

MARY PARDEE MAKES THE CASE FOR EQUINE STUDIES *p. 50*

THE CHRONICLE *of the* HORSE

VOL. 80, No. 27

OCTOBER 16, 2017 • \$4.99



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Don't Dismiss Equine Studies Programs

Lake Erie's director of riding and equine studies professor explains the ways in which this degree prepares a student to be a professional.

BY MARY PARDEE

Over the last few years I've heard many older professionals expressing frustration and disappointment at the lack of horsemanship, work ethic and determination exhibited by juniors and young professionals in our business.

This summer, Denny Emerson asked for comments on the merits of equine studies colleges and degrees, and Katie Prudent spoke of her frustration watching wealthy amateurs rise to the top of the sport by buying the best horses, questioning where the tough and talented young riders are. Emerson and Prudent have long been idols of mine, and I have the utmost respect for their opinions.

But let me tell you: Those tough, dedicated, talented riders are out there. There are many great 4-H groups and Pony Clubs doing an excellent job of teaching young riders, and collegiate equine studies

Equine studies students take equine classes, general classes, and do hands-on work in the barn, such as learning to wrap legs. MOLLY SORGE PHOTO

programs continue the work of producing the very type of horse people professionals are talking about. As a professor in Lake Erie College's School of Equine Studies (Ohio) for 11 years, perhaps I can shed some light on those questions and give a different perspective.

Those of us who work with equine studies programs have heard many of our peers say, "If you're any good you don't need to get a degree. Just go work for someone good," or "Kids who come out of those programs are (fill in the following adjective): entitled, lack real world experience, just book smart, lazy, too inexperienced in the really important things."

Perhaps we shouldn't paint all programs and the students in them with such broad brushstrokes? A college degree is about more than just learning subject matter. The core educational requirements teach people to be better critical thinkers, better writers and speakers, and provide experience in at least a few business classes. Our students are required to take biology, English, math, accounting, psychology, entrepreneurship courses and other classes that provide a strong science, liberal arts and business foundation. How many horse people do we know who are brilliant in the ring and barn but can't manage a website, handle business accounting or design an advertising strategy? If these students decide to leave the horse business they possess a bachelor's degree and skills that are transferable to the non-equine business world.

Students take equine classes along with their general education courses. Equine health, equine business, equine nutrition, lameness and conditioning, pasture management, and others help create a comprehensive knowledge of the horse. In equine anatomy and physiology they learn the major systems of the horse in detail, by dissecting legs and other body parts. The hands-on work in the barn requires them to clean stalls, practice horse handling techniques, give shots, wrap legs, clip horses, administer first aid, assess body condition score and evaluate equine

“A college degree is about more than just learning subject matter.”

diets, practice correct longeing, learn saddle fit, learn correct biting and many other skills.

In our riding classes we provide a string of horses at each level and challenge the riders to become thinking riders, not just passive pretty riders. They learn theory, work on classical principles, and there are no gimmicks or shortcuts. We aren't teaching to show; we are teaching to learn. They ride the hard ones and learn to work with the horse physically and psychologically.

As in everything, not everyone is a superstar. Some lack pure talent. Some

lack great work ethic. But for every student who is average there are many superlative students. These are the ones we refer to you when you contact us. Our students have interned for trainers and businesses such as Peter Wylde, Val Renihan, Andre Dignelli, Peter Leone, Michael Matz, WinStar Farm, Darley USA, KESMARC and KER. Not everyone belongs in the ring or the saddle as a profession. Many students go on to work in the industry in different capacities. They work for publications, PR or event management companies, nutritional research, and the myriad of other busi-

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nesses that support horses and riders.

I urge you to support these colleges with equine studies programs. We're trying hard to develop the next generation of horsewomen and horsemen. Educate your students about these programs as they start thinking about college. Donate horses that can become a "professor." We all need horses at every level. Offer to teach a clinic at a reduced rate for the students. Together we can create a positive synergy of equine education. ●



MARY PARDEE

Mary has been a faculty member at Lake Erie College (Ohio) for 11 years. She has more than 25 years of experience as a teacher and trainer, specializing in hunters and equitation. Her students have competed successfully at such shows as the Winter Equestrian Festival (Fla.), Capital Challenge (Md.), USEF Pony Finals, IHSA Nationals and many others. Mary has also prepped Thoroughbred sales horses in the United States and England, and she has experience with polo and driving.

Mary received her bachelor's degree in English from the University of Kentucky, her secondary English teaching certification from Cleveland State University, and her master's in education from Lake Erie College. She's now an assistant professor of equine studies, director of riding and IHSA English team coach at Lake Erie.

IN THE FORUM, horsemen are invited to express their views and offer constructive criticism on any topic relevant to working with and enjoying horses. The opinions expressed by the writers are entirely their own and not necessarily those of The Chronicle of the Horse.

▶ **The Desire To Achieve Is There**

Peter Wylde, *The 2004 Olympic team gold medalist and 2002 World Equestrian Games individual silver medalist, sees potential in collegiate equestrians.*

Over the last eight years I've been very involved with the U.S. Hunter Jumper Association's Emerging Athletes Program. I've been the head clinician at all eight of their National Finals and look forward to returning as head clinician and judge for this year's final, which will take place for the second year in a row at Lake Erie College.

I met Mary Pardee for the first time last November at Lake Erie College and was impressed with her organization, including the LEC stable and her students.

I am continually in need of eager helpers/grooms/riders to assist with my business, especially in Florida in the winter, but also at our farm in New York during the summer. The longer I've been back in the United States from my time in Europe, the more I've grown to appreciate the type of helper I can receive from many of these college programs. A lot of these kids are familiar faces to those who participate in the EAP, and the one consistent thing amongst virtually all of them is their desire to achieve. The work ethic is impressive, and their positive attitude to be compassionate horse people is refreshing.

Oftentimes in our sport, the media, and consequently the public, only looks at the young riders who are in the limelight, either because of their blue ribbons or because of



Kelli Cruciotti is one of the young riders named by Peter Wylde as a hard worker with a bright future.
KIMBERLY LOUSHIN PHOTO

their celebrity status. Those of us who are observant horse people should take the initiative to look at the grassroots and see the hardworking, talented young kids who are in the trenches doing anything and everything they can to further themselves, hoping one day they will be a Bezie Madden, Kent Farrington, McLain Ward or Laura Kraut. It takes a lot of work to get to the top, and please

remember, some of us didn't break onto the international scene until we were in our 30s.

Riders like Kelli Cruciotti, Shawn Casady, Victoria Birdsall, Jacob Pope, Tori Colvin, Hunter Holloway, Michael Hughes, Emma and Gracie Marlowe, Kathryn Haley and McKayla Langmeier (these are the ones who come to my mind, though I know there are others) are all out there, working extremely hard. They are all putting in their dues, and although probably due to budgetary constraints they are maybe not presently competing at the Global Champions Tour, I'm quite sure in the future they will get that chance.

We as a country can be proud of this group of talented kids, and one day that lucky break (like I had at age 31 when I was introduced to Dan Lufkin and his Chestnut Ridge Farm) will knock on their door, and when that day comes they will be ready to take the world by storm.

PETER WYLDE