenay will be entering as a freshman.

Both girls also plan to run for the NJAA Board of Directors. Claire says she will run next year, and Courtenay plans to run the year after that. They agree that their reasons for running aren't necessarily because their moms were on the Board, but rather because of the personal experiences they've had with older Green Jackets at LEAD and other NJAA activities.

### Board beginnings

Mention of the green jackets makes Susan laugh. Her Board was the first to wear them. They were sitting in a meeting and Kenley Conner from Kentucky was wearing a green sports coat. The team started talking about how sharp the jacket looked on Conner and how most people look good in green. They all tried the jacket on and agreed it was the color they wanted.

In her sister's opinion, it was a good change. Her team wore gray, double-knit jackets. Actually, she can't remember ever having the jacket on, except for her Board pictures.

"They were just a few letters away from being green, but they were bad," French says. She laughs about the iconic decisions those early boards made without realizing the effect they'd have.

"They elected 12 of us to the very first Board," French says. "Then they sent us straight into a room to draw straws." To help start the rotation, the six who drew short straws served for only one year. French and the other five who drew long straws served

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► DeHoff (right) and Susan Taylor forged a strong friendship while participating in the national junior show and serving on the NJAA Board of Directors. That friendship has been rekindled as their daughters participate in junior activities.

their full two-year terms. That night, they discussed the structure of the officer system, and they decided that the six who only had a year to serve should receive officer positions.

### Changing with the times

While some things the first Board decided that night remain the same, the duties of the young leaders have increased. And the opportunities for the current generation are more numerous.

“The show used to be much shorter, and the junior Board didn’t have as much responsibility,” Susan says. She says the Board now is much more active helping in the showing. Another big difference is its involvement with contests.

“When I was growing up, the NJAS was just a show,” Cindy says. “If you weren’t showing cattle, you weren’t there.” That isn’t true today. In addition to showing, Courtenay and Claire have competed in contests ranging from photography and public speaking to the Auxiliary-sponsored All-American *Certified Angus Beef*<sup>®</sup> (CAB<sup>®</sup>) Cook-Off and team sales. Cindy says she thinks the contests have helped NJAA members become more knowledgeable and well-rounded.

“The kids today know so much more about their animals and the end product,” she says, adding that the Cook-Off has had a lot to do with NJAA members learning about meat. She also appreciates the quiz bowl and extemporaneous speaking contests for teaching participants how to research, something she didn’t learn until college.

“It’s amazing how much has changed since we were on the Board,” Susan reflects. That doesn’t just go for the NJAS, but the world in general.

French got a chance to see these differences when she worked with kids on *The Scoop* newspaper (see pages 296-297) in Tulsa, Okla., at the 2007 NJAS.

“It intrigues me how much more sophisticated kids are nowadays,” French says. “I think they’re just exposed to so much more with the media.”

Before the NJAS, French asked Claire if she’d serve on the newspaper. Claire told her that she and Courtenay would both participate.

“They kind of come as a pair,” French says. “But they took their jobs very seriously. They’re in totally different stratospheres than their moms and I were in terms of what they’re exposed to and capable of. Both girls seem mature and mindful of who they



► Following in their moms’ footsteps, Courtenay DeHoff (left) and Claire Taylor have become close friends and enjoy participating in Angus activities together.

are. Looking back, Susan and Cindy seem so much younger when they were that age; they were very fun-loving.”

French attributes this difference between the girls and their moms to a change in time. One of the biggest changes she sees is the fact that every NJAA member on the newspaper staff had a cell phone.

“Kids today are so much more connected,” Cindy says. “I would have never thought of calling one of my Angus friends up during the year. Courtenay talks to hers all the time.” Cindy and Susan agree that the convenience of cell phones and e-mail make friendships easier to maintain for their daughters.

It makes life easier as well. Cindy remembers one trip when she was meeting her parents in Ohio for the NJAS. Her parents’ truck broke down in Illinois, but they didn’t have any way of contacting Cindy and letting her know. If something like that happened today, she’d easily be able to reach Courtenay on her cell phone.

### Some things never change

The times may have changed, but one thing both families say will always remain is the strength of the program and bonds forged with their Angus friends.

“It makes me so happy my daughters want to be involved with Angus,” Susan says. She says she feels fortunate her daughters have had the opportunity to participate

in a program that meant so much to her growing up.

Cindy is also thrilled to be involved in the NJAS once again. Her husband grew up with a Simmental background, and when Courtenay was younger, she showed both Angus and Simmental cattle. Cindy couldn’t have been happier when they decided to stick with Angus.

“Tom Burke would say I’ve made my husband ‘Mr. American Angus,’” Cindy jokes. However, she credits the Angus people with making the difference. She says the Angus community is full of some of her and her husband’s closest friends, not to mention those of their daughters.

“Involvement in the NJAA forges strong bonds,” French says. “Even though the kids compete against one another, their loyalties are still there.”

Susan and Cindy agree. They say that there were times when they lost touch with each other and others in the Angus community, but the second they met again, they picked up right where they left off.

“The minute you come back, everyone is still here, and you’re still close friends,” Cindy says.

French says she doesn’t think Cindy, Susan, Courtenay and Claire’s story is unusual.

“There will be plenty more stories like theirs as kids carry on and generations make the Angus bond even stronger.”

