

GUARDIANS OF THE FUTURE

Ten outstanding individuals receive scholarships from the American Angus Auxiliary.

by Megan Silveira, assistant editor

Batman has Robin, but how is *The Business Breed* helping ensure they're securing the next generation of superheroes?

The National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) is full of outstanding members, but this year 10 individuals stood out as potential guardians of the future of the agriculture industry.

For more than 50 years, the American Angus Auxiliary has recognized these outstanding junior members with the American Angus

Auxiliary Scholarship. The Auxiliary has awarded thousands of dollars in scholarships to 10 individuals this year.

Five female and five male recipients are chosen and ranked, with the scholarship pool divided amongst them based on their individual placings. Individuals must be nominated for recognition by their state or regional association the spring preceding their freshman year of college.

Five cattlemen are also selected by

the Auxiliary during this application process to be entered into the race for the title of Miss American Angus. The newest woman to wear the red coat will be crowned at the annual Angus Convention in November.

The contestants for the 2023-2024 Miss American Angus title are Lauren Wolter, Illinois; Kady Vejraska, Washington; Eliza Patchin, Iowa; Ava Leibfried, Wisconsin; and Alyson Friesen, Oklahoma.



Female scholarship winners (from left) are Julie Conover, American Angus Auxiliary president, presenting; Lauren Wolter, Aviston, Ill., first; Addison Cotton, York, Neb., second; Kady Vejraska, Omak, Wash., third; Eliza Patchin, Mitchellville, Iowa, fourth; Sydney Sanders, Leesburg, Ohio, fifth; and Karla Knapp, American Angus Auxiliary president-elect.



The Auxiliary's male scholarship winners (from left) are Tucker Stagemeyer, Page, Neb., first; Blake Pillars, Martin, Mich., third; and Sam Greiman, Perry, Iowa, fifth. Not pictured are James Voight Fredericksburg, Pa., second; and Jensen Woodworth, Enterprise, Kan., fourth.



LAUREN WOLTER

Hometown: Aviston, Ill.
Parents: Bradley and Kimberly Wolter
High School: Central Comm. High School-Breese
College: Kansas State University
NJAA Tenure: 9 years

"Any individual that has grown up in agriculture would say that work ethic is one of the most important skills they learned on the farm. Although I certainly do not disagree, I believe that perseverance and resilience are the most important qualities I have developed growing up with livestock," says Lauren Wolter. "Nothing teaches you to push through the tough times more than growing up with livestock."

Troubles during calving season and broken farm equipment are just a few challenges Wolter says come to mind when she thinks about moments she's had to dig deep.

Outside of the barn, there are hard tests at school, disappointing results at contests

or even difficult piano pieces that test this Illinois junior. No matter what is thrown her way, however, thanks to her background in the Angus industry, Wolter knows she has the inner strength to keep pushing.

She takes the phrase "cowgirl up" to a new level in all that she does. Wolter competes in cattle shows across the nation, offers professional emcee services to her community and is actively involved in local 4-H and FFA, as well as several clubs.

"There is not a doubt in my mind that the work ethic, adaptability and resilience I have learned growing up in the cattle industry will continue to serve me well in my future endeavors," Wolter explains. "The NJAA has

been a foundational part of my identity and future goals."

Her ultimate ambition is to serve as role model to up-and-coming Angus enthusiasts. Wolter plans to pursue her animal science degree at Kansas State University (K-State), before continuing her education to earn a master's and doctorate in meat science.

She lists a career in research or international relations at Certified Angus Beef as her ideal career.

To help her along this path, the Auxiliary awards Wolter a \$2,200 scholarship and the opportunity to compete for the title of Miss American Angus.



ADDISON COTTON

Hometown: York, Neb.
Parents: Jeff Meradith and Kim Hirschfeld-Cotton
High School: York High School
College: Northeast Community College
NJAA Tenure: 8 years

Leadership is within everyone's reach, says York, Neb., local Addison Cotton. No matter an individual's personality, she says anyone can discover their potential for greatness.

This personal philosophy came to the junior as she kept busy with the Nebraska Junior Angus Association and her local 4-H and FFA chapters. Officer positions taught her the importance of teamwork, helped her take on more responsibility, and increased her appreciation for both workplace culture and a sense of community.

"My diverse involvement has allowed me to become a well-rounded individual with increased self-confidence," Cotton explains. "I will always cherish the friendships I have

made and the relationships I have throughout the Angus family and intend to continue promoting the Angus breed."

When she first joined the NJAA, Cotton says she was a shy girl who preferred to fly under the radar. The fifth-generation farmer was no stranger to hard work, but it took a few years to discover the power of her own voice. Once Cotton learned to "maximize her potential," she began to fully understand all that the agriculture industry has to offer.

