

COMPLIMENTARY

SONOMA COUNTY

HORSE JOURNAL

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SONOMA COUNTY

HORSE JOURNAL

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Cover photo by professional photographer Tina Fitch. Tommy Greengard and Joshuay MBF compete in the cross country phase at the 2023 Eventing Championships at Galway Downs, Temecula. See article on page 10.

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President's Message



JOHN O'HARA PHOTOGRAPHY

HAPPY NEW YEAR! And with that cheer comes the prospect of a year of greener grass, sunnier perspectives, and promising possibilities. We anticipate with enthusiasm projects to be initiated, activities to be organized, and adventures to be planned. Backlogged projects like rebuilding that sagging fence and filling in that low spot that always

collects the water somehow as at the turn of the calendar in January give us hope that we will be able soon to scratch them off 'the list'.

2024 brings us the Equus Awards, the Sonoma County Horse Council (SCHC) biennial celebration of North Bay people and animals that inspire us. The list of past honorees is impressive and represents every aspect of equine life, including teaching, training, supporting, caring, underwriting, and exemplifying the best of horse ownership. This includes people who have been leaders in many facets and help others find their pathways and generally work for the good of the order.

This year, the Equus Awards will be held on Saturday, May 11, at the Friedman Center in Santa Rosa. It promises to be an evening of good fun and an opportunity to get together with friends, old and new. It is a chance to learn about those whose skills and interests may not regularly

be in the spotlight but are clearly deserving of recognition. So, take a minute now to put the date on your calendar and then watch the SCHC website for when tickets become available for purchase.

Do you know someone who belongs on the list of honorees? Now is the time to offer names in consideration for an Equus Award. You can submit suggestions for recognition till January 15. The nominating committee appreciates all suggestions to ensure that it is not missing anyone in the community who should be lauded for their efforts. So, put on your thinking caps and send any suggestions to: vicepresident@sonomacountyhorsecouncil.org.

The turn of the year also leads us to nominations for SCHC board membership. This coveted position represents a chance to help guide the horse council in developing its agenda for the coming years. It's a satisfying way to keep your finger on the pulse of the horse community and help with mutually beneficial ideas and organizational elements that can strengthen the base for everyone.

Board members commit to a three-year term of service in keeping with our goal to keep a flow of ideas and differing perspectives to drive a healthy organization through regular changes to the board. Members participate in monthly meetings which are a combination of in-person and Zoom. They serve on a variety of committees that serve the needs and desires of our horse community.

Please consider this opportunity to help keep the council relevant and vibrant. *Happy trails, Henry Beaumont*

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SANBAR WELCOMES DRESSAGE ICONS

Sanbar Dressage, 6529 Lakeville Hwy., Petaluma, kicks off its 2024 Clinic Series on March 2 and 3 with FEI 5*/Level 4 dressage judge **Mike Osinski**, only the third American judge to earn this status. He will be judging the dressage at the Paris Olympics. He has been a national dressage judge since 1984 with USEF Senior, Young Horse, Equitation, and Freestyle designations. Auditors and alternate riders are welcome.

Following, Sanbar will welcome on June 6 and 7 Olympic Team Bronze Medalist and USEF Young Horse Coach, **Christine Taurig**, who has a particular passion for developing young horses and coaching riders. Riders and auditors are welcome. For more information, visit Sanbardressage.com.

CORRECTION

In the Fall 2023 issue article on SERRA, we mistakenly identified Morgan Lance as being employed in animal welfare. She, however, currently works for a child welfare charity. Her experience in the past has included advocating for animals, teaching animal care to humans, and fundraising for projects to improve the welfare of dogs, cats, and wildlife in Asia and veterinary care for working equines around the globe.

STOP THIEF, LOCK UP YOUR CAR

Clever and well-informed thieves have hit a large number of Marin and Sonoma County barns, breaking into cars and nabbing purses. Seemingly familiar with the habits of horse people, their modus operandi is to arrive in the middle of the day, perhaps even on a busy Saturday, find an unlocked car, or break the window of a locked one, and grab the treasure.

In a single car, the thief quickly drives to among others Walmart, Target, Rite Aid, or Michaels and purchases gift cards with the credit and debit cards found in their new possession. One victim found \$8000 worth of charges on credit cards that were made in only two hours.

Reports of thefts have spread from barns in Nicasio, Woodacre, Petaluma, Santa Rosa, and Sebastopol, with some hit multiple times.



SUCCESS AT EVENTING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Champion and reserve champion results of local competitors from the 2023 Eventing Championships held at Galway Downs in Temecula:

- Tommy Greengard and Joshuay MBF CCI 4*-L National Reserve Champion
- Greylin Booth and Modesto RE CCI 1* Team Young Riders Reserve Champion
- Tommy Greengard and Quick Quinn Preliminary Reserve Champion
- Tommy Greengard and Cooley Sligo Modified/Training Champion
- Alice Chan and Merriewold Quintessa Training/Novice Reserve Champion
- Annie Desmond on Little Elf Beginner Novice Reserve Champion

Champion and reserve champion results by local competitors from USEA Young Eventing Horse Championship in Paso Robles:

- Amber Birtoil and Oxford K, West Coast Young Event Horse Four-Year-Old Champion

FOUND HORSE

—Message from Rebecca Larcher

This horse had been missing for about 24 hours in Marin County's Samuel P. Taylor Park area when she was found by a fellow searcher on foot. Please, if your horse gets lost, call the Sheriff's office and the local animal service ASAP. When I got involved the following morning that the horse was missing, none of these services had been notified. The owner and friends were the only ones searching.

My family has been involved with Marin's search and rescue for many years. So, I made some calls and got more people involved. Within three hours, five people on horseback were searching, and multiple agencies were preparing to search on foot. Large animal rescue was on standby.



HIPPOTHERAPY CENTER TO STAY IN COTATI

Renaissance Healing and Learning Center (RHLC), specializing in hippotherapy, will continue on in Cotati. A few months ago, the property where RHLC has operated for 24 years went up for sale. After months of nail biting, the property sold and the new owners invited RHLC to stay.

Founder physical therapist Fran Sandler is ecstatic to continue their work at the Derby Lane facility where hippotherapy uses equine movement to benefit people



The best outcome came through. Saga McIsaac had joined us on foot, and she found the mare Sequoia within a relatively short time.

Note to self: horses tend to go uphill when lost. The tiny spot on the top of the photo is Saga and Sequoia.

The Marin County Sheriff's Posse is always looking for qualified members. Please consider applying and helping our community.

with a variety of neurological and orthopedic conditions by helping balance, coordination, and strength, as well as improving focus, and visual and motor planning activities by using the bilateral movement of the horse combined with its unique natural four-beat gait that helps stimulate a person's muscles as if they were walking.

