



The HorseCountry Quarterly

A PUBLICATION OF THE TRYON RIDING & HUNT CLUB

Future Block House Races on Hold - PAGE 9



PHOTO ERIK OLSEN

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TR&HC PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

Looking Forward: The Next 100 Years



It is hard to believe I am entering the homestretch of my three-year tenure as president of TR&HC. It has been an honor and privilege to serve as president of this hard-working service-based club. TR&HC, the oldest equestrian club in the area, historically has reflected the times and the foothill area, evolving and changing over time.

Looking back through the archives one can find events that have come and gone. Did you know the Club once hosted lancing tournaments, gymkhanas, and even a rodeo? Our “signature” events however have stood

the test of time. The Charity Horse Shows, Block House Steeplechase, Horse Trials, and the Any and All Dog Show have been fixtures on the Tryon calendar for decades.

The future of the Block House Steeplechase, an event almost synonymous with our Club and Tryon, is uncertain as it will not be held in 2025. In recent years, the logistical and financial challenges of organizing the steeplechase have become increasingly difficult. You can read more about it on page 9. We have formed a Block House committee to explore if it is possible to bring back this cherished event. If you would like to contribute your thoughts, please feel free to call us at the office. We would be happy to include you on our committee!

With TR&HC turning 100 years old in 2025, we can proudly look back on what we have accomplished, but we won’t rest on our past laurels. We plan to kick off our 100-year celebration at the new event center, The Fitzgerald, in downtown Tryon. Stay tuned for details, and pencil us in for Thursday, April 10th for an evening where we’ll reflect on our rich history and look ahead to an exciting future!

Again, it has been a true honor serving as president of the TR&HC, and I hope to see you all at the annual meeting and holiday party in December at FENCE.

Angie Millon
President, TR&HC

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President, Tryon Riding & Hunt Club



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TR&HC President	Angie Millon
Editorial Director	Michelle Yelton
Art Director	Stephen Bleezarde
Business Liason/Advertising	Leigh Borreson

SAVE THE DATE!

2024 TR&HC Dates

November 3: 91st Any & All Dog Show

December 6: Annual Meeting/Holiday Party

Visit tryonridingandhuntclub.org for more info.



L-R: Tryon Riding & Hunt Club board members Donna Younkin and Joanne Gibbs present a check for \$3,000 to Polk Central Elementary School Principal Dr. Kim McMinn, and teacher Andrea Water. The school was one beneficiary of the 2024 TR&HC Charity 1 Horse Show.

FROM THE EDITOR’S DESK

In this issue, we celebrate both the enduring legacy of our equestrian community and the new endeavors shaping its future. As we approach the centennial of the Tryon Riding & Hunt Club in 2025, we are reminded of how deeply horses are woven into the fabric of our lives.

The Club’s 100th anniversary next year is a milestone few organizations can claim. It’s a testament to the years of tradition this community has fostered, while also recognizing the fresh opportunities our neighbors are bringing to our shared heritage. We’re fortunate to be part of a community that honors its history, and as always, it’s the balance between preserving the past and embracing the future that keeps our equestrian culture so vibrant.

We are incredibly grateful to the many people who have contributed over the past 100 years to Tryon Riding & Hunt Club’s legacy, ensuring that we remain a thriving and vibrant horse community. Your dedication to preserving the spirit of equestrian life in Polk County inspires us all.

I invite you to explore this issue and celebrate the evolving stories of our horse country—a place where tradition thrives alongside progress, and where the bond between horse and rider remains at the heart of everything we do.

Michelle Yelton

Michelle Yelton
Editorial Director



91ST ANY & ALL DOG SHOW SET FOR NOVEMBER 3RD

Get Ready to Unleash the Fun!

by Michelle Yelton

The Tryon Riding & Hunt Club (TR&HC) is excited to host its 91st Any & All Dog Show on Sunday, November 3, at Harmon Field in Tryon. The event kicks off with onsite registration at noon at Harmon Field’s basketball pavilion, and the show begins at 1 p.m. Registration is also available online at tryonridingandhuntclub.org.