After losing her grandfather to a stroke, Cotton found a new sense of purpose: to empathetically serve those in need on a daily basis. Cotton will be attending Northeast Community College with plans to major in

animal science and nursing. She hopes to work as a registered nurse while still growing her Angus herd.

"It may seem odd that I desire to be a registered nurse that raises cattle, but I am excited to grow my passions into a successful future where I can work hard at something I love," Cotton explains. "The pride and gratefulness I feel for being able to develop both of these passions are indescribable. I am not afraid to put in the work necessary to keep the future bright for generations to come."

For such a worthy dream, the Auxiliary offers Cotton a \$2,100 scholarship.

Continued on page 118



KADY VEJRASKA

Hometown: Omak, Wash.
Parents: Todd and Katlenia Vejraska
High School: Omak High School
College: South Dakota State University
NJAA Tenure: 9 years

Growing up around her two Angus-crazed sisters, Kady Vejraska has held her own. The Omak, Wash., junior quickly transitioned from her role as “shy little sister” to confident young breeder. She served in several roles of Angus royalty, representing four different states at the national level.

“Each step taken in the road of my life has seen taking them with my Angus family and Angus cattle,” Vejraska explains. “It has been an amazing trail to ride, and I am excited for the next steps as I head off to college in the fall.”

Though she’s recently had to say goodbye to the show ring, Vejraska’s eager to head to South Dakota State University. A major in

agricultural education, communication and leadership will help jump-start her future goals of becoming a great teacher.

Her ability to connect with others and eagerness to meet new people come from active involvement in the NJAA.

“As a young member, I was very shy, and after COVID it was very hard for me to come out of my shell and talk to people. However, at Angus shows, you will meet the best kind of people, and they are never afraid to talk to someone,” Vejraska says. “With my Angus family, as well as my responsibilities as royalty, I found my stride and enjoyed the ride. Without the American Angus Association,

I can say I would not have grown into the young woman I am today.”

Some of Vejraska’s personal strengths lie in her ability to balance her time and lean on her support system. She prides herself on understanding the “human” moments all people experience, and learned to adapt and overcome whatever challenges come her way.

To help this young lady continue her Angus journey, the Auxiliary provides Vejraska with \$2,000 and the chance to run for the Miss American Angus crown.



ELIZA PATCHIN

Hometown: Mitchellville, Iowa
Parents: Jeffrey and Kristen Patchin
High School: Southeast Polk High School
College: Iowa State University
NJAA Tenure: 9 years

“I believe most life lessons must be learned by raising and working with cattle,” says Eliza Patchin. “Raising cattle is not an easy job, and it takes time, patience and recognition that the results won’t always be what we might want. What is important is that I do my absolute best and acknowledge that I have done all I can do in each situation and interaction.”

Show-ring etiquette, losses during calving season and triumphs in practice sessions at home are all part of Patchin’s agriculture experience. The Iowa native learned to give herself grace in the low moments and celebrate in the highs.

She says her time in the NJAA taught her to look for opportunities to learn something

new at every turn. Secure in the thought that agriculture is the foundation of society, Patchin’s learned how to showcase the beauty of the industry with others around her.

Though she knows the total numbers of farmers and ranchers are shrinking, this junior has big plans for keeping the story of agriculture alive: finding a career as an attorney for producers.

She’s spent her junior years participating in events that helped her develop the hard and soft skills she’ll need for this type of work. Patchin plans to achieve undergraduate degrees in agricultural business and international agribusiness from a land-grant university prior to attending law school.

Patchin credits these big dreams to the

Illinois Junior Angus Association and the NJAA.

“From those opportunities I’ve learned how to be a better listener and how to adapt my communication to help others hear multiple points of view and reach a consensus,” she explains. “Because of the NJAA, I’ve learned how to present small bits of information to my peers in a way that does not overwhelm them, but instead will help them learn about agriculture and encourage them to question and seek out credible sources on their own.”

The Auxiliary awards Patchin a \$1,900 scholarship. The junior will also have the opportunity to compete for the title of Miss American Angus.



SYDNEY SANDERS

Hometown: Leesburg, Ohio
Parents: David and Mindy Sanders
High School: Fairfield Local High School
College: Lake Land College
NJAA Tenure: 9 years

Sydney Sanders' story in the Angus industry has been one of teamwork. Her black-hided cattle compete in what she considers to be one of the most competitive breeds in the industry, so she's had to discover a "hustling mentality."

Part of her competitive spirit comes from a friendly rivalry with her sister. Though the two both like to win, Sanders says they're each other's biggest cheerleaders.