"Also unique to hippotherapy is that it promotes a feeling of calm well-being that horse people have known all along," said Fran. www.rhlc.net

USEF INTRODUCES MICROCHIPPING REQUIREMENT

Beginning December 1, 2025, all horses competing in competitions licensed or endorsed by the US Equestrian Federation (USEF) must be microchipped with a 15-digit, ISO-compliant 11784/11785 chip.

According to the USEF, a fundamental of equine safety is microchipping. Microchips in horses allow for immediate onsite verification of horses for the purpose of safeguarding the health of each horse. This is vital, especially during times of disease outbreaks or natural disasters.

"In the event of an infectious disease outbreak, microchip readers may be utilized by state and federal animal health officials or veterinary staff to scan microchips of horses on the competition grounds for the purpose of identification of exposed horses to be isolated and quarantined. Microchips will allow our competitions to become an even safer and healthier place for equine athletes," said Dr. Katie Flynn, USEF's equine health and biosecurity veterinarian. "This microchip not only identifies your horse but when scanned, a temperature is recorded. These biothermal chips can be utilized by horse owners for daily monitor-

ing of their horse's health at home and on the road. As a rise in temperature is oftentimes the first sign of an infectious disease, this allows a horse owner to take prompt action to isolate and care for this horse before it is shedding a virus or bacteria in the stable and infecting other horses."

The implantation process of a microchip takes only a few seconds to complete. The microchip is inserted into the nuchal ligament of the horse's neck and will last the duration of the horse's life.

USEF Board of Directors Vice President Judy Werner stated, "From providing the easiest, fastest, and most accurate way to improving traceability in disease outbreak scenarios, which allows for the rapid management of investigations to minimize spread of contagious disease, to the ability (with the biothermal chip) to take one horse's or twenty horses' temperature several times a day quickly and safely with no distress to the horse, the microchip is a tool whose value is many times its price."

For more information, review equine microchipping at usef.org.



PHOTO BY EMMA DENNO

DIARY OF A FUTURE FOAL

BY TARA GOOD-YOUNG

Our Lady Valentine hit the eight-month pregnancy mark, making her and her family well on their way. As any getting-heavy-with-child mother-to-be can relate, she (and we) welcomed the seasonal shift from hot summer days to the refreshing comfort of fall and winter. With baby quadrupling in size over the last month, from nearly 2.5 pounds to well over 10 when this photo was taken, Lady now appears more obviously pregnant instead of just "a real easy keeper." Knowing this is her last pregnancy, I took the opportunity to capture the beauty of her growing the next fine-harness, three-gaited, or five-gaited addition to our Monarch Stable family in a little maternity session. Stay tuned for the spring issue update.

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PHOTO BY SHERRY STEWART

TOMMY GREENGARD

EVENTER ON THE RISE BY KIM F. MILLER

On paper, Chocolate Horse Farm trainer Tommy Greengard had career options outside of the horse world. With a degree in environmental science from the University of California Berkeley,

he didn't need to sign on for the long days, long weeks, and ups and downs of life as a professional equestrian.

He could have kept riding as a hobby.

But really, there was never a career question for Tommy. "I've been totally fixated on horses since I was 3," he shared.

He began riding for Andrea Pfeiffer's Chocolate Horse Farm (CHF) in Petaluma as much as his college schedule allowed. At the end of 2020, he stepped into the assistant trainer position, along with earning his degree and graduating the following year. "I was in the right place at the right time."

Living The Dream

Ever since Tommy has been living the dream – typically riding between 12 and 15 horses a day, coaching clients, and thriving in a development and sales partnership with Andrea.

"It's been amazing," Tommy said. "I've been fortunate to have had a really great couple of years and the opportunity to ride some really special horses. And, I love the teaching and coaching, too. We have a great clientele, ranging from kids just learning to trot and jump for the first time, to those competing all the way up the levels."

Recently, Tommy campaigned five horses in the Eventing Championships at Galway Downs in Temecula, four in the FEI divisions, and one in the Modified Training Challenge.

Tommy and his own Joshuay MBF took their three-year partnership to the next level in the Defender CCI 4*-L. Bolstered by remarkably consistent victories up the levels, Tommy had planned on Galway for Josh's 4*-L debut for the past year. However, a mild fetlock injury last fall at Tyron International in North Carolina appeared to derail that plan.

"We thought, 'Oh well, he'll be out for six months to a year, then we see where that puts us.'"

Stepping Up

But Josh and his veterinarian Jill Thornton, DVM, of Sonoma Marin Veterinary Services, had other ideas. "He came back better than he was before he got hurt," Tommy stated. "Dr. Thornton is super amazing and

creative and she really took his rehab very seriously. She fine-tuned it so he didn't lose much fitness, and we could bring him back stronger and fitter than before." A daily hour of under-saddle walking on a hill was a key to Josh's remarkable recovery.

"We finished fifth at the CCI 3*-L at Rebecca Farm in July and wondered what's next?" Tommy recalled. Josh answered that question with super CCI4*-S outings at Twin Rivers Ranch and Woodside earlier this fall, with 3rd and 1st place finishes, respectively.

The amped-up atmosphere at the eventing championships played to the Dutch Warmblood's strengths, Tommy predicted. "He is a phenomenal competitor because he is so focused. He's been in a lot of big rings, like the Kentucky Horse Park, and the bigger the atmosphere, the better for him."

Though the nine-year-old came to Tommy from North Carolina, he was originally imported from Sanne De Jung in the Netherlands when he was at the end of his five-year-old year.



Tommy and Josh on the cross country course at The Eventing Championships at Galway Downs in November. PHOTO BY TINA FINCH



The Chocolate Horse Farm training team: Andrea Pfeiffer and Tommy Greengard

"Josh is a complete professional. He is very sweet with his people but he can be a little aloof and standoffish with people he does not know. He is pretty convinced the world revolves around him but he is not entirely wrong at CHF," Tommy described.

Tommy's expectations are deliberately not so big. "He's checked off every box in my mind and then some this year. I'm going to try to stay focused, give him the best ride possible and not get too balled up about the outcome. I know he's ready for this job." And right he was. Tommy and Josh were CCI 4*-L champions. Also, at that championship, he and Quick Quinn were reserve champions at preliminary level.

That's Me Z is another Tommy ride on the move. The highest scorer, nationally, at last year's 5-Year-Old Young Event Horse Championships moves up to the Pro Series Equine CCI 2*-L. He is the front runner for the Holekamp/Turner Grant, helping a North American-bred horse travel to Pau, France, for the FEI Eventing World Breeding Championships for Young Horses.

The More The Merrier

Riding multiple horses is Tommy's happy place. "It keeps me a bit more objective and focused on the big picture versus getting bogged down in the details." His self-admitted weakness for sweating the small stuff is one of the few things Chocolate Horse's Andrea Pfeiffer thought she could help Tommy with.

