

Embrace the Unexpected

Being involved with the American Angus Auxiliary sparked a lifelong passion for Cortney Holshouser of Castalia, N.C.

by Jena McReil, digital editor

Cortney Holshouser will tell you her husband, Karl, isn't the best teacher.

It was the summer of 2003, and the couple had been dating about a year when he persuaded her to show a heifer at the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) in Louisville, Ky. Cortney remembers stepping onto the green chips and into the bright lights, suddenly terrified at the grandeur of the showing.

Her nerves went into overdrive.

She had made her cattle-showing debut only a few weeks prior at a couple of county fairs and the Atlantic Nationals — which seemed like little league compared to the national stage she found herself entering that day.

"When Karl asked me if I'd be interested in showing, I said, 'Sure, I'll show a cow.' I had no idea what I was doing, but I did it anyway," Cortney says with a laugh. "He was not a good teacher, and I had my share of embarrassing moments, but I guess everything happens for a reason."

Looking back now, that intimidating trip around the NJAS showing was a prelude to what would become Cortney's sincere passion for the Angus breed and its people. Over the next decade, she would serve as a volunteer advisor for the North Carolina Junior Angus Association, in officer positions for the North Carolina Angus Auxiliary and at the helm of the American Angus Auxiliary.

An unexpected dream turned into reality.

While she always knew she wanted to be involved in agriculture, cattle weren't part of that equation. Cortney's family grew tobacco in eastern North Carolina, and before meeting Karl she'd never been around livestock. They met at North Carolina State University (NC State), where they both graduated in 2004. Two years later, they married and started their lives together on the farm.

Angus cattle, of course, were an essential part of the deal.

The Holshouser family has been raising Angus cattle for about 25 years, and Karl



► "I've always had a sense of not just being a member of something. I have always felt like I need to be involved and make a difference," says Cortney Holshouser, a North Carolina native and past president of the American Angus Auxiliary.

joined the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) when he was 8 years old.

Today, the couple travels with a small show string of cattle and manage an approximately 120-head seedstock operation in Castalia, N.C., as well as offer custom embryo transfer work.

"Our life together is definitely not what I would have imagined," Cortney says, "but I honestly wouldn't want it any other way. I would not trade it for anything."

While attending her first NJAS, Cortney says she was amazed at all the contests and activities for Angus youth.

Much more than a cattle show, the week's events offered impressive life-skills competitions that set juniors up for future success. Since 2003, she hasn't missed an NJAS.

"You don't realize the tradition of the junior show, and how families plan their summer around the event. It is their vacation — and now that's the same for me," Cortney says. "It's my most anticipated week of the year. That first year, I didn't know that I'd ever go back, but I couldn't imagine missing it now."

She and Karl served as advisors to the North Carolina Junior Angus Association for a couple of years, working with the youth and traveling to events, such as the Leaders Engaged in Angus Development (LEAD) conference. Through these experiences, Cortney was able to fully understand the opportunities presented to junior members in the Angus breed.

Finding her place

Martha Holshouser, her mother-in-law, purchased Cortney's first membership to the North Carolina Angus Auxiliary in 2004. She was immediately impressed with the group's enthusiasm for the Angus breed and its future generations.

Even though she did not grow up in the business, Cortney says she was extended a warm welcome by the American Angus Auxiliary and given the chance to share her talents within the volunteer organization. Throughout the next 10 years, she served in a number of leadership positions, both on the state and national level.

At the American Angus Auxiliary's Annual Meeting in November 2014, she retired as the organization's president.

"I've always had a sense of not just being a member of something. I have always felt like I need to be involved and make a difference," Cortney says. "I wanted to be involved with the Auxiliary because I felt very strongly about their mission, and I wanted to be



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► Cortney Holshouser (left) passes the gavel to Lynne Hinrichsen, who was elected president of the American Angus Auxiliary at its November 2014 Annual Meeting.



PHOTO BY KASEY BROWN

► Handing out awards at the NJAS is a favorite for Cortney, pictured here with the Association's director of events and education, Jaclyn Upperman.

involved in giving opportunities to Angus youth.”

A gracious and humble leader, Cortney has accomplished many goals for the Auxiliary and its members during her years of service. Her favorite, she says, is when young women approach her about being involved in the Auxiliary because they are inspired by the group's mission.

Each year, the American Angus Auxiliary conducts fundraising activities to support youth scholarships, hosts educational programs for their members, and provides opportunities for Angus women to connect and get to know one another.

Whether it's the Angus Gift Barn, showcasing trendy cattle merchandise to purchase, or the biannual “Women Connected” conference, which brings together women from across the country, the Auxiliary remains one of the Angus breed's best ambassadors. Cortney says that friendly atmosphere is what has kept their membership growing through the years.

