

Memories in the Making

By Christy Couch Lee

After nearly a decade of service to swine industry youth, Jennifer Shike has carried her memories and experience into the next chapter of her life.



It's as if she's stepped into a circular room, with images and movies of experiences and moments lining the walls, everywhere she turns.

Jennifer Shike of Urbana, Ill., accumulated countless memories and valuable experiences during her nearly 10 years of service, creating and building the National Junior Swine Association (NJSA) to what it is today.

"I can't recall one memory that stands out more than the others," Shike says.

"It's been a privilege to watch the NJSA become a unifying thread that brings so many people together. It's overwhelming at times to think about all of the relationships that have formed because of it – not only in my own life, but in the lives of all of NJSA's members and families."

Perhaps most important about her years of service isn't what she gained, but what she gave back.

In December, Shike embarked on a new adventure in communications for the University of Illinois (U of I), and to devoting even more

of herself to her husband, Dan, and children, Olivia, 4, and Hunter, 2.

During her years of service to the NJSA, however, her passion and devotion was to the formation of the organization, creation of every NJSA event and enrichment of the thousands of young lives affected by this national youth organization.

Always a livestock girl. Shike grew up in Washington, Iowa, showing American Quarter Horses, sheep and hogs, and competing in horse and livestock judging.

"I always knew I had a passion for livestock," Shike says.

As Shike entered junior high and high school, she also discovered a passion

for writing and speaking – entering writing contests, competing in FFA public speaking contests and writing for her high school newspaper.

When the time arrived for Shike to choose a college and a major, she combined her loves of livestock, writing and speaking, pursuing a degree in agricultural journalism.

She began her college career at Black Hawk College – East Campus, participating on the livestock and horse judging teams. After earning an associate degree in ag transfer, she continued her education and judging career at Kansas State University (K-State).

Shike spent her first summer of college working at her local cooperative Extension office – attending shows, coordinating events and writing press releases.

During her sophomore year, she heard about the National Swine Registry (NSR) internship with *Seedstock EDGE* magazine.

“I heard great things about the NSR internship program and thought this would be a good way to learn more about the industry,” she says. “When I met NSR CEO Darrell Anderson, we clicked.

Quite honestly, I knew he was going to be an important part of my life.”

Anderson recalls the first impression Shike left with him, during her interview.

“I remember that interview very distinctly,” Anderson says. “I was very impressed from the get-go. She has a sharp, articulate personality, with a passion for livestock and kids.”

That summer of 1998, Shike was responsible for writing stories and taking photographs for the magazine, in addition to designing some advertisements.

During that time, NSR had no established junior program. However, the association recognized the need for junior events, and plans were established for the first-ever NSR junior show.

After work hours, she assisted the other NSR summer intern, Daryl Real, with developing that junior event.

Shike returned to college, and the following summer, she served as the editorial

intern for the *Angus Journal*. Then, during her senior year, Anderson contacted Shike about a full-time position with NSR.

“The executive committee wanted someone to organize NSR junior activities,” she says. “So I was hired as the junior event coordinator and website manager.” She started the job in the summer of 2000.

Although Shike was excited about the prospect of this newly created position, she also was aware of the challenges she faced. She enjoyed writing, and the possibilities within agricultural journalism. What if she lost her writing skills?

In addition, she would be commuting from Champaign, Ill., as her soon-to-be husband, Dan, had enrolled in graduate school at the U of I, where he also prepared to become

developing “The Pinnacle” newsletter.

Shike’s first order of business as director of junior activities was to develop the structure of the junior association and junior board, as well as focus on the promotion of the organization and membership growth.

Within a few years, the NJSA grew from one national show to 10 annual events. Today, the NJSA conducts the National Junior Summer Spectacular (NJSS), in addition to the Eastern, Southeast, Southwest and Western regional shows, the World Pork Expo Junior National and the NBS® Junior Barrow Classic; and the NJSA National Youth Leadership Conference, NJSA Boot Camp and regional leadership conference.

Warren Beeler of Frankfort, Ky., serves

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the livestock judging team coach.

“Here I was, taking a job that wasn’t focused on my agricultural journalism degree,” she says. “Each week, I would be spending two days at the NSR office and one night away from my husband. I told myself if I could stay there two years, I would be doing well.”

The birth of the NJSA. However, Shike soon realized that everything in her life had prepared her for this experience. And, she would be spending much more than two years creating this organization.