"I can't take much credit" for Tommy's accomplishments, Andrea told *California Riding Magazine* when Tommy joined her program. "I got to step in with a young man who already had a very strong background. "If I had to pick on him, I'd say he can be too detailed oriented," she continued. "I have to say sometimes, 'It's OK you missed that trot step.' I try to get him to relax about the process a little. He is very driven, wants to do everything right, and never half-way."

Tommy acknowledges that Andrea has indeed helped him to relax. She joins an illustrious list of horsemen to shape Tommy's fate with horses.

Way Back When

The morning of his sixth birthday, at precisely 8 a.m., is an indelible memory. The three years prior, "I'd sit and watch my mom take lessons at Mill Creek Equestrian," he said, referring to the now-gone horse world hub in Malibu's Topanga Canyon. "You couldn't take lessons until you were 6, so that's what I got to do on my sixth birthday, and the rest is history."

Robyn Fisher guided Tommy through his junior career. "He came to me at 7, and I've been able to watch him go from this young boy who dressed as Woody



Josh shows his focus and athleticism in the show jumping phase at the eventing championship. PHOTO BY TINA FINCH

THE STATE OF SONOMA COUNTY EVENTING

BY ANDREA PFEIFFER

The state of eventing in our area? A good question, one which I am happy to answer with good news. In Sonoma County, we have a dedicated group of trainers and barns who specialize in eventing. The growth has been strong, and the longevity of these businesses shows that eventing in our area is still growing and has so much potential for more.

COVID was responsible in a major way for the drop in members of the US Eventing Association across the country. Fortunately, North Bay counties weathered the storm well and equestrian activities were on the list of activities that the U.S. government allowed to continue during this period.

Looking back, many successful and interesting individuals have been involved in eventing in Sonoma County since the early 1970s. At that time folks competed at Mt. Diablo, Pebble Beach, and Wild Horse Valley Ranch.

Today, all of California including our area and Hawaii make up Area VI of the U.S. Eventing Association, and we proudly have a large contingent of riders and horses that compete at all levels including the highest levels of the sport.

The calendar for eventing competition in Area VI starts in February and runs through mid-November. Woodside Horse Trials, which is now the closest eventing venue to Sonoma County continues to produce top-level competitions. This includes an FEI event in October which is necessary on the West Coast to get horses and riders qualified for trips to national events at

Galway Downs in Temecula in the fall, Kentucky Horse Park in the spring, and European destinations.

Many of our horse and rider combinations do travel well outside of our area to compete, but travel is necessary no matter your geographical location. One of the great features of Sonoma County is its rolling hills and ideal weather that makes it fairly easy to get horses fit for all levels.

While we do not have an event in Sonoma County, plans are in the works to find a venue in the north to get a new event up and running. Bringing a new event to the north would be a super addition to the competition calendar. It is a large undertaking, as everyone can imagine, and it will take three or four years to create a venue suitable for competition. But we are hopeful and motivated that this will happen.

The goal is not to start from scratch but to use a current venue and add the exciting sport of eventing to an existing site. There are a few existing facilities that a committee of key people are investigating.

Eventing is a challenging sport, but with the addition of Starter Level the sport is much more accessible to a very large group of riders and horses. The spirit of eventing runs deep in this county. The people who are involved care about the sport at every level, from its safety to its accessibility to the development of well-prepared riders and horses.

One of my favorite phrases applies to eventing: "The future is bright." Eventing will continue strong in our area and will grow as our county grows.

from *Toy Story* for Halloween to this intelligent, bright young adult," said the trainer, rider and FEI Level 3 eventing judge.

The dedication was always there. When Robyn moved from Mill Creek in Malibu to Moorpark in 2013, Tommy switched high schools to be closer to the barn. Before he could drive himself, Tommy's parents, who both work full time, made the long, congested commute from their home in Malibu to Robyn's R Farms in Moorpark.

Robyn's emphasis on dressage and the gift of putting Tommy on different types of horses are among her many contributions his horsemanship. She can also take credit for the University of California Berkeley

when Tommy was looking at schools where he could have kept riding with Robyn. "Robyn told me I had to go, and that I was going to ride with Andrea and that was that," Tommy remembered.

All In – All the Time

Tommy's dedication continues to be backed by that of his parents, Liddy Morrin and Gerry Greengard. Like most parents, they thought that exposing their child to a variety of experiences would be good. At some point, they threw in that towel and chose to "get on board," Liddy said. "Looking back, it is extraordinary how differentiated and specialized he was at a young age.



“Eventing encompasses so many aspects of horse care and riding. I believe eventing creates horseman, and the horses really enjoy what they are doing.”

Tommy and Josh share a moment before the jog at the Eventing Championship.

“When you know what you want to do, it makes other things easy,” Liddy reflects of the now-clear benefits of her son’s singular dedication. “He is an incredibly focused child. He never had any problem keeping his grades up, even though he was away from school a lot.”

She makes a distinction between herself, who “enjoys riding,” and Tommy, who “is extremely interested in all of it: the breeding, buying, selling, nutrition, coaching. He wants to drill down deep on all of it.”

Tommy agrees. “I stuck with the eventing because it encompasses so many aspects of horse care and riding. I believe eventing creates horseman, and the horses really enjoy what they are doing.”

Enjoy It!

Going all in on the eventing path has been full of parenting positives. “There is so much hard work in the eventing world,” noted Liddy. “It shaped him in terms

of discipline.” Gratitude is a family priority that Tommy learned to apply to the variety of horses he rode coming up the ranks. “We didn’t try to keep up with the equine Jones,” Liddy noted.

“We were concerned that it is a very privileged world,” she continued. “As a parent, you want your child to understand some of the issues regarding equity and access. From a young age, Tommy didn’t pay attention to the demographics of who was in the ring with him: whether they were adults or what gender they were.” As the grateful recipient of good coaching, parenting, and support, the 2022 Eventing 25 Emerging Athlete Program member is happy to pass on advice to contemporaries.

“The biggest thing I’d say for going to any big competition is to take a moment and enjoy it,” Tommy shared. “You’ve worked really hard to get here, you’ve done a lot right to get to that point and before you know it, the weekend will be over.”

