

Adapting for Success

Events have been postponed or canceled. Plans have been interrupted. Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, however, the team at the National Junior Angus Association has not stopped moving forward.

by Megan Silveira, assistant editor

Since its start in 1956, the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) has been dedicated to encouraging young people to become involved with the Angus breed, develop their skills and grow their character.

Today, the four-member events and education team — Jaclyn Upperman, director of events

and education; Jera Pipkin, education coordinator; Madeline Bauer, events coordinator; and Caitlyn Brandt, events coordinator — is still devoted to upholding the same mission made years ago.

While the nearly 6,000 active junior members from across the United States and Canada are a beacon of hope for the future of the Angus breed, the recent pandemic has tested the strength and dedication of the entire American Angus Association, especially the team consistently working behind the scenes at every NJAA event and program.

Season of change

As the effects of COVID-19 reached all corners of the country, the NJAA team had to cancel the Raising the Bar conference and postpone the State Training and Angus Retreat (STAR) conference, along with some shows this spring.

Pipkin says the NJAA's top priority was safety and security. With a focus on comfort and sensitivity for the topic at hand, Pipkin says the team had to err on the side of caution.

With various cancellations Pipkin says the events were not going to be the same, and she

and the rest of the NJAA team would rather the junior membership have an over-the-top experience than a halfway one.

“Since those events were canceled, we really wanted to find extra avenues to keep our junior members engaged during a time when they would normally be with us in person,” Pipkin explains.

Bauer says the biggest challenge through all the changes has been creating experiences to fill the void of cancelled events.

She says when faced with reconstructing both educational activities and events for junior membership, the NJAA team asked themselves, “How do you make up for those experiences? How do you make up for those moments?”

The NJAA team knew some canceled events could not be recreated, but Bauer says they could be replaced.

By adapting to change, embracing technology and utilizing a dose of creativity, Bauer and her team created virtual experiences to help make up for the schedule changes brought about by the pandemic.

Making modified memories

Despite feeling heartbroken the juniors would not be able to come together at the canceled or postponed events, Bauer says

the NJAA team immediately began searching for ways those members could still interact with one another and grow as individuals.

“We tried not to focus on our disappointment, and instead tried to move forward,” she says. “That’s what led us into our Steps to Success campaign.”

Pipkin says this campaign featured a published checklist of tasks created to help juniors step outside of their comfort zones and stay in touch with the Angus breed while at home. Members completed tasks surrounding topics in the beef



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industry such as stewardship, career development and leadership to compete for various NJAA prizes in giveaways, she says.

“We wanted to contribute to giving the kids something to do outside of their schoolwork,” Brandt adds. “We thought about getting them outside and keeping them thinking of summer shows or their projects.”

The 12 tasks assigned in the checklist were all “housekeeping” items Brandt says juniors would have to do at some point down the road. From completing Bronze and Silver award applications to writing thank you notes and even signing up for future NJAA contests, Brandt says she was thrilled to see high levels of engagement from the junior membership.

On the education side, to help provide a similar version of the instructive content that would have been presented at NJAA conferences, Pipkin says social media tools like Facebook had to be utilized.

From a live Q&A session on Facebook to answer questions about future NJAA contests to prerecorded video sessions featuring information previously scheduled to be presented at NJAA events, Pipkin says she has learned to embrace the situation created by COVID-19 as a “unique opportunity” to present information to junior members and their parents in an online format.

“The NJAA is all about our families and kids actively learning and engaging together,” she says. “I think that was a great silver lining for us. Even though the rest of the world stopped, it was really awesome to see our juniors and parents never really stopped wanting to learn.”

With the help of Keegan Cassidy, membership director of the National



Junior Angus Board (NJAB), Pipkin says the NJAA staff also put together the Career Development Corner. This new series revolves around the idea of preparing the junior membership for future careers, and features advice from NJAB members like Cassidy.

Brandt says Cassidy’s involvement with the video series is just one example of how the NJAB has proven their dedication to the breed during the pandemic. Through the changes brought about in the past few months, Brandt says she has been thankful for the help and positivity the NJAB has brought to the table.

Bauer adds that the members of the NJAB have been going above and beyond to make the most of these times, and continue to help the junior membership grow and develop. The use of technology has allowed for Bauer’s teammates and the NJAB to create modified versions of the NJAA events junior members might have been missing out on.

“I’ve never been more thankful for technology, and I think that’s how we’ve been able to move forward. We utilize social media and are

constantly thinking of ways of how we are going to continue to engage with our junior membership and bring our Angus family together,” Bauer says.

Brandt says the list of ideas the NJAA team has is constantly growing. Webinars, trivia questions, throwback challenges and videos are on the horizon for junior members, and Brandt believes these new opportunities will meet the needs of the juniors in a unique way.

At the end of the day, Brandt says the NJAA team will continue to provide for the future of the Angus breed. While things may look and feel different, Brandt says her team will never stop moving forward. As long as the juniors continue engaging with the NJAA, the possibilities for growth and connection will continue to be provided.

“Juniors are resilient,” she says. “Once this is over, we’re going to come back stronger than ever.” **AJ**

Editor’s note: Look for more #AngusFamily Moving Forward stories like this in upcoming issues of the Angus Journal and online at www.Angus.org/MovingForward.