Her internship with Extension helped her gain experience in running events. And, her journalism background helped her with the promotion of the program, and with

on the NSR Youth Advisory Board, in addition to serving as chairman since 2008. He says Shike’s devotion to the continuous improvement of the organization and its events led the NJSA to the success it experiences today.

“I think Jennifer’s all-out effort, along with her attention to detail, comes very close to perfection,” Beeler says. “She will outwork any and all, with a passion and per-



Jennifer Shike says among her greatest memories during her time in the NJSA were the relationships with the kids she met and the lives she touched.



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— Jennifer Shike

sonality that gets things done.”

As more events have been added to the NJSA calendar, fundraising has continued to gain importance.

In the nearly 10 years Shike served as the director of junior activities, her fundraising goals and achievements grew exponentially.

The organization’s growth didn’t come without some growing pains. However, these struggles helped Shike and the NJSA grow, she says.

Shike says one of her greatest challenges in the early years was serving as an advisor to a junior board only a year or two younger than she.

“That kept getting better, because I kept getting older, and they were the same age,” she says. “Every year, I gained more confidence in myself and my abilities.”

Without a doubt, her confidence as a leader has left lasting effects on junior board members, past and present. Bailey Albright of Coldwater, Mich., currently serves as the NJSA Central Region Director. She says Shike has left a lasting impression on her life, since their first encounter at the 2000 NJSA NJSS.

“I enjoyed working with Jennifer,” Albright says. “She’s one to give someone respect. We respected each other’s way of doing work, and it worked very well.”

As Jennifer’s confidence grew, so did the responsibilities of the NJSA. To help carry out the mission and duties, two new staff members were brought in – Kade Hummel, NSR field activities representative, and Katey Brattain, junior activities coordinator.

“I enjoyed working with Kade,” Shike says. “We traveled many miles together and developed a friendship

I’ll always appreciate. We were a good team and balanced each other well.”

“And, Katey,” she continues. “She became involved in the NJSA and realized the power she had within her – serving as the NJSA junior board president before becoming a staff member. She is an amazing person and a great example of what the NJSA can do to help youth succeed as leaders.”

Another hurdle the NJSA faced: the drastic changes the swine industry experienced in recent years, Shike says.

“They went from not expecting much from the junior shows to expecting quite a bit,” Shike says. “I’m convinced of NJSA’s importance to the purebred swine industry, because I’ve heard so many people share how the NJSA helped them stay in business. This added more pressure to the job, but I’m thankful for it because it made the program even better.”

NJSA leadership also was forced to deal with the stress gene and DNA testing, and enforce rules to preserve the integrity of the organization, Shike says.

All the while, Beeler says, Shike maintained her focus on what truly matters – the youth of the swine industry.

“She never allowed the pigs to get bigger than the kids, and that resulted in unbelievable success,” he says.

Through the growth and the challenges, Shike maintained focus on the future of the industry, and the future of the NJSA.

“We kept focusing on the next step and where we were going,” she says. “Sure, we had growing pains and challenges. But we rose above them with the support and leadership of many

good people who truly cared about the NJSA and believed in its importance.”

Among those who provided support and belief in the program were many swine industry leaders, Shike says.

“I never imagined I would call Warren Beeler, Jim McCoy and Kim Brock my friends,” Shike says. “But over the years, as they served as chairmen of the NSR Youth Advisory Board, we developed a friendship and respect for each other that I will always treasure. Their passion for youth and the swine industry never ceases to amaze me.”

Although Shike appreciated the influence others made in her life, they say she did her share of influencing others.

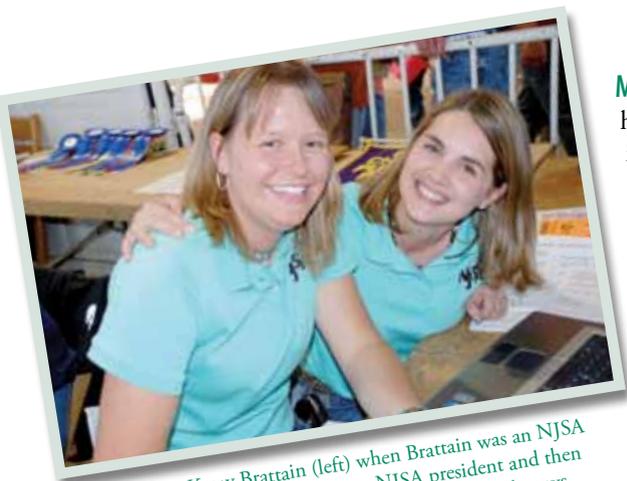
Touching lives and making memories.