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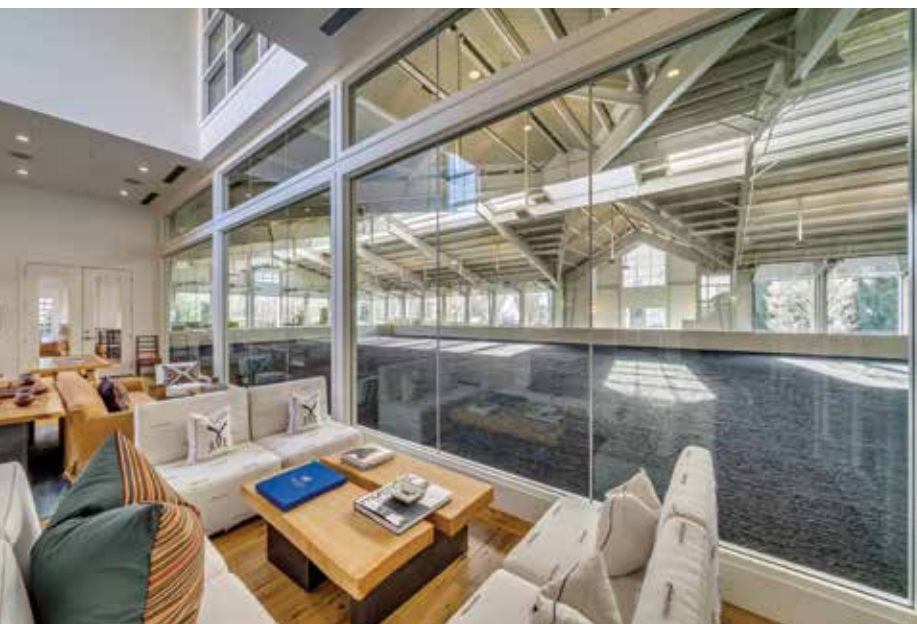
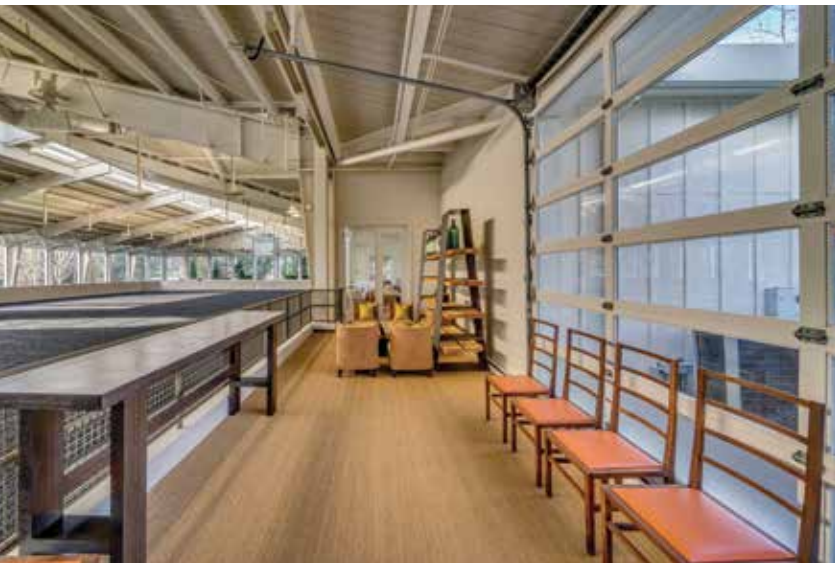
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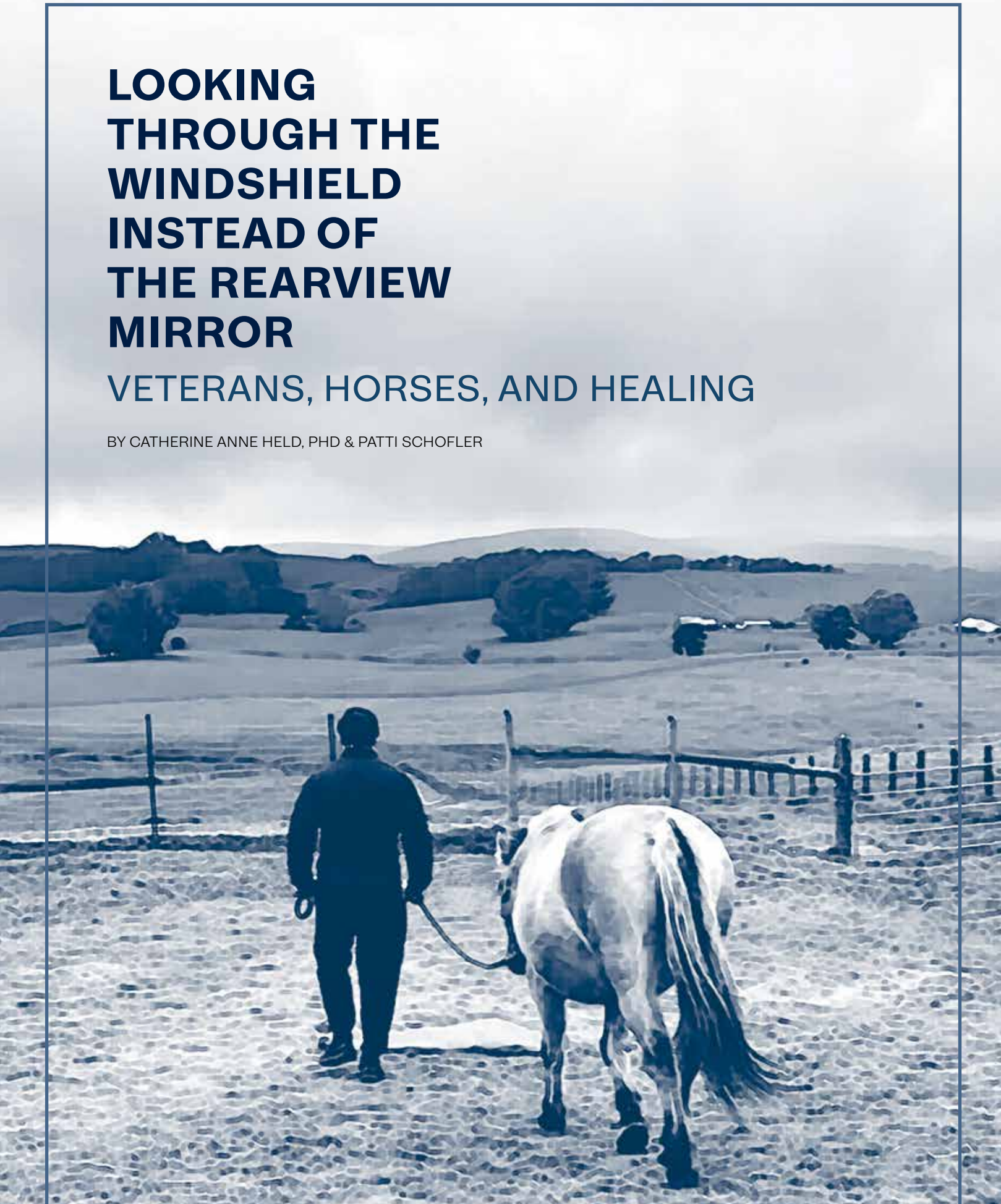
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LOOKING THROUGH THE WINDSHIELD INSTEAD OF THE REARVIEW MIRROR

VETERANS, HORSES, AND HEALING

BY CATHERINE ANNE HELD, PHD & PATTI SCHOFLER



The 17-year Army veteran, backed by six tours of Iraq and Afghanistan, had been arrested several times for driving while under the influence. When the third time happened, he landed in an inpatient addiction program under terms set by the Army. Unless he successfully completed the program and stayed sober, he would be tossed out of the service and lose his pension.

