

Academy II: In Search of a

When 38 Jersey youth traveling from far-flung corners of the United States arrived in Columbus, Ohio on the afternoon of Sunday, July 17, their first task as a member of the second class of Jersey Youth Academy was to complete a questionnaire.

To the first question—*What are the three main reasons you are attending Academy?*—their responses were as diverse as their life stories and immediate goals.

“For my love of the Jersey breed.” “To meet prominent members of the Jersey industry.” “To see what goes on across the world of Jersey and the association.” “To make connections with industry professionals.” “To learn more about the advancements in the breed.” “To meet other youth with the same passion as mine.”

Yet there was a common aspiration, a statement of individual purpose written on page after page. As one of the class said, that was “To learn about careers and where do I fit into the Jersey industry.”

Building On The Model of the Inaugural Academy

The Jersey Youth Academy was designed to achieve three broad objectives:

First, for the participants to learn why and how the Jersey breed has grown and prospered, and what the future holds for the Jersey business;

Second, for them to meet leaders from the Jersey community and from across the support industry, to gain their unique insights about the dairy business with a specific focus on the Jersey cow; and

Third, to learn about the range of career opportunities that involve the Jersey breed and Jersey products, and begin the journey that will take them to success working in the Jersey dairy business.

The first Academy, in July of 2009, was a Jersey boot camp with as much content relative to the program’s objectives as AJCA-NAJ staff could pack into four days. Based on feedback from members of that inaugural class, the program was expanded by a full day. Still, the 2011 Academy, running from July 17 to 22, was an exercise in “information overload” according to one participant, but produced a high-point experience for participants, staff, Deans and guest speakers alike. Even before exit interviews on Friday, one participant posted to Facebook: “I miss Academy already and I haven’t even left!”

The verdict on the 2011 program was that it exceeded expectations. Participants gave their Academy experience a 4.95 rating on a 5-point scale.

“Academy was an eye-opening experience,” said Kara Maxwell, Donahue, Iowa, “and almost essential for Jersey youth. It provided an amazing wealth of information, and a chance to look into the American Jersey Cattle Association and all that goes on there.”

“Hats off on the organization of the program,” said Tommy Allen, Reedsburg, Wis. Along with “great speakers and great round table discussions,” he said, “it was nice to be in a group and talk about cows and not get weird looks. Meeting people my age who will be working with Jerseys for years to come is priceless.”

“I thought the national convention was a big deal,” said Taryn Martin, Tillamook, Ore. “Now I know that there are lots of opportunities to learn. From talking to staff, I realized I wasn’t where I want be for school. And, I feel after this Academy, I am going to be involved with Jersey youth from all over.”

For Tyler Kirchoerfer, Cape Girardeau, Mo., Academy was first about the contacts he made. “Where I live, there are only five dairies within 100 miles. This is a good program for youth to meet others. I’m looking forward to 50 years from now, standing



Career Path with Jerseys



Pictured on the cover of this issue: kneeling, from left to right: Tucker Hardy, Dylan Ellenburg, Jordan Dunn, Tyler Kirchoerfer, Trey Huffard, Tanner Barham, Billy Grammer, Mitchell Gilpin, Colin Russell, Logan Karchner, and Steven Wetmore. Row behind, standing: Tommy Allen, Natalie Sanders, Kara Maxwell, Taryn Martin, Theresa Sweeney, Tricia Kirchoerfer, and Charlie Moyer. Standing, from left to right: Mary Katherine Rawn, Mariah Fjarlie, Kelli Carstensen, Cassy Krull, Jaylene Leshner, Charisse Orth, Alexandra LaPrise, Jesse Kline, Stacey Theobald, Jessica Sentelle, Regina Grover, Maria Noble, Amanda Mitcheltree, Haley Ooms, Rylin Lindahl, Laura Mahoney, Cassie Chittenden, Sydney Endres, Erin Williams and Kira Andre.

up and saying that I was a part of the second class of Jersey Youth Academy.”

The most valuable experience for Haley Ooms, Valatie, N.Y., was “being able to pick the brains of the speakers you brought in. The breeders cited the various paths they took to increase their businesses, and that will help out with our farm.”

“Awesome, amazing, the greatest experience ever with Jerseys,” said Mitchell Gilpin, Hico, Texas. “I was able to come here and see different management practices from what we have back home.”

“I learned something from every speaker,” said Stacey Theobald, Waymart, Penna. “The Deans shared not only their success stories, but also their not-so-successful ones. I saw that you can be successful in this business, even if there are downfalls.”

For vet school-bound Laura Mahoney, Plainville, Mass., Academy revealed “opportunities other than private practice, maybe working for an A.I. stud or a large herd. It didn’t occur to me that there would be a non-traditional way to pursue my passion.

“Everyone here was driven,” Mahoney added. “It is nice to be surrounded by a group of driven young people who want to be successful, will stay in the dairy business, and to know that we will meet up again in life.”

“You showed us how many pathways you can go and still be in the industry,” said Trey Huffard, Crockett, Va. “I think Academy is a great thing. The more (youth) you can expose to it, the better. The bigger, the better.”

Roster of Speakers

The keynote address was presented by James Ahlem, Hilmar, Calif., Vice Chair of Dairy Management Inc. (DMI) and past President of National All-Jersey Inc. Invited speakers included Calvin Covington, past AJCA-NAJ CEO and former CEO of Southeast Milk; Francis Fluharty, Research Professor at The Ohio State University; Kent Weigel, Chair of Dairy Science, University of Wisconsin–Madison; Jude Capper, Assistant Professor, Washington State University; and Stan Erwine, Vice President, Producer Relations with DMI. At Waterman Dairy, Ohio State University, presentations were made by professors Joseph Hogan, Maurice Eastridge and Kristy Daniels and herd manager Reagan Bluel. Farm tours included Alan and Sharon Kozak, Millersburg and the Bill and Debbie Grammer farm at Sebring. At Young’s Jersey Dairy, Yellow Springs, Ohio, the group helped finish the day’s cheesemaking and learned about agri-tourism from Stuart Young. After a welcome by President and CEO David Thorbahn, key staff from all departments at Select Sires Inc. presented, with a viewing of collection procedures and tour of the Jersey bull facility. Participating in the Dean’s Panel were AJCA President Robert Bignami, past President Paul Chittenden, past directors Charles Luchsinger and Helene Dreisbach, Dr. Robert Dreisbach, and California Jersey breeder Richard Hughes. Eric Steer, a past AJCA scholarship recipient and now plant manager of Reiter Dairy, and his staff talked about careers in milk processing. Presentations were also made by Stacey Shipley Atherton, Jersey breeder serving on the Ohio Livestock Care Standards Board, and every member of the AJCA-NAJ management team.

All costs, including transportation to Columbus, were paid by the Academy’s 501(c)(3) educational foundation created in June of 2008. Contributors to the foundation represent a broad spectrum of Jersey breeder and dairy industry support, with the largest contribution to date coming from the all-donation National Heifer Sale on June 25, 2011.