Of the many goals she’s seen accomplished, Shike says perhaps her greatest accomplishments are the friends she’s made and the lives she’s touched.

“One of my greatest accomplishments is knowing I may have played a small role in someone’s



Shike says the NJSA would not be where it is today without the dedication of the NJSA staff, including Katey Brattain (second from right), former NSR junior activities coordinator, and Kade Hummel (right), NSR field representative; and NJSA board members, including former NJSA President Kayla Wood (second from left).



Shike first met Katy Brattain (left) when Brattain was an NJSA member. Brattain went on to serve as NJSA president and then became Shike's co-worker. "She's a great example," Shike says.

life," she says.

Providing opportunities for youth to realize success also brought Shike joy.

"Some kids never had much money to spend on a pig, but they came to the shows anyway," Shike says. "With the variety of contests offered at NJSA events, there is truly something for everyone. You don't have to drive the champion gilt to walk away a winner."

In addition to the opportunities for youth to succeed at the shows and become more knowledgeable at leadership events, Shike hopes NJSA members are inspired in their personal lives, too. Helping the young people become leaders was a top priority — whether it was through Ray Perryman's inspirational services at NJSA shows, junior board members serving as good role models, or Shike's own example as a Christian leader in the swine industry.

"The fact that kids found Christ in their participation makes me even more confident that God put me there for that reason," she says. "That's really overwhelming, and it's cool."

Anderson says Shike's influence may not be realized for years to come.

"I think she helped to create a solid foundation for the organization, in terms of a mission and beliefs and fundamental, core values," Anderson says. "And until she gets to the Pearly Gates, she may never know just how many lives she touched."

Although Shike was fulfilling many goals and touching many lives, her devotion to family spurred her to make one of the toughest decisions of her life — leaving the NJSA for a career with less travel and more time at home.

Moving on. As Shike and her husband have a growing family — including Olivia and Hunter — she realized her need to spend less time on the road, away from family.

Shike says she strove to do the best job possible, and wanted to be able to leave the association during successful times.

"Last year, we raised the most money we'd ever raised," she says.

"We broke into new areas of industry support. That made it hard to go, because it was so rewarding and I was so proud of the direction we were heading. But, I didn't want my children to miss out on opportunities because it made me feel good to do my job. If I was going to be the mother I wanted to be, I needed to be around more."

In December, Shike began the next chapter of her career as a U of I media communications specialist. In this position, she is responsible for communicating the latest research and activities of the U of I animal and crop sciences departments.

Into the future. As for the future, Shike's primary goal is to provide the opportunity for her children to pursue their goals, which, as of now, include showing horses, and potentially hogs and cattle in the future.

"I'm very blessed," she says. "My kids are the greatest accomplishments of my life."

In addition, she says, she and Dan hope to continue to support the NJSA in whatever roles possible.

"I'd like to volunteer, and help wherever I can," she says. "I want to be involved. I want the NJSA to be successful forever. I'll help however I can — it just may be from a different place in the barn."

Shike encourages the youth of the NJSA to make good choices, and embrace the power they hold.

"Agriculture is always changing," she says. "But, one thing that will never

change is the need for dedicated and motivated leaders. With all of the pressure on agriculture, if youth don't make good choices, we won't have shows."

She also hopes the industry's youth embrace change, work hard and are willing to take a few risks.

"Be open minded and flexible," she says. "Do things that are uncomfortable and scary — that can be so much more rewarding and exciting down the road. And, you need the willingness to work hard and get dirty."

These characteristics are fully embodied in Shike, Beeler says.

"Jennifer has the kind of contagious leadership that made you fall in and want to help carry the load," he says. "She has enduring passion for the kids and the purebred industry, and it rubs off on everyone she is around."

In order for the NJSA to continue to thrive, Shike says, breeders and compa-



Shike's young family, including kids Hunter, 2, and Olivia, 4, and husband, Dan, already have their start in showing, with Olivia showing horses for the first time in 2009.

Photo courtesy of Sweet Pea Photography

nies in the industry must continue their support of the organization.

"I hope people will continue to support the NJSA more than they ever have," she says.

The NJSA will continue to grow and thrive, under the careful and talented hands providing new leadership.

And this farm girl from Iowa will forever relish the memories and moments of an organization she helped to build from the ground up — with dedication, hard work and a belief in the industry.