"My sister is my greatest competitor in everything that I do, and yet she will always be the first to step up and help me when I need her," she explains. "We push each other to be better, and that's how I believe that maximum work ethic is achieved. Teamwork

has taken both of us a long way in our careers, and I know that I am fortunate to have experienced this."

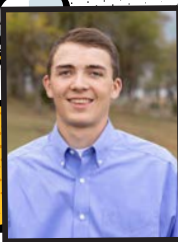
Side by side, the girls each found their individual place in the NJAA. Sanders' career has seen her securing impressive titles at shows like the NJAS and allowing her to serve on a multitude of committees with the Ohio Junior Angus Association.

Driven by a desire to serve as a role model for younger members in Ohio, Sanders pushed herself to take on new mentorship roles. She says she believes in leading by example, and wants to use that mindset to help secure and shape the next generation of Angus producers.

Her past in the show ring as a member of the NJAA inspired her to achieve a bachelor's degree in ruminant nutrition and compete on a collegiate livestock judging team. Sanders aspires of serving the industry for the rest of her life.

"The agriculture industry and NJAA are two things that will always hold a special place in my heart. I would love to go to college and earn a degree to serve them both for the rest of my life," she says. "The people I will meet and experiences I will enjoy in this career will be priceless."

To help her on this journey, the Auxiliary gives Sanders a scholarship of \$1,800.



TUCKER STAGEMEYER

Hometown: Page, Neb.
Parents: Brent and Carla Stagemeyer
High School: O'Neill High School
College: Butler Community College
NJAA Tenure: 8 years

"The cattle industry is a dynamic and challenging field that requires a wide range of skills and knowledge to succeed," says Tucker Stagemeyer. "Production agriculture is constantly evolving, and a successful cattleman must be able to react to changing conditions, whether it's weather, market trends or technological advancements."

It's this truth that forced Stagemeyer to stay adaptable. As a junior Angus breeder, he had to stay flexible and manage his time well. Schoolwork was balanced with time around livestock, and it was the family farm where he says he first learned how to make decisions effectively and efficiently.

Having to face the COVID-19 pandemic in his freshman and sophomore years of

high school, these skills were put to the test. Classes looked different, events were cancelled, competitions transitioned to online platforms. Stagemeyer, however, has always been up to a challenge.

Beyond pushing himself to new heights, this Nebraskan also jumps at any opportunity to share agriculture with others.

When he took part in the Farm Bureau Ag Pen Pal Program, Stagemeyer wrote letters to a class of sixth graders located in Omaha. What started as teaching these youngsters that brown cows don't make chocolate milk, quickly became an opportunity to showcase the story of "farm to plate."

This passion has shaped Stagemeyer's future goals. He will attend Butler Community

College to major in agriculture business and compete on their livestock judging team before continuing his education to eventually practice agricultural law.

"I am deeply interested in defending agriculture politically. I want to be a voice for the rural, agricultural production in an ever-increasing urban society," he explains. "Through my experiences in the NJAA, such as livestock judging and public speaking, I have learned to think quickly, defend my opinion and promote the ag industry."

These lofty plans will include room for an Angus herd and a heart of service.

For all he's done thus far in the industry — and will continue to do — the Auxiliary offers Stagemeyer a \$2,200 scholarship.

Continued on page 120

GUARDIANS OF THE PLAINS
2023 NJAA * GRAND ISLAND, NE



JAMES VOIGHT

Hometown: Fredericksburg, Pa.
Parents: Delbert and Wilhelmina Voight
High School: Northern Lebanon High School
College: The Pennsylvania State University
NJAA Tenure: 10 years

Life as a showman wasn't just a hobby to James Voight growing up — it was in his blood. His parents and grandparents were actively involved in the American Angus Association, so from an early age, he knew what it meant to be a cattle producer.

Voight lists his competitive spirit, curious mind and self-confidence as byproducts of his involvement in the NJAA. Coupled with great mentors, he says he learned how to push towards the best version of himself.

"My parents were my first role models and among many things, they showed me what it meant to be a strong leader," Voight explains.

"Leaders put others before themselves, are humble, are careful listeners, do what is best for the group even when it is difficult and lead by example. As I grew up and got involved in activities, I tried to emulate these qualities."

In a variety of leadership positions, Voight got to put those skills to the test. He served on several committees and led several projects in his community. From publishing quarterly newspapers to organizing a raffle fundraiser for the Pennsylvania Junior Angus Association, he took his passion for service to a new level during his time as a junior.

"No doubt this formidable skill set will serve

me well in the years to come," Voight adds. "I plan to pursue a career in either aerospace or nuclear engineer, which requires a heavy course load in college."

Tenacity was born in the barn, but will continue help this junior achieve his dreams. Voight plans to keep breeding cattle after college, where he can raise his family just as he was. He'll balance a career with volunteer hours at his local church, county fair, beef country and the American Angus Association.

