

A World Never Imagined

American Angus Association staff and members adjust to a new reality keeping business moving forward amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

by Rachel Robinson, American Angus Association

In her 16 years at the American Angus Association, Gayla Fuston has never seen anything affect the Association quite like the COVID-19 pandemic. The Angus Genetics Inc. (AGI) customer service team lead describes breeders who once stuck to conversation around DNA samples but now talk about isolation and hope for a return to normal, if only for shopping and a haircut. Other breeders are business-as-usual and are thankful the Association is trying to do the same.

COVID-19 changed the world as we know it, but the American Angus Association didn't want changes made necessary by the disease outbreak to change the service our members receive. It is the business of the employees to provide the members with the fast, efficient service they need to run profitable businesses. A vast majority of the team transitioned to remote work to follow the local government regulations, but the ability to process work stayed put.

Transition

"I feel the transition to remote has

gone very well," Fuston says. "I'm proud to say we've been successful and have been able to continue and provide the same service for our breeders. We have been able to continue receiving and sending samples to the labs daily for testing and using archived samples from storage when requested by the breeders."

more heavily on the Information Systems (IS) department than other departments to ensure systems continued to work with a mostly remote staff.

"When we think about individuals working remote and how much their jobs have changed so quickly, we don't want to forget about those that are still at the office doing work,"

says Chris Stallo, Association chief operations officer. "Their jobs have changed just as much, if not more, during this time. From the way the mail is opened to how the files are being sent out to employees to work on outside the office and everything in between, all of those processes are now different for those who remain inside the office. Collectively, they are doing different tasks now in order to allow

employees outside the walls of 3201 to serve our members."

The transition to remote working has taken a team effort and a lot of change, but the team has found some bright sides to the current pandemic.

"As for my team, we have enjoyed



Working from home did not stop Angus employees from representing their favorite Angus Brand apparel.

The change to remote led the Association to recreate existing processes to accommodate the new normal for Association staff. Within two weeks, the majority of staff were working productively from their homes. That responsibility landed

the flexibility of being able to work,” Fuston says. “Most of the team has kids who also were home since schools were closed, and for some, childcare was an issue. It has worked out well that we can care for our families and our members at the same time. For myself, I have enjoyed being able to see outside and enjoy God’s beauty and the sunshine that we can’t while in the office without windows in our area.”

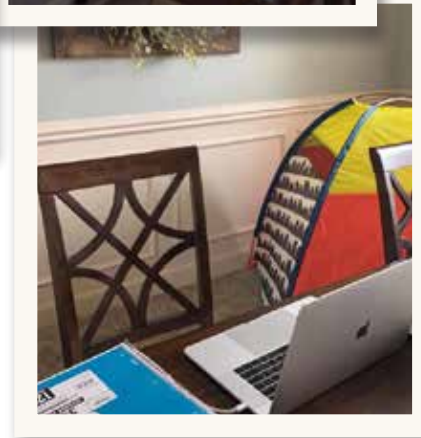
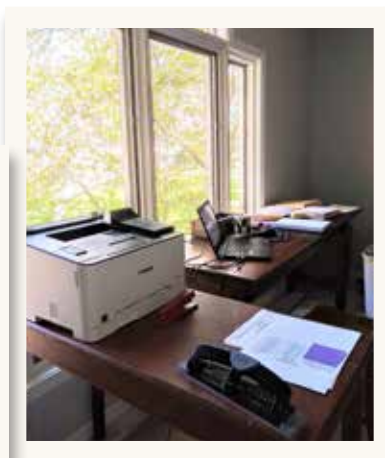
The Association staff has stayed just as close to members outside the office as they were inside the office, but how has the staff stayed connected to each other, you ask? A newly created Team Angus Facebook page to share the ups and downs of working from home. From a spirit week that brought solidarity through daily clothes themes to funny and inspiring posts, the Angus team has found an outlet for fun and comradery with their peers.

That fun hasn’t taken away from the work. The member services team processed more than 20,000 registrations in April, which is a more than 3% increase over April 2019. Close to 400 delegate nominations had been processed remotely in two weeks as of April 24. Angus Media has continued to produce the *Angus Journal*. More than 35 sale books have been designed and printed to support producers’ sales. Additionally, they designed three postcards, three brochures and two state directories.

As part of the transition to work remotely, the Association asked members to do more digitally, and Association members answered. More than 90% of registrations were submitted online, and members entered more than 2 and 3% increases over April last year in the



The Angus team’s Facebook page became a platform for sharing the creative workspaces designed to make working from home enjoyable.



number of yearlings and weanings, respectively, electronically.

Innovation

It’s taken a high level of innovation from everyone on the team to adjust how the work gets done, however. Many jobs have changed to accommodate the new temporary normal. Paper processes have moved digital, in-person meetings have become video meetings and some roles are done with employees making short trips into the office to pass work back and forth.

“Continuing to scan DNA samples to setting up and entering work remotely has been huge,” says Ashley Petty, Association processing team lead. “The Angus team has done things that no one would have ever imagined could be done.”

Workflows haven’t been the only

area of innovation. Employees have gone to great lengths to make sure they’re set up in their new workspaces to be productive for Association members.

Although you don’t hear her voice every time you call into the office, Cheyenne Pittman is still bringing a smile and positivity to the work of the Association.

“One nice day, in an attempt to soak up as much of the amazing weather as possible, I transformed my husband’s taxidermy supply cart and leftover pallet boards into a rolling desk ... complete with handles for easy moving,” she says.

One employee had a large storm that took out her power, so they set up a generator to allow her to continue to work. No workspace? No problem for one employee who

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works in his unfinished basement that he has transformed into functional space. How do you get your computer at the right height? A cookie cooling rack and cereal box are the perfect height. A TV screen and a step stool work as a second monitor for another employee.

Desks are folding tables, dining room tables and a few actual desks, of course. “New coworkers” (aka children) are building tents, learning and playing in various “offices.” An old church pew holds file organizers, other furniture has been sawed down and remade into workspace, and old furniture has come out of storage to get a productive set up.

“Through the cooperation and coordination of several departments

within the American Angus Association, service continues to be provided to our members and their customers who rely on the Association for their success,” says Jerry Cassady, Association member services director. “This has been a monumental ordeal, but providing service is what our members expect and deserve.”

The American Angus Association Vision Statement includes phrases such as “member-driven” and “progressive.” The COVID-19 pandemic has created an opportunity for Association processes to become more member-driven and progressive.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged us to foster innovation

quickly to continue to serve the membership,” Stallo says. “While it has had a damaging impact on our industry and social lives, it has also prompted a rush of creativity from the office. Employee job functions were changed overnight, and everyone adapted to the ‘new normal.’ We continued moving forward with the membership in mind the entire time.” **AJ**

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