

An Invaluable Foundation

Illinois junior member Anne Dameron recognized as Junior Herdsman of the Year.

by Jordan Lamb, Angus Communications intern

The green coat, blonde hair and big smile have become a familiar and welcoming sight for Angus juniors, from the barn to the ring. That welcoming personality flows from Anne Dameron, the 2026 Tom Wells Junior Herdsman of the Year.

As a fourth-generation Angus breeder, Dameron's roots in the breed run deep. Long before she could compete, she was following her family through cattle barns and spending her days around livestock. Today, as she prepares to enter her senior year at the University of Illinois studying agricultural communications, Dameron looks back on a junior Angus career filled with memories, lessons and relationships that will last far beyond the show ring.



Growing up around cattle was one thing. Experiencing the unique atmosphere of the junior Angus association was another.

"The Angus community and the junior program mean everything," Dameron says. "It's really what raised me."

She has been walking through the cattle barns at Angus events across the country for as long as she can remember, but points to the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) as the place where her love for the breed and people truly took off.

"Coming to the National Junior Angus Show and seeing everyone from across the country all together in one place was when it really clicked for me," she explains. "It's a feeling that you can't experience any other time of year."

That annual reunion became one of the highlights of her year. The cattle may have brought everyone together, but the people kept her coming back.

The Tom Wells Junior Herdsman of the Year Award recognizes a National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) member in their final year of eligibility who demonstrates exceptional dedication to cattle care and preparation while serving as a positive leader among their peers. Established in 2023 by the Wells family through the Angus Foundation, the award honors the legacy of Tom Wells, a passionate junior Angus member and supporter

of the NJAA. Selected by fellow NJAA members, recipients exemplify the work ethic, sportsmanship, leadership and commitment to animal husbandry that Wells valued.

For Dameron, being chosen by her peers makes the recognition especially meaningful.

"Growing up in the NJAA, I've always been surrounded by incredibly hard workers, giving their all each and every day without ever needing any praise or recognition in return," Dameron says. "To think that those equally dedicated and hardworking individuals considered me for this award is both humbling and a tremendous privilege."

In recognition of the achievement, Dameron received the \$500 Tom Wells Junior Herdsman Scholarship and a custom belt buckle. But she says the greatest reward has been the people, experiences and lessons gained through the breed she has called home for so many years.

More than banners

When asked to identify a defining moment from her younger years as a junior member, Dameron pauses. After all, condensing more than a decade of memories into a single moment is no easy task.

"It's hard to pick one moment that stands out," she says.

Instead, her mind returned to the friendships that became the centerpiece of her NJAA experience.

Every year, Dameron and her

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— Anne Dameron

friends would meet up at the NJAS.

“We all would gather up at the show and run around, and truly have the best week and make the best memories,” she explains.

Those shared moments might not have always occurred in the spotlight of the championship drive or on an awards stage, but they became the memories Dameron treasures most.

“I know that I have lifelong friends coming out of this and people that I can always count on,” Dameron says.

While competitors may spend time battling for a banner in the ring, they spend just as much time cheering each other on behind the scenes. For Dameron, that balance between competition and camaraderie is what makes the breed special.

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As her final junior show came to a close, Dameron added

another achievement to an already memorable week. She exhibited the first-ever Supreme Bred-and-Owned champion, a recognition that made Dameron’s final NJAS appearance especially meaningful — it represented years of dedication to cattle raised within her family’s operation.

“It’s really exciting, and there are so many emotions with it,” Dameron expresses. “To win in the bred-and-owned show is a great honor.”

Even amid the excitement, she remains grounded in appreciation for the opportunities the Angus breed has provided.

When asked to summarize her junior experience in a single word, her answer comes quickly.

Years of family support and shared commitment to the Angus breed helped shape a junior career defined by service, success and lasting relationships for Anne Dameron.

“Invaluable. I wouldn’t trade it for anything,” she says. “I’ve met the best people through this association, had the greatest experiences, and it’s developed me into a person I wouldn’t be without the opportunities this association gave me.”

As Dameron prepares for the next chapter of life, she does so with the lessons, friendships and memories gained through the NJAA.

For a young woman who has spent her entire life in the Angus business, the greatest takeaway is not a title or a banner. It’s the community that helped raise her, supported her and provided a place to belong.

And that, she says, is something truly invaluable. **AJ**