To help him achieve these goals, the Auxiliary awards him a scholarship of \$2,100.



BLAKE PILLARS

Hometown: Martin, Mich.
Parents: Rodney and Lori Pillars
High School: Martin High School
College: Northern Oklahoma College
NJAA Tenure: 10 years

Newly elected to the Michigan Junior Angus Association Board of Directors, Blake Pillars saw himself starting to grow. By learning from his mistakes, the junior developed the ability to better communicate with others to help them envision his grand ideas.

At his first NJAS, the trend of stepping outside his comfort zone continued. State advisor Rob Reid issued Pillars a challenge of meeting three new people a day — a task that's now tradition.

"The skill of introducing yourself and communication with a complete stranger now comes easy to me because of my involvement

in the NJAA," Pillars explains. "For that I am forever grateful."

With the Angus breed at the foundation of his life, Pillars' future goals center around the beef industry. The young cattleman lists his lofty goals: attend Northern Oklahoma College to major in agriculture business while competing on the livestock judging team, serve on the NJAB as a green coat, and own an Angus operation that offers opportunities for NJAA and 4-H members.

They're dreams that require a persistent and passionate spirit, but Pillars says he's up to the challenge. Time among others as

obsessed with cattle as he is helped Pillars dig deeper in the hard times.

"Advancing in life is not always about what you learn, but the friends and partnerships you gain along the way," Pillars says.

As he leaves his junior career behind, this budding agriculturalist says he won't ever forget what it means to work hard, track progress, stay organized and live with a compassionate heart.

For his dedication to his herd and the Angus breed, the Auxiliary provides Pillars a \$2,000 scholarship.



JENSEN WOODWORTH

Hometown: Enterprise, Kan.
Parents: Jason and Brooke Woodworth
High School: Abilene High School
College: Kansas State University
NJAA Tenure: 18 years

"Having been raised on a ranch, I learned early in life the importance of hard work as well as being willing to be a team player and doing whatever job needs to be done to get a task completed," says Jensen Woodworth. "I have also learned the importance of flexibility and improvising when situations change. These lessons have been invaluable in many aspects of my life."

He didn't think life on the Kansas cattle operation would correlate to his experience on the cross country and track teams, but he's been surprised by how versatile these agriculture lessons proved to be.

Thanks to his background, Woodworth

says he was taught to think outside the box and make the most of the resources available to him. He prides himself on being able to bring unconventional ideas to the table and approach problems with a fresh mind.

Despite plans to move to Manhattan to attend K-State, Woodworth won't be forgetting about his roots. He hopes to one day return to his passion of raising beef cattle.

This fall, Woodworth will start to pursue a degree in agriculture technology management. His studies will focus on next-gen farming and ranching, and he will balance that schedule with a spot on the meat judging team.

"I will have the responsibility of completely financing my college education on my own. My goal is to complete my college career without the need of taking on any student loans," Woodworth explains. "I am very thankful for the generosity of people and organizations that choose to help graduating high school students fund their future education and pursue a career that they are passionate about."

The Auxiliary is one of these organizations, granting Woodworth a \$1,900 scholarship.



SAM GREIMAN

Hometown: Perry, Iowa
Parents: Kurt and Tina Greiman
High School: Dallas Center-Grimes
College: Iowa State University
NJAA Tenure: 4 years

When Sam Greiman looks back on who he was when he first joined the Angus world, he can hardly recognize himself.

"Through my time in the NJAA, I have become a much more outgoing and approachable person," he explains. "I used to be reluctant to get out of my comfort zone."

It was the LEAD conference where Greiman first came out of his shell. Today, the junior never hesitates to try new things or meet new people. Each hand shaken is more than just an opportunity for a friend, however.

"The NJAA connected me with others in the Angus industry and expanded my

perspectives on the ag industry in general," he says. "I plan to grow these connections and make new friendships that will help me in the future."

The LEAD conferences even inspired him to seek leadership roles in other areas of his life.

Past roles in officer positions at his local FFA chapter prepared him for future opportunities in college clubs and his fraternity. As Greiman attends Iowa State University, his future career plans center around ag sales and business management. He has a particular interest in starting his own business — a goal he credits to his father,

who's owned his company for 28 years.

Greiman says he's thankful for the lessons learned while preparing for the show ring. During his junior tenure, he's competed across the state, events that have secured his heart with the Angus breed.

No matter where the future takes him, Greiman will use the dedication and work ethics he found in the barn with his black-hided cattle to succeed. He to encourage his future children to join the NJAA.

The \$1,800 the Auxiliary awards him will help make these dreams a reality.

AJ