His wife left with the kids. He was without a home, without family, in danger of losing his career and he was scared to death. He was ready to try anything.

Coach Robert Wysocki recalled walking side by side with the veteran into the round pen. At the opposite end, a horse named Rein stuck her head out of the round pen fencing and stretched to reach the green grass.

As the veteran told Robert his story, the mare brought her head inside the fence, turned around, and surveyed the two visitors. "As he's getting deeper and deeper into the story, she slowly walks over to us without being summoned, totally at liberty. When she arrives, she inserts herself right between the two of us and puts him right at her shoulder," Robert recalled. "While he's still talking, unconsciously, he lays hands on her. She leans into him a little bit to reinforce that connection.

"We'd been there about 15 or 20 minutes as he told the rest of his story, and I suggest we go outside and talk about what just happened. As we start walking to the gate, Rein stays right with him, shoulder to shoulder. I open the gate to allow him to walk out, but as he steps toward the gate, Rein wraps her neck and head around him, essentially saying 'Don't leave. I'm not done yet.'"

When the veteran came out, he tells Robert that for the first time in a long time, he felt hopeful. "He says, 'I can do this. I can make it through this program.'"

In 2023, Bayside Marin Treatment Center of San Rafael began a program for military veterans such as was offered to the veteran who found Rein. Once a month, the veterans undergoing treatment travel to the 1,000-acre Medicine Horse Ranch in Tomales to interact with their dozen horses with the hope that the veterans will transition from residential chemical

dependency treatment to living sober in supportive housing. Others have already graduated from residential treatment, but still return to work with the horses.

Robert, who has assisted in Bayside's equine program and as an intern in the Medicine Horse Ranch HorseDreamUSA certificate program in Tomales, brought his personal experience with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

He enlisted in the Marine Corps at age seventeen and spent fifteen years on active duty, participating in action that included Desert Shield and Desert Storm in 1990-1991, and as part of the U.S. amphibious forces reinstating the president of Haiti in 1994. He suffered severe injuries including a traumatic brain injury when his passenger vehicle was struck by a Saudi tank in 1991. After leaving the Marine Corps in 1995, he spent many years fighting alcohol abuse until the fateful day in 2015 when he went to the Dare to Dream equine program in southwestern Virginia.

After 45 minutes in the round pen with palomino Quarter Horse Sunny, he sensed a huge weight, like a heavy backpack, lifted off his back and onto Sunny. He felt accepted by Sunny and the other horses with their non-judgmental connection, helping him rebuild his capacity to trust. Many veterans Robert has worked with report to him that they feel more grounded and aware of their bodies after being with the horses.

Robert's son, Michael, went to the facility too. Like his father, Michael was traumatized by his war experience. As a Marine Corps turret gunner in Ramadi, Iraq, he was with two friends when their Humvee was blown up. Michael was shot. When he came home given to anger and somber moods, palomino Sunny came to the rescue, somehow knowing to be playful with Michael. After returning from the session, Michael's wife saw her husband smile for the first time in years.

Since witnessing his son's healing, Robert has devoted his life to helping veterans and others with PTSD. He comes to the Bay Area from his home in Wyoming to put on veterans' events, and to participate in the HorseDreamUSA® certification program at Alyssa Aubrey's Medicine Horse Ranch in Tomales.

Alyssa has worked as an equine-assisted learning facilitator with people from various backgrounds and addictions. With several published books to her name, she has for two decades been devoted to educational experiential learning and incorporating horses in leadership development.



LEFT: Alyssa Aubrey and Tuari at Medicine Horse Ranch.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ALYSSA AUBREY



RIGHT: Robert Wysocki consults with a veteran's wife.

PHOTO BY TIERNEY BECKER

She described the veterans as more deeply wounded than other traumatized clients and noted a deep lack of trust in themselves and others. "We are not built to withstand the experiences these veterans have been through, and horses are a bridge back to the best parts of themselves," Alyssa said.

Most of the vets are dealing with extreme loneliness and not feeling accepted which can lead to extreme behavior and addiction. The unique nature of the horse and the human response to this animal deserve credit for the transformations.

"It's the same type of relationship in a deployed unit regardless of what service you're in, be that Air Force squadron or a Marine rifle squad. You're in an environment for the first time in most people's lives where they are living as prey animals. Usually, humans are tier-one predators," Robert explained. "Your response as a prey animal is very different from that of a predator."

As prey animals, horses depend upon one another for survival, and the herd depends on individuals for the herd's survival. "Your unit is your herd. Your connections are key to your survival and the group's survival."

Furthermore, horses and prey animals can't afford to err on the side of trust. They have to err on the side of caution and reaction. "It's the same in the combat or deployed environment. Anything and everything could be a threat.

"Then, when you leave that environment where you experienced the trauma, and go back to the world, you have these really strong and firm connections in your brain that look for threats to your survival. Even when

threats aren't there, you see threats. But you don't have your 'herd' to protect you."

Robert had 11 different jobs in 10 years. "These were big jobs. I was a senior program manager, a program executive, and a vice president of business development. The companies didn't train the managers how to deal with people dealing with post-traumatic stress or other issues. I ran into things that were very uncomfortable. Most of it was because I didn't feel accepted."

Robert contended that only horses could offer the lessons. Cows, for example, don't have a big flight or fight response and did not run the plains.

Relationships with horses go deep in our DNA. In seeing the patterns and relationships among horses, I think we learned how to grow by watching horses. The cave paintings from thousands of years ago in France and Spain show generic images of buffalo or deer, but they show very specific images of individual horses. This demonstrates to some anthropologists and archeologists that the relationship between humans and horses was much closer than the relationship between humans and other animals."

Horses teach humans how to respond appropriately to threats or challenges because horses are very efficient in their responses. "They don't do anything that they don't need to do. Their goal is to put whatever it is behind them and return to grazing. They need this energy reserve because if there is a big threat, they need this burst of energy to run hard and fast or in the worst case, fight. Watch a video of a horse taking on a cougar or coyote. Horses are deadly animals when confronted."

A frantic call came to Robert from a family member whose husband's history included combat trauma in Iraq. When the veteran returned home, he often responded to a threat with fighting. "She would contact me to talk him off the ledge. He'd go dark and she couldn't get to him when he responded inappropriately to what he deemed as a threat.