This beloved community event, which has been a staple for over nine decades, invites dog lovers and their four-legged friends to enjoy an afternoon of playful competition, all in the name of charity. Club board member Nancy Wilson is helping to organize this year’s event and looking forward to another day of community and doggie fun. “As one of the longest-running events of its kind, the Any & All Dog Show is more than just a competition – it’s a cherished tradition that celebrates the bond between humans and their canine companions,” said Wilson.

Highlighting this year’s event is an encore performance by Dina Zaphiris, “Dog Trainer to the Stars,” who is excited to return to the Any & All Dog Show.

“The Any & All Dog Show is a spectacular day of fun for the entire family and your dogs! We were a part of the show last year, and loved it. I’m so happy to be going again this year!” shared Zaphiris.

For just \$1 per category, any dog owner can enter their pet – regardless of pedigree – in a variety of fun and lighthearted competitions and all contributions will go toward supporting local nonprofits. Categories include:

- Best in Show
- Biggest and Smallest Dog
- Best Trick
- Best Costume
- Dog That Looks Most Like Owner
- Best Rescue Dog



Past participants — and winners — at the Any & All Dog Show.

PHOTOS MARK JUMP PHOTOGRAPHY

Purrfect Bark will be back to provide ‘doggie goodie’ bags and attendees can purchase a sign with their favorite dog listed for \$25 per dog that will be posted on the showgrounds. Ribbons will be awarded to winners in each class.

The Any & All Dog Show will also include face painting and giveaways, making it a perfect outing for families. The event will take place rain or shine.



GREEN CREEK HOUNDS KENNEL COURSE

by Michelle Yelton

A New Legacy for Polk County

Polk County’s equestrian community often benefits from the dedication of its residents, and that continues to be true thanks to Carolyn and Tom Cadier and the realization of their vision for a community cross-country course.

Fox hunting and eventing are both deeply rooted passions for Carolyn and Tom. Both are active members of all three local fox hunting clubs, and Carolyn spent several years producing the Festival of the Hunt competitions. Tom previously served as a Master of Foxhounds in Georgia for 13 years and has over 40 years of the sport under his belt, with Carolyn not far behind in experience. Both were eager to give back to the community in a meaningful way and their hearts were set on a cross-country course.

Last year when the Green Creek Hounds asked the Cadiers to help move the club forward, it was the spark that set the rest of the plan in motion. Carolyn remembers asking herself, “What if I can make a cross-country course there and get the property in shape and open it up?”

Momentum grew and the couple laid the groundwork for the aptly named Green Creek Hounds Kennel Course. Thanks to years of experience and planning, the Cadiers and a team of volunteers transformed this site into a community cross-country course that is now ready for riders. The creation of a nonprofit organization and board has been instrumental in the project moving ahead.

Preserving the natural aesthetic of the venue was essential. “We’re keeping things lovely and natural ... that’s what’s really important,” said Carolyn.

Another key focus for the Cadiers was ensuring the course served riders of all levels, emphasizing natural, approachable obstacles rather than the extreme challenges often seen at high-level competitions. “We did not want to make this course upper-level competitive. This is for everyone. The greatest number of participants in eventing are novices, and that is the average level of a fox hunt club, so that’s what I felt was reasonable and better for the community,” Carolyn explained.

With currently 19 fences of varying heights, the course allows riders to train in a safe and welcoming environment. To help offset costs and include more members of the community, Carolyn found



Tom and Carolyn Cadier’s vision for a new, community, cross-country course became a reality with the creation of the Green Creek Hounds Kennel Course. PHOTOS SUPPLIED

local sponsors for every jump on the course, underscoring the communal effort behind the project. Green Creek Hunt Club members have been the biggest supporters. Also, the nonprofit status of the Green Creek Hounds Kennel Course means that proceeds from events and schooling fees will be reinvested into the community, further enhancing the facility and supporting educational programs.

Nancy Wilson recently rode the course and gave rave reviews. Wilson said the course is “beautiful, well-planned, and a huge new opportunity for eventers and folks who would like to school cross country! It is easy to see that Carolyn and Tom Cadier are planning this new equestrian training venue with care, experience and most of all, great footing with multiple types of jumpers and terrain. I encourage all riders to



check it out and support their new jump building funding!”

