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Alumnus vying for title of Travel Channel Star

AUGUST 4, 2015



Alumnus Blake Jeffers holds Xena, a Burmese python housed at the Center for Wildlife Education on Georgia Southern's campus. Blake is vying to be the next Travel Channel Star.

When Blake Jeffers ('08, '11) submitted a video entry to become the next Travel Channel Star, he wasn't really expecting to get a call saying he'd been chosen for the running.

"I watch the Travel Channel all the time, and they were giving away a free \$100,000 vacation and to enter you had to go to their website," he said. "When I was there I saw the audition to be the next Travel Channel Star, so I sent in a video. I surely wasn't thinking there was a chance I'd get picked, let alone picked in the top 15."

But from more than 1,000 entries nationwide, the biology teacher from Collins, Georgia, was named as one of the top 15 contestants to become the next Travel Channel Star. Although not originally picked to be in the top five, a landslide of votes from family, friends and his growing fan base helped change his results. Now, he's been selected as one of the final two contestants.

The winner, set to be announced in September, will be decided by three judges who critique a series of filmed travel segments by each contestant, as well as fan voting via online and Twitter. The winner has the chance to appear in a five-part web series, and based on the ratings, more web series episodes could be added. Eventually, the winner could make it to prime time television.

"I would love to be on prime time, who wouldn't? But I think you have to cross that bridge when you get there," he said. "I think if you ask any young kid playing baseball if they want to play in the major leagues, of course they'd say yes. But until you get there you don't know that lifestyle, so it just depends. So yeah, I'd like to be there, but who knows what my niche market might be."

A self-proclaimed southern guy, Jeffers enjoys outdoor activities like hunting and fishing, along with simply being outdoors, which helped land him the title of "earthy traveler." So after making the top five, the show sent Jeffers to an alpaca farm outside of Atlanta to film part of the series. "They've really allowed me to use my knowledge and education and let that shine through," he said.

While on the farm, Jeffers encountered several surprises, including a kiss — and a bite — from a camel.

"I honestly found out about 24 hours before what I was going to be doing," he said. "So I get there — and I've been on a farm plenty of times — but I've never been on a farm like that. Seeing these animals was amazing. I had no clue there was going to be a camel so I just go up and grab it. Everything you see in video is authentic — nothing is scheduled or scripted."

But more important than learning about new animals, he said, was connecting with the farm owner.

"The guy who owns the place is from England, and that's what travel does is bring common ground," Jeffers said. "He couldn't be any more different than me, but we found some common ground, and traveling is all about finding what makes you similar."

Jeffers also seems to have connected with the audience through the experience, garnering support from his students, community, church and many others.

"The town of Metter has really had my back, along with my church, support from people in Statesboro and just a lot of really neat people are rallied behind me and pulling for me," he said.

"And I think it's because I'm not some extravagant person who drives around in a Mercedes or vacations in the Hamptons. I'm just a regular guy, working a regular job and doing regular things like everyone else."

He hopes to continue connecting with the audience, and judges, as the final round of competition comes to a close. So how's he feeling about his fellow competitor?

"Janelle is definitely more appealing to eye than me, she's done commercials, acting and modeling, but I think I'm definitely more relatable," he said. "But again, I'm just your average everyday guy who goes to church and eats at Longhorn down the street. People would think 'that's somebody I could know.'"

There is still some time before Jeffers finds out his future as a Travel Channel representative. This week, Aug. 3-7 will be open for fan voting online at TravelChannel.com, and on Twitter.

While Jeffers anxiously awaits the results of the show, he seems pretty confident, even if the odds aren't in his favor. So what would he do if he lost?

"That's easy—life just goes on. I have a content life, I'm happily married, I live on a farm and have animals, and I couldn't imagine teaching at a better school than Metter," he said. "So that's a really an easy question. It doesn't mean I wouldn't be upset, but it's not like I'm at the end of my road."

You can vote for [Blake](#) on Twitter by tweeting "Blake should be the next #TravelChannelStar!" or by visiting the show's [website](#).