"Horses teach us how to respond appropriately by conserving energy and not over-responding."

Common topics addressed in a session include being present to self, re-building and improving the ability to trust self and others, relationship building skills, stress, and anxiety reduction.

"Horses have an uncanny ability to reflect the gap between what the individual is saying (I want to practice being present, I want to be connected, I want to feel empowered and confident) and how the individual is showing up," described Alyssa. "Horses have no agenda for us; they simply reflect back to us our excellence and our internal incongruence."

Experiential treatment sessions often begin with the "say hello" exercise to give the horse and veteran purpose. "Our intention is to establish contact or a relationship, like walking up and shaking hands with somebody. Some try to pet the horse on the face. A horse responds by backing away from a strange person, sticking his hand in its face. We don't do that to people. Why would we do that to the horse?" asked Robert.

During the exercises, a coach is observing and when something like that happens, the coach will ask the veteran what happened? What was your intention?

"I wanted to connect."

"How did that go for you?"

"The horse backed away because..."

"I don't want to know what the horse is thinking.

What are you?"

"Well, maybe I was too fast or too aggressive."

"Horses provide immediate critical feedback.

And they don't lie or pretend."

"Our say hello activity was taught to us by Barbara Rector, MA CEIP-ED who is credited globally for developing the first horse-assisted learning program in 1995 at Sierra Tucson recovery center," said Alyssa. "Barbara's research about the lasting benefits in lowering stress and anxiety of say hello, grooming, and breathing with is well documented in a number of publications."

In a workshop, the veteran will be asked to lead the horse around cones. Leading a horse becomes a metaphor for leading one's recovery, which can often feel like a 1000-pound animal, especially in early recovery.

"Leading one's recovery occurs in relation to someone or something. It does not exist by itself. Behind all recovery, something is at stake. At the most basic level, survival is at stake. Are we attending to our concerns and taking action to make our lives turn out, or are we letting life happen to us? Are we living in a static state of complacency, or are we directing our recovery into the life we want to create?" asked Alyssa.

"Equine therapy was a cathartic experience. In order to even approach these animals, we have to be completely honest with ourselves, and recognize and accept our state of mind. You get to know yourself better in a few minutes with a horse than you do with most people."

—Bayside Marin Treatment Center participant

Robert added, "So how do you connect with that horse so he will trust you enough to stay focused on that relationship and walk with you around these obstacles?"

The last exercise is for the veteran to share with the horse what is troubling them or the coach might provide questions to consider to experience sharing and opening up to others.

The aim of the work at Medicine Horse Ranch is to encourage new pathways to come out from limited views and beliefs that hold us back or keep us locked in narratives that do not serve. Alyssa contended that confidence is key, as are forgiveness and new actions toward the life ahead. "Look through the windshield instead of the rearview mirror."

KIDS PLAY POLO WITH GREAT EXCITEMENT

BY LAKIN KHAN

Polo is the best sport ever," or so says the younger set about the thousands-year-old sport of kings that they play today with great energy and enthusiasm at Wine Country Polo Club in Santa Rosa.

Extolling the skills and enthusiasm of the club's youngsters, Paul Griffin, president of the club, has found youngsters to be inspired because their parents or even their grandparents play the game. They grew up around horses and were already strong riders. They watched their family and friends play. But they each have their own sense of connection with the horse and with the game.

PASSED DOWN THROUGH THE FAMILY

Eager to become the best player he can be, 14-year-old Jens Lermusiaux has the skill to play full games on teams with adults. Under the encouragement of his mother, Claudine Descheemaecker, who had learned to play polo in Belgium where she grew up, mother and son share their set of ponies.

"I always want to play, but I like caring for the horse, too; it's not just the riding," said Jen. "It's the excitement of the play but it's also the communication with the horse."

Carlos Rivas V also comes from a family of polo players, playing and learning from his father, Carlos Rivas IV, who played and learned from his father, Carlos Rivas



Carlos Rivas V begins a breakaway. PHOTO BY BILL STACY

III. Carlos Rivas IV recalls his time with his father quite fondly and wants to share that experience with his son.

Now ten, Carlos Rivas V began learning and practicing polo before he was seven. He loves going out in the morning with his father to exercise the horses and loves learning to play the game and the moves. He also loves the thrill of the game.

"You can't think of anything else when you are playing," he said, an echo of all polo players, young and old. He, too, wants to become the best in the world and is excited about going to Argentina in November with his father to watch the renowned Argentine Polo Open. He hopes for the opportunity to practice with other young and accomplished players in Argentina, the hotbed of the best polo players and horses in the world.

Mahie Sharma is learning and playing with her father, Vineet Sharma. Her younger brother Viraj, now in fourth grade, is also practicing and playing. Mahie loves the morning exercise hour with her horses, her father, and her brother, and like the others, she would be involved with horses even without polo.

LOVE THE TEAM PLAY

However, her love for the game is because you play as a team. Everyone has each other's back, supporting each other as they barrel down the field after the ball. If the first person misses the hit, the next person in line is



Jens Lermusiaux controls the ball.

PHOTO BY CLAUDINE DESCHEEMAECCKER

there to hit the ball, and the person behind them, as well, all following the invisible right of way that protects horse and rider from dangerous contact.

"It's not like show jumping, which is one person, one horse. This is a team," she said, "a whole line of four working together towards the same goal."

Playing polo "is mentally healthy," said Mahie, thirteen, who has been practicing and playing polo since she was seven years old. "I forget the worries and stresses of my day."

All the kids mention that the sport demands the utmost attention. Riding and directing a thousand-pound horse at speed, complete with twists, turns, and full stops, while chasing a small white ball, swinging at and hitting it with a slender mallet, all while sharing the field with up to nine other horses and riders seeking to avoid collision or contact, demands full and complete concentration.

POLO GROUNDS WITH HISTORY

This game of skill, intensity, and fun attracts people who often play for life. In Sonoma County, the club and grounds, set at the foot of Trione-Annadel State Park, were founded in 1969 by one such person, Henry Trione, a devoted polo player for decades. The Trione family members continue to be devoted sponsors of Wine Country polo.

The game arrived in the U.S. through the hands of the British colonists, who discovered the game in Manipur, India, in the 1800s. It arrived in India from ancient Persia, where it was used as training for their cavalry over 2,000 years ago. The game spread across Asia to China and down into India.

Currently, at Wine Country Polo Club, about ten kids in their teens are able to practice and play, another ten

or so coming up behind them, Paul noted. The club is exploring ways to invite interested youngsters without direct horse experience to learn the game, to "provide sponsorships for lessons, maybe allowing them to rent a horse," said Paul, to offset some of the costs when starting out.