Carolyn also paid tribute to her husband for his partnership in this endeavor. “I’m also calling the field the Tom Cadier Field because Tom’s the one who got it in shape.

He has been working on it since March and it’s beautiful.”

Another valuable member of the development team is Terry Lynch, who stepped up to be their nonprofit board chairman. Carolyn expressed her gratitude for Terry’s contributions: “Terry has been an invaluable part of our team, working closely with my husband Tom and the board. His sponsorship and support have truly helped bring our vision to life.”

As the course continues to develop — with plans for a water complex and additional trail enhancements — the Green Creek Hounds Kennel Course is poised to become a cornerstone of the local equestrian community. For those eager to experience the course firsthand, information is available at GreenCreekHounds.com, or you can reach out directly: GCHmasters@gmail.com.

For Carolyn, this project celebrates the spirit of collaboration and the love of equestrian sports in Polk County: “I’m more excited about it because it’s a legacy for the community.”





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THE EVOLUTION OF THE HORSE SHOW RIBBON
A Journey Through Time

by Michelle Yelton

Competitive equestrians most likely remember winning their first horse show ribbon, sparking a desire to chase more victories. There is achievement and pride represented by this smooth, glossy satin. Their vibrant colors and intricate designs represent hours of dedication, training, and competition. But where did the tradition originate? And, how have ribbons evolved over the years?

The tradition of awarding ribbons at horse shows is believed to have originated in 1839 when The Royal Agricultural Society of England included horse shows in its agricultural fairs. Ribbons were introduced to distinguish outstanding livestock, including horses.

Initially, these ribbons were simple pieces of colored fabric, often silk or satin, with handwritten inscriptions indicating the award and the event. The color-coding system – which endures to this day – was designed to make it easy for spectators and participants to recognize the winners at a glance.

As horse shows grew in popularity, so did the beauty of the ribbons. By the late 19th century, ribbons became more ornate, featuring rosettes and printed details, such as event name, date, and class. Silk and satin remained popular choices, and the ribbons were sometimes adorned with gold or silver thread to add a touch of elegance, often reflecting the status and wealth

associated with horse ownership and competition.

The rosette – a circular design made from folded ribbons and adorned with streamers – made its debut in the 20th century and became a standard feature, adding even more prestige to the award.





Above, just a few examples of ribbons from some of our local competitions.



In addition to aesthetic improvements, the purpose of horse show ribbons expanded. Collecting ribbons became a way for riders to document their journey and successes in the equestrian world. The ribbons also served as mementos, capturing the memories of each competition.

Today, horse show ribbons are more than just awards; they are a vital part of equestrian culture. They represent the dedication, skill, and hard work of both the horse and the rider. From its humble beginnings in 19th-century England to its current status as a cherished symbol of success, the practice of awarding ribbons has endured for over a century and remains a vibrant and integral part of equestrian tradition.





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EVENTING

by Michelle Yelton

A Look at 2024 and Beyond

Eventing, across the nation, is changing as many venues are facing declining entries, increasing expenses and a crowded competition calendar. That means that Tryon Riding and Hunt Club is rethinking how it supports the sport of eventing. While Morris Horse Trials will not occur in 2024, the Club is considering ways to sustain the tradition of eventing in our area.

TR&HC recognizes the importance of the lower levels, which are crucial for the growth and sustainability of the sport. Thus, the Club was excited to receive and approve a grant application from the Green Creek Hounds to provide a novice level jump for their new cross country course.

Watch for this TR&HC branded coop to show up on their course soon!

Additionally, as highlighted in our previous issue, the Tryon International Equestrian Center (Tryon International) will be hosting a new late autumn USEA/USEF Horse Trials from October 31 to November 3, 2024. Tryon International has graciously supported TR&HC in the past by loaning cross-country jumps for the Morris the Horse Trials, and now there are plans to



TR&HC's support of eventing continues in new ways.