“When I first became involved, I was completely out of my comfort zone. My biggest advice to anyone is don't be

intimidated. If you feel strongly about what we — or any other organization — are doing, come join us. We like to have fun and accomplish a lot at the same time.”

That sentiment holds true for any industry organization or group cattle producers might be interested in joining. Find a cause you are passionate about, and join with others who share in your goals. Together, you'll accomplish much more than you can separately.

Strength in numbers

Cattle farming and ranching can be a fairly isolated occupation.

One of the greatest benefits of being involved with the American Angus Auxiliary, Cortney says, is the ability to share experiences with women who have similar lifestyles.

“We are all very different, but still the same, and Angus cattle are what binds us,” Cortney says. “The best conversations we have together are about everyone's different takes on the business — what works for them, how the calves are looking, that sort of thing. We are a pretty integral part of the industry, and it's nice to share something like that with others like you.”

Those conversations play out in the stands at the NJAS, in the barns at regional shows, the Auxiliary's annual meetings, and at cattle sales and events throughout the country. Knowing that you aren't alone in your goal of producing quality beef, and relying on others for advice and expertise can make a significant impact on how you approach your business.

“I feel so passionately about the Auxiliary and our members, it just carries over to what I do on the farm,” Cortney says. “It makes you want to work that much harder to have something sustainable for the future generations to be able to enjoy.”

Organizations also bear the responsibility of helping protect the industry against future hardships and challenges. For the American Angus Auxiliary, Cortney says they spend a lot of time focused on consumer misconceptions about beef. Their group's demographics parallel those making a majority of the purchase decisions, and they have a great opportunity to educate others about the wholesomeness of beef.

One way they work together to do that is by hosting the All-American *Certified Angus Beef*® Cook-Off each year during the NJAS. The competitions encourage Angus youth to become well-versed in beef cuts, cooking flavorful meals and preparing creative presentations that resonate with consumer audiences.

Getting involved

No matter where you land in the Angus business, take advantage of the opportunities to network with fellow producers and make connections that can make your cattle operations stronger.

Angus breeders should consider attending the Beef Leaders Institute (BLI) or participating in other educational programs offered through the American Angus Association, including a Cattlemen's Boot Camp or seminars hosted at the National Angus Convention & Trade Show.

Applications for the 2015 BLI class are available online, and 20 young Association members will be selected to participate in a tour of the complete beef production chain. The leadership experience comes highly recommended from BLI alumni and is financially supported by the Angus Foundation.

The next Cattlemen's Boot Camp will be hosted by the University of Florida's Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences March 9-10 in Marianna, Fla. Classroom sessions and demonstrations are included in the day-and-a-half event. Register now online on the Association's website and make hotel reservations for what's sure to be an excellent program filled with practical applications for your farm or ranch.

The deadline to apply for both the BLI and Cattlemen's Boot Camp is March 2.

Becoming more involved in the Association can also start by getting to know those involved in state Angus associations or other cattlemen's groups. To find a complete listing of contacts or more information, visit www.angus.org.

“It’s our hope that by supporting the Cook-Off and other youth scholarships that we are investing in future advocates for our industry and helping ignite a passion for sharing the importance of cattle farming and ranching,” Cortney says.

Even though she did not grow up showing at the NJAS or competing in the Cook-Off, Cortney has witnessed firsthand the impacts such experiences can have on the beef

industry’s future leaders. She has awarded scholarships to outstanding young men and women who will make great contributions to the Angus breed, and she has rallied the efforts of the volunteer leaders who make those funds possible.

After leading her heifer into the ring at the 2003 NJAS, Cortney would’ve never guessed what lay ahead of her in the Angus



► Recognized for her year’s service as president of the American Angus Auxiliary, Cortney Holshouser was joined by several North Carolina Angus friends at the Auxiliary’s annual breakfast in Kansas City. Pictured (from left) are Alton Holshouser, Patty Harward, Catherine Harward, Martha Holshouser, Karl Holshouser, Cortney Holshouser, Christy Perdue, Carol Perdue, Elaine Scarlett, Clay Perdue and Jane Ebert.

community. By stepping outside her comfort zone, she was greeted with many opportunities to make a difference and establish friendships that will last a lifetime.

She may not have grown up with Angus cattle, but Cortney now considers herself a “lifer” in the American Angus Auxiliary and the American Angus Association.

Cortney treasures the opportunity to

build relationships with others who feel as strongly about the organization as she does, and who have the same goals and are willing to work just as hard to provide opportunities to youth.

Says Cortney, “In all honesty, the friendships that you make in this industry ... you just can’t put a price on that.”