CONFIDENCE AND CONNECTION

With the need for many horses, the upkeep and training, the expense can be considerable, but it is also a game that demands the best from horse and rider, body and mind; it develops confidence and connections in young people and in that way, it might be considered invaluable.

In the short, intense season from May through September, practice, play, and care for the horses command the riders' full attention. There are club practice games on Thursdays, a light day on Fridays, and then full-on games over the weekends, often with visiting players and pros from Argentina or elsewhere. The young players relish this opportunity to work and ride with the more experienced and higher-ranked players. An advantage of a smaller, more contained sport is being able to work with your heroes and mentors, Jens mentioned, and both Carlos and Mahie echoed. "Here I can ride with my hero, Tommy Usher," said Jens, who learned directly from Usher about listening to the horse, about being willing to adapt to each horse and how they play.

In this sport, the rider rides many different horses, adapting to each horse's style and temperament. Gameplay is divided into divisions, called chukkers, of about seven minutes; most club games are four chukkers long, with four minutes between the chukkers and ten minutes at half-time. Because of the intensity



Mahie Sharma loves to intercept the ball. PHOTO BY BILL STACY

of play for those seven minutes, the 100-yard sprints with turns and twists, players use fresh ponies for each chukker, meaning each rider will ride four different horses per game. Most young riders will access one or two horses of their own to ride but then rely on their parents or family for the other mounts in a game.

VALUE OF RIDING MANY HORSES

Riding that many different horses definitely improves horsemanship and skill. As young riders, "you have to play the way the horse plays." Jens said.

Paul noted that polo ponies have to be steady and unflappable and not react to other horses or ponies coming up on them. Paul described the polo pony as a "Thoroughbred who can barrel race." They are often trained in Argentina, the polo capital of the world. And though often called ponies, most are truly horses.

Usher says a good polo pony loves the games as much as the rider does, is eager to play, and wants to be in the action. Carlos and Mahie noted that good polo ponies can be fast off the mark but also slow and calm when needed. They can turn quickly and are responsive to each situation. Polo is a game that is new each time. "Each day, each play is different," said Jens. It engages the mind and body fully of both rider and horse.

Certainly, like most horse sports, there is an element of danger and injury. But Paul noted that the current rules of the game were created to keep horse and rider safe, minimize the risk of collisions, and maximize the game's fun and exhilaration.

Strict rules govern who chases the ball, how it can be stolen, the establishment of the lanes of play, and the right of way. Two referees follow the game play on horseback.

The younger players start at slow walking and trotting speeds, learning the movements of hitting and stick handling, of plays and horse handling, of being strong equestrians well before they begin in the lower-stakes club matches. Both horse and rider must engage in ongoing, year-long training, keeping fit, active, and ready for play.

With no playing from October through April, depending on the rains, the horses get vacation through the winter, often at an away stable, perhaps in Sonoma, near Palm Springs, or in Arizona. The youngsters will ride and tend to their other horses, practice their shots, and work to stay in shape, all in preparation for next summer when they can once again get back on a swift, well-mannered pony and race around the polo field after a small white ball.



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VSV IN CALIFORNIA

BY MICHELLE BEKO, DVM

Last year, horses in several southern California counties experienced a number of cases of vesicular stomatitis virus (VSV). This virus can infect horses, cattle, pigs, and occasionally llamas or people. Mostly it is found in South and Central America including Mexico but intermittently makes incursions into the United States, especially the southwestern states.

The virus is primarily transmitted by insects, especially black flies, sand flies, and culicoides (gnats). It can cause short-lived vesicles (blisters) on the gums, mouth, tongue, and/or coronary band. When these rupture, direct contact between animals can transmit the virus. Infected animals usually have a fever and may be lame if they have coronary band lesions. Most will uneventfully recover with no specific treatment other than supportive care. For example, extensive lesions in the mouth or tongue may make eating difficult and require that food be soaked to make eating less painful.

In the U.S., veterinarians who suspect a case of VSV are required to contact state animal health authorities. The reason behind this is that symptomatically, VSV is indistinguishable from Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD),



PHOTO BY DR. JEFFREY MOSS

PHOTO BY CAROLINE CONN

Blisters on the tongue and mouth are caused by vesicular stomatitis virus.

a disease found in cattle but not horses. FMD is a highly contagious viral disease that can cause significant economic losses to the beef and dairy industries through lost production. It has the potential to stop international trade.

If a horse is diagnosed with VSV, that horse and all others on the premises will have a mandatory quarantine until at least 14 days after the last case has recovered. Insect control and general biosecurity procedures such as not sharing tack, buckets, or other equipment between horses can help limit the spread.

In 2023, 216 cases of VSV were confirmed in California, Nevada, and Texas. Of those 213 were in California counties including San Diego, Riverside, Fresno, Tulare, Los Angeles, Orange, Ventura, Santa Barbara, and San Luis Obispo.

Most of the affected animals were horses, although at least one rhinoceros (San Diego County) was infected.

During the time when there was VSV in California, the California Department of Animal Health recommended that all equine events require horses to have a health certificate two to five days prior to the event with a statement on the certificate that the horse did not have symptoms of VSV or originate from a premises or county with VSV. They also recommended that all horses should be examined by a veterinarian prior to entering showgrounds.

Hopefully, this disease will never become established in the United States.

AT THE BRAIN SEMINAR

BY MELISSA KALEMBER

Neurophysiologist Dr. Steve Peters, co-author of "Evidence Based Horsemanship", and equine clinician Mark Rashid gathered in Arroyo Grande, California, to teach thirsty minds about the horse brain.

Dr. Steve, a wonderful and natural teacher, lectured on the science behind how they think, feel, and process the world around them. Most helpful was the discussion of the various states of the sympathetic nervous system and the parasympathetic nervous system. In the illustration below, he showed the optimal state the horse must be in to learn. Is the horse curious with the right amount of concern to learn and grow new extensions of nerve cells that propagate the electrochemical stimulation? Does the horse feel threatened and panicked?

He guided us through the chemical responses that occur in the brain depending on which part of the pyramid the horse is in.

He explained that to work with us, horses must be in an "optimal zone of arousal." When in this zone, horses are not in fight or flight mode, i.e. the sympathetic nervous system. In the window of tolerance or optimal learning zone, horses are calm, relaxed, and aware.

During discussions with Mark Rashid, Dr. Steve masterfully bridged the training of horses with the knowledge of how the horse brain is designed. Mark and Dr. Steve demonstrated with a horse in a round pen. We saw firsthand the physical signs of the horse that corresponded to what was unfolding in the horse's brain. We were able to see a horse leave its window of tolerance or optimal learning space. We saw when it came back into its window of tolerance.

For example, the horse in the demonstration was a little spooky and lit up, reacting to various sounds, indicating that he was out of his window of tolerance. The horse wanted to use Mark for comfort, clearly seeking to stand almost on top of him.

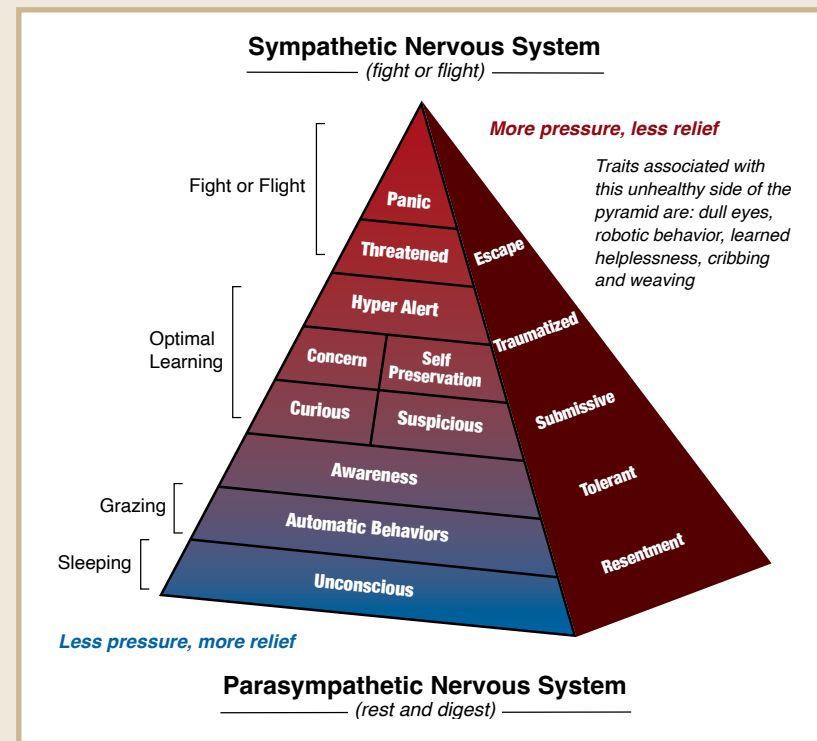
Mark worked with the horse in a way that invited him out of his sympathetic nervous system. The horse accepted by

pausing, and we watched the physical signs in the horse as it left its sympathetic nervous system and found its parasympathetic nervous system. We saw head posture change, eye blinking increase, and then eventually the licking and chewing.

Dr. Steve recapped what was occurring in the brain that was allowing this physical shift. Mark elaborated on the timing, feel, and internal connections that were applied for this to occur.

We humans, usually with the best intentions, tend to humanize our horses. The owner thinks the horse is doing something on purpose. The rider reacts to the horse because he is retaliating. Yet scientific evidence shows, through the dissection and study of the physical horse brain, that the horse does not possess the part of the brain that is responsible for 'doing it on purpose' or 'retaliating.'

Armed with this information, I try to work with what's occurring in the horse brain, not my overanalyzing human brain. Dr. Steve provided the scientific evidence with which humans can be open to working with, seeing through, and connecting with the horse through the horse's brain, not through the human brain.



Michelle Beko, D.V.M.

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SECRET SAUCES

Horse care tips can come from the kitchen. Might you have a secret sauce that is the answer to all things horse? Share it with *SCHC Horse Journal* readers at schc.pschofler@gmail.com.



Tabasco sauce on leg wraps that need to stay on at night discourages a horse from fiddling with the wraps. A dollop also works well on those crossties

some horses love to chew.

—Ollie Galligan

Keep around a big jug of apple cider vinegar to spray on your horse's soles and frogs. It purports to prevent or treat thrush, a fungal infection. For a wintry sponge bath,

apple cider vinegar with water can cut through the sweat and make the coat shiny. Red wine vinegar takes the sting out of boot rubs and scratches. —Andrea Pfeiffer



Mung beans support kidney and liver function, helping to improve digestive health through inherent nutritional and fiber value, but they help to rebuild the body as well. If a horse is on a high-quality forage, yet demonstrates dryness in the body and feces, add mung bean first and see how they respond. This

bean is generally well tolerated and does not normally create gassiness or digestive upset, compared to other beans. —Dr. Thomas Schell

Manuka honey is amazing. A horse was bitten by a recluse spider and was not going to make it. Manuka honey came to the rescue! He made it. It is produced from the nectar of the New Zealand and Australian manuka tree. The medicinal form is available at stores like CVS. —Patti Schofler



The main pasture at Lost Hearts and Souls Horse Rescue

BECOME A MEMBER TODAY!

The Sonoma County Horse Council celebrates its 30th year as an advocate for horse owners and businesses, protecting all our interests.

sonomacountyhorsecouncil.org

Your \$30 annual membership entitles you to quarterly issues of the award-winning *Horse Journal* delivered to you. Support your horse community!

OUR CENTRAL MISSION IS TO PROMOTE THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF HORSES AND ALL ASPECTS OF THE HORSE INDUSTRY IN SONOMA COUNTY:

- Promote and preserve horse agriculture, industry and recreation in Sonoma County
- Communicate to members on horse-related issues
- Inform the public about horse community goals and projects
- Support private and public equestrian facilities and local clubs
- Promote all aspects of the equine industry

WHEN WE EQUINE ENTHUSIASTS SPEAK WITH ONE VOICE, WE ARE VERY POWERFUL. JOIN THE MOVEMENT.



Sonoma County Horse Council

THE SCHC IS A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION



Pam Buda is a Realtor who specializes in Wine Country and Equestrian Property with 20 years living and working in Sonoma County.

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20 Years of Wine Country & Horses

In June 2003 I founded my real estate practice after leaving Silicon Valley and moving to my own horse property. A mutual friend introduced me to Betsy Bueno, running a fledgling horse rescue out of her tract home, stringing 11 garden hoses down the block to leased pastureland. She had tried for 2 years to find the true home for her horse rescue.

By the end of September we had sold her home and simultaneously closed on her new farm. Neither of us knew where the next years would take us. Betsy incorporated *Lost Hearts and Souls Horse Rescue* as a charity, saving many lives along the way. I developed a successful real estate practice based upon putting my clients' goals first and generating repeat and referral business. It's amazing how one decision can kick off a chain of events that impacts so many lives in unexpected ways.

Thanks to the support of our amazing Sonoma County equine community, I've had the opportunity to represent all types of buyers and sellers. Trust me when I say horse property is a 'different animal.' It demands an agent who knows how to market your home to horse and non-horse people alike, as well as speak the language of horse owners and riders.

If you're looking for a horse property or have one to list in 2024 (or both), please give me a call to see how I can help!



Sonoma County Horse Council

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PHOTO: DAWN HEUMANN

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