PHOTO LIZ CRAWLEY

incorporate several beloved aspects of Morris into this event. These include the awarding of TR&HC perpetual trophies to the winners of the Training and Preliminary divisions, the continuation of the Thoroughbred Incentive Program Awards, and participation in the USEA Intercollegiate Program.

"We are also exploring ideas to offer a course walk for the lower levels, to recognize grooms, and a few more ideas that we would like to be a

surprise!" shared TR&HC board member Donna Younkin. "If there are local businesses or individuals who would like to participate in bringing some 'Tryon' and TR&HC flavor to the event, please let us know."

TR&HC President Angie Millon has emphasized the Club's continued focus on eventing. "These efforts reflect our Club's commitment to the eventing community and its dedication to ensuring that competitors continue to have opportunities to develop their skills and compete in a supportive environment."

Finally, no horse trial happens without a cadre of volunteers, and TR&HC and our community are fortunate to be home to many experienced volunteers. "We encourage anyone interested in volunteering to consider joining us at the November event at Tryon International." To volunteer, contact the TR&HC office at 828-351-9709 or office@trhc1925.org.

Stay tuned for further updates on TR&HC's initiatives and the evolving plans for continuing the great tradition of eventing in our community.

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YOUNG RIDER: ZEALAND PATEL

by Margie Askins

A Story from Luck to Love for this Passionate Fox Hunter

It was literally the “luck of the draw” that began young rider Zealand Patel’s journey with horses. Patel was five years old at the time her name was entered and selected in a drawing at a school auction for five horse riding lessons from her classmate’s mother, Samantha Russell. “I fell in love with riding, and have never stopped since,” Patel stated. Patel, a self-proclaimed “animal lover,” took riding lessons for several years after those initial five—truly falling in love with the horses, and the sport. Those initial lessons transitioned into a year’s worth with Russell followed by additional years with other trainers. Eventually, this journey led Patel to discover her greatest passion—fox hunting.

“I fell in love with riding, and I’ve never stopped...”

Patel started fox hunting with the Tryon Hounds in 2021 when she leased a pony named Cora from Allison Smith. Smith, who rides with Tryon Hounds, invited Patel to go on a hunt because she thought she would enjoy it. “The first time I went out into the field it was like nothing I could ever imagine! It was like a fairytale, not just for me but for Cora.” She stated it was a privilege to ride Cora on her first mount and speaks of her fondly. “Cora is a bay with a white face and a white heart on her side. She gave me all the experience I now have for fox hunting.” The ride with Cora marked the beginning of Patel’s fox hunting journey, and she is now entering her fourth season.

For Patel, fox hunting goes beyond the relationships she builds with the horses she rides; it’s also about the exhilarating thrill of the hunt. Fox hunting fosters a deep appreciation of the land, and its value. While many youths wake up to their cell phone alerts, Patel prefers to indulge in the natural environment. “I love fox hunting because I get to see our countryside in a way that is beautiful, and the hounds’ voices make it even sweeter. On the morning of the hunt, I get to see the sunrise and the Earth awaken. By far, it is the best place to be and it is my favorite thing to do. If I had it my way, it would be [this way] every morning,” she stated.

Unfortunately, Patel can’t go on a fox hunt every morning because she has to juggle fox hunting with her hunter/jumper schedule. She trains twice a



From the ring to the hunt, young rider Zealand Patel finds her passion in both.

week and exercises the hunt horse she is riding that season at least twice a week. She credits much of her success to her trainers: “I have been lucky enough to have quite a few role models that I can look to for guidance, including my trainers in the past and present such as Leigh Rice, Gisele O’Grady, and Amelia Nowicki.” Patel recently decided to explore jumpers, and began working

with Nowicki from Hidden Valley Farms. “Patel started coming to me for lessons this summer with the goal of getting into the jumper ring. She instantly fit right in at our barn! It makes my heart smile when I see her helping some of my little kids tack up for their lessons!” Nowicki shared.

Fox hunting is now a passion for Patel, and she encourages other young riders to get out in the countryside and give it a chance. “I think some young riders are intimidated when they hear ‘fox hunting’ because they don’t know what to expect; I would encourage them to try. It is definitely a sport that needs to be carried on by the younger generation and I will do all I can to make that happen.” Patel didn’t know what to expect when she won five riding lessons by the luck of the draw and look at her now!

A Tradition on Hold: 2025 Block House Steeplechase Canceled Amidst Challenges

It is with a heavy heart that the Tryon Riding & Hunt Club (TR&HC) announces the cancellation of the 2025 Block House Steeplechase, a cherished tradition that has been a cornerstone of the Polk County community for 76 years. This decision was not made lightly, and the Club shares in the profound disappointment felt by our members, participants, and the broader community.

TR&HC President Angie Millon explained: “We are deeply grateful to Tryon International Equestrian Center (Tryon International) for partnering with us these last 10 years during a critical time when the future of the Block House Races was uncertain. Their support provided years of added stability for the event. At this juncture, Tryon International has decided to withdraw their financial support for the Block House Steeplechase, returning the race to TR&HC. To protect the Club’s financial resources, we believe it is in our best interest to suspend the 2025 event while we evaluate its future.”

The Block House Steeplechase has long been a point of pride for Polk County, evolving from local races over informal tracks to a nationally recognized event. In 2015, the race was moved from FENCE to Tryon International’s state-of-the-art Green Creek Race Course in hopes that the change would allow the event to thrive. Despite best efforts, the significant resources required to produce the event has made it unsustainable for either organization to continue. While FENCE provided many wonderful years of racing, the course has seen years of inactivity and



The Block House Steeplechase — a local tradition for 76 years.

is no longer a safe option for the Block House.

The National Steeplechase Association (NSA) has acknowledged the challenges that have led to the cancellation of races like the Block House Steeplechase, noting the financial and logistical difficulties as key factors. In a recent press release, NSA President Al Griffin said, “We have been working tirelessly with all of the stakeholders to sustain steeplechase racing during these unprecedented and incredibly challenging times. Our number one goal is to keep our sport viable

while ensuring the health and safety of our fans, owners, trainers, and riders.”

As we approach the centennial of the Tryon Riding & Hunt Club in 2025, the Club’s efforts will focus on celebrating this milestone as our signature event for the year. The attention shift is bittersweet for the board.

“We are committed to honoring the rich history and traditions of our club while exploring new opportunities to bring the community together. As we regroup on the future of the steeplechase, we extend our deepest gratitude to our sponsors, volunteers, and everyone who has supported the Block House Steeplechase over the years. Your dedication and passion have been the lifeblood of this event, and we are sincerely thankful for all you have contributed,” said TR&HC President Angie Millon.

TIEC President Sharon Decker mirrored the Club’s sentiment: “Tryon International has been honored to partner with the Tryon Riding & Hunt Club in hosting the Block House Steeplechase for many years. Our collaboration provided stability to this historic event, and we are proud of the memories we’ve helped create. Unfortunately, due to the financial challenges of operating the race, we must step back at this time. We remain committed to supporting the equestrian community and the future endeavors of TR&HC as we are able.”

The Club looks forward to celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2025 and will keep the community informed of its plans for this significant milestone.

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LOCAL LEGEND: CHARLES HARPT

Celebrating the Life and Legacy of an Equestrian Artist

by Margie Askins

Charles Ernest “Charlie” Harpt was many things in his life—a loyal friend, a great storyteller, a billboard designer and painter, a member of the U.S. Army and Airforce, an artist for a major newspaper, a collector of Porsches, a humble and generous soul, a man who built and sailed in his own boat on the Atlantic Coast, but above all his accomplishments, he was an incredible artist focusing on his favorite animal as his subject—horses.

This adoration shows up in the details in his artwork. His horse paintings are marvelously intricate—the saddles, the bridle, and even the balance of horse and rider shown in such a realistic style it is often compared to Norman Rockwell’s style of representational art. Harpt modestly referred to himself as a “homemade artist” because he was mainly self-taught. He traveled on a scholarship in his early years to study art for 18 months abroad, and he used his GI Bill to attend art school, but the rest he accredited to learning on his own by just doing it.

Throughout his career and life, he attended every horse event he could travel to. His process was to take pictures that he would take back to Philadelphia, or wherever he was living at the time, and later combine and work with the photographs to create his paintings. Harpt believed that the more you paint, the more you see. It was this belief that led him to the mountains of North Carolina. He wanted to see more of the animals he loved so deeply. To do this, he had to paint them. To truly know his subject, he dove into the world of equines. He listened to what he referred to as the “horse people” talk because he learned so much. He got to know them to ultimately understand the animals he loved to paint. He understood the value in the relationship between horse and rider. And he also became a serious rider.

Tryon, N.C. was blessed when Harpt read an article about Clear View Farm’s Jeanne Smith in a publication, and moved to the N.C. mountains at the age of 67. He later trained with Smith and Lisa Miller, and then with trainer, Katie Maxwell. When asked about Harpt, Smith replied, “Charles took riding lessons at my farm for many, many years. My last memory of Charles was him at 84 years old taking a lesson on my

34-year-old school horse named Magic. He was very humble and shy but he lit up every time he mounted a horse. He did two paintings of me and never said a word about it. I learned about the paintings much later on through other people. I am honored to have both paintings hanging in my home.” Harpt is said to have gifted as many



Charles Harpt painting courtesy of Jeanne Smith.

paintings as he sold. He was known for his generous spirit and he valued the friendships he built. Those “horse people” became his local



Charles Harpt painting courtesy of Sarah Holmberg.

friend family, including local artists Phyllis Eifert, Joan McIntyre and Sarah Holmberg. Holmberg stated that the only advice she got from Harpt when she asked how to improve her painting was to “use a bigger brush.” Harpt was known for his quirky sense of humor and bigger than life personality.

It’s the stories behind his paintings that leave a legacy, and local riders and equine were lucky enough to have been captured in many of his masterpieces. As Harpt taught us, the more you paint, the more you see. The way he saw the beauty and magic of the horses of the Western N.C. mountains has left a legacy that will endure in each oil painting, gracing every wall on which they hang.



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Tryon Riding & Hunt Club Celebrates 100 Years in 2025!



As we approach our 100th anniversary, the Tryon Riding & Hunt Club is making plans for a year of special events and celebrations to mark this historic milestone. Get ready to join us in honoring a century of tradition, equestrian excellence, and community spirit.

Stay tuned for exciting announcements and event details coming soon!

Be a part of the legacy. For updates, visit TryonRidingandHuntClub.org or follow us on social media.



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NONPROFIT SPOTLIGHT

by Leigh Borreson

Children and Horses Thrive at Equine Journey

Kim Cochran never intended to do something like this – or even dreamed of it. She always loved horses and started riding when she was five. She rode for years, but horses took a backseat when she raised a family. When her children went to college, she found herself riding – and teaching – again. “I met two women who adopted off-the-track thoroughbreds and I realized that this was something I wanted to be a part of,” Kim remembered. “I didn’t really think about it; it just happened.” Eventually, she had thoroughbreds from all over the country ... while some came from famous lineages, many of them came with baggage.

Kim explained, “At some point, I decided that the horses needed a purpose. I knew there was a need for them. There are children out there who can’t afford to ride. I wanted to give them the opportunity to learn to have proper relationships and I knew the horses could help with that.” And so in 2014, Equine Journey was born and has grown every year since. Children learn responsibility through afternoon programs and camps that teach them to care for the horses and equipment while also learning to ride. The relationship becomes very personal, since each child is usually assigned to a specific horse. Kim added, “It’s about the horses but even more about what we can do for the kids through the horses. The horses are the net that catches the kids and gives them an opportunity.”

They now have 28 children who come consistently and all 23 horses take part. “We look forward to every day,” Kim said. “Kids who could never have afforded to ride are thriving here.” Children from all over the upstate area attend; some are referred by DSS, others from Steps to Hope, mental health facilities and schools. The fees cover only about 10% of the cost, and many children attend for free – so getting funding is a constant challenge.

Despite the obstacles, the effort to connect kids with horses is worthwhile because the rewards are huge. Kim said the most satisfying thing is being able to watch the kids – often over a period of years in the program – and see them succeed. Brooklynn Lewis is one of those kids. When she came to Equine Journey, she was more than painfully shy; she would not speak at all. The program turned her life around, so in full circle fashion, she has stayed to help. Not only is she a Senior Equine Therapist, she is now the Vice President of FAA at her high school, and giving speeches is a major part of her role.



Children and horses build lifelong relationships at Equine Journey.

Another young boy was wildly disruptive in school and simply would not stay in class. Sensing his need for connection, his parents sent him to Equine Journey. The program reached him in very tangible and valuable

ways. He went on to graduate from a community college and purchase his own car, and is starting the next phase of his “journey” with a new job! He, too, recently came back to volunteer.

Kim’s expertise and experience with horses and her caring heart are the drivers of the program, serving socially and emotionally challenged children. Maureen Gallatin is helping and advising Kim and has been observing closely. “All you have to do is watch her,” Maureen said.

“She gives kids confidence and they feel safe with her. She doesn’t baby them, but doesn’t push them either. It is obvious that this is her calling. She is making a difference in the lives of children and horses.”

Kim credits her small staff and, of course, the amazing horses. “Horses don’t judge you. They don’t care what color you are or what school you go to or who your parents are,” Maureen added, “These horses validate that the children are valuable ... and that can be life changing for a kid.”

Maureen emphasized that the staff is “all in” 100% – but stressed that Kim is the secret sauce. “She sees the best not only in the children, but the horses, too.” These are mostly race horses and some have been abused. Walking down the aisle of the barn, visitors are greeted by the shiny, well-cared-for horses — one by one, at each stall, they come out to welcome visitors with their kind, gentle, friendly spirits, eager to make a new friend.



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Behind the Lens with Show Photographer Natalie Suto

by Sarah Madden



Natalie Suto’s passion for equestrian photography ignited at 13 years old. Now 24, she manages the annual Hunter/Jumper competition photography at Tryon International Equestrian Center, and is likely the youngest official photographer to be found on the major show circuits. From observing her mother’s career as a wedding photographer, to capturing moments at local shows in her hometown, to providing personalized private client coverage at high-profile events, Suto’s journey in the equine industry has centered itself on high-quality work and making room for the next generation of talented photographers.

Every minute counts when photographing equestrian sport. On competition days, Suto arrives at the showgrounds long before the first class of the day begins, leading a team of skilled photographers to ensure every ring is covered. Often seen scooting between rings with cameras in tow, she catches candids while switching out SD cards so she can edit photos as quickly as possible for eager competitors. Hours after the last horse shows, Suto sorts, edits and uploads the day’s photos, only to repeat the process the next day.

What led you to pursue equine photography?

When I was 13, I started taking riding lessons at a local barn. When I started going to horse shows, I

began bringing my camera to photograph my friends. Back then, there weren’t many official photographers shooting the shows I was attending.



What is your history with Tryon International?

My first visit to Tryon was in July of 2017. I couldn’t stay away after that! Tryon International has and will always be one of my favorite showgrounds. I decided to offer Private Client Photography coverage during a few weeks at Tryon in 2021. From there, the venue approached me about



providing photo coverage, and the rest is history.

What has been the most challenging part of running your business?

Blending a private client coverage [artistic] perspective with an official photographer perspective. Prior to basing in Tryon, I had solely operated as a private client photographer, focusing on candids and stylistic shots in addition to traditional jumping photos. I’ve worked with some great official photographers on their teams, but never had my own show. The shooting styles are very different between the two roles, but I strive to provide a bit of both.

As a young entrepreneur, you’ve said you aim to make Tryon International welcoming to all photographers, including newcomers. How do you do that?

Unfortunately, many official photographers are limiting access at show venues due to competition from private client photography, which offers more personalized coverage. Some venues address this by enforcing restrictive photography policies that discourage both amateurs and professionals.

Knowing that it’s important to foster the art of photography and give competitors the freedom to choose their preferred coverage, I worked with the Tryon team to create a photography policy that is accessible to hobbyists and professionals.

I always remember my younger self, who just wanted to take photos of her friends. I encourage aspiring photographers to work with the official photographer at their local shows. Many show photographers, including myself, will happily provide internships