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Association Commentary

by Dawn Bergard, National JRA Advisor

"Youth are not the leaders of tomorrow, but the leaders of TODAY!"

-Josh Shipp

For those of you fortunate enough to observe the JRA Board in action at a Convention, Round-Up, or other event, you can envision this message as true. What they may lack in life experience, these young people make up with energy and enthusiasm for their tasks as youth leaders - they organize fund raisers, assemble and present the "JRA Year In Review" power-point to the general assembly, give reports to the RAAA Board, participate in the Junior Activities Committee meeting and gain insight by attending meetings and interacting with Red Angus staff, breeders and industry representatives. Behind the scenes, they contribute articles and regional reports to the Red Generation, this ARA Magazine and Have You Herd, the junior online newsletter. They plan, organize and secure sponsorships for Round-Up; conduct workshops for contestants in the Junior Stockgrowers Contest; represent the RAAA in the American/Canadian Exchange Program and at the bi-annual Youth Beef Industry Congress (YBIC).

What compels JRA members to greater service - to seek election to the JRA Board? What calls them to that higher level of commitment, responsibility and time? The answer varies with each individual - it could simply be a desire to serve - to step up to the plate; it may be the example set by their peers - showing that involvement can be fun and rewarding; it may be the example set by adults - either parents or breeders - that any passion worth involvement is worthy of your time and effort; it could be the desire to travel or the lure of more experience in public speaking. Some would argue that it is simply an addition to a resume. Whatever the call, it is refreshing when junior members take the step toward greater leadership and follow the advice that "Success is finding something in life that you love so much you would do it for free (but you learn to do it so well that you get paid for it)". And, those who have served on the JRA Board in recent years will attest that a Board position requires way more work than a "resume-filler" is worth.

Membership has its privileges, but those who strive for leadership reap additional benefits: lots of practice with public speaking, decision making, team work, leadership opportunities and travel - to name a few. Even on a voluntary basis,

leadership is not easy - it comes with higher expectations of service, attitude and behavior; it comes with pressure to make decisions that affect every member of the Association; it comes with demands on time and effort, and often, it comes with little thanks. Not only JRA Board but anyone who has served on the RAAA realizes the demands of leadership.

But, the good news is - we all benefit from junior involvement and commitment to Red Angus! JRA members offer youthful exuberance and new perspectives while gaining skills in communications, working with others, giving of time and ideas for the greater good. Many junior members increase public awareness and the promotion of our cattle through their 4-H, FFA and exhibition involvements. Red Angus members offer wisdom and guidance - often from the school of hard knocks but also from life's successes; encouragement; employment opportunities; support and set an example for juniors to follow.

The most successful teachers we encounter in life are those who lead by example - the individuals who choose not to heed "do as I say, not as I do" but rather who live out the lessons, attitudes and behaviors they want to pass to the next generation. One excellent instance of leading by example was captured in the photo below during the 2007 Convention.



Following in their footsteps: current JRA Board members pictured with their Dad's who serve on the RAAA Board, from left: Marianne and Laurence Mendoza; Amber and Terry Boyles; Laura and Joe Mushrush. What better way to serve your Association and set the example of service than be being involved at a level that exceeds general expectations and includes many hours (actually, often, years) of dedication to a passion and a way of life?

We are indeed fortunate to have willing youth leaders today - but let us also be appreciative of those who go/have gone before - showing the way to make a difference. What footsteps will you leave for others to follow? ■