

Jim Peifer / Kurt Birky

Illinois

Jim Peifer started in the business of raising registered Suffolk sheep in 1987 with about a dozen ewes. At that time, Jim's sheep were more of a "hobby flock" to keep him busy in the winter when he had some down time from farming. A big influence on Jim to improve his breeding and his flock was his good friend, neighbor, and Hampshire breeder Dale Steffens. Kurt Birky started raising sheep living on the farm as a 11-year-old in 1968 with his father Wayne Birky and brother Kevin Birky. Kurt's influences were Rollie Rosenboom, Stan Heitz, Jack Larsen and George Good, just to name a few.

Kurt joined Jim in his business in the late summer of 1997. When Jim and Kurt got started in the business, their goals were to compete at the national level, to raise a "clean" flock, and to sell and be the "go to" flock for top breeders. They acquired 6 top stud ewes and leased 2 ram lambs from Steve George. This excellent start allowed them to meet those early goals and surpass them even quicker than Jim and Kurt ever expected.

Once the flock was established, it consisted of 30 to 35 ewes most years. The most impactful sire during this partnership was George Brothers 3915. Through his son Doc and his daughters and granddaughters, their impact continues on today in pedigrees around the country. The most impactful ewe family was George Brothers 3898 and her daughter Peifer 1015. His ewe line goes back to George Brother's great Bertha ewe and this line does not miss. The most shining moments in Peifer Suffolks success were their four Louisville Champions: Stroker Ace – 2002; Cracker Jack, a Stroker Ace son – 2004 for Tom Burke; Strokin' It, another Stroker Ace son – 2005; and Alpha – Champion Ewe in 2006 whose sire is 1186, son of 1015. During their partnership, they also had multiple champions and reserve champions at the Illinois and Iowa State Fairs, the Ohio Suffolk Sale, and at Sedalia.

The areas Jim and Kurt targeted in the industry were breeding big frame Suffolks, selling breeding stock to other breeders, and selling stud bucks to commercial and range breeders.

Jim and Kurt supported the United Suffolk Sheep Association and sheep industry by always registering their sheep with the proper pedigrees. They were committed to helping new people and new breeders as they were establishing their flock with best practices including feeding, fitting, worming, and other advice. This included working with a lot of junior Suffolk breeders. Kurt has assisted many young breeders in giving fitting classes and advice over the years.

Jim and Kurt had a multi-year plan for gradually retiring from the sheep business, but midway through that plan had an opportunity to disperse the flock in 2008 which was

found to be a blessing in disguise. In 2009 Jim was diagnosed with fronto-temporal degeneration – a type of early onset dementia – which became progressively worse over the next several years and led to his passing – too soon – in 2013.

Kurt has continued working in the Suffolk breed, mostly with the Ruby Mountain Sheep Company's flock that is based on a lot of the top Peifer sheep and several other flocks and enjoys competing at top level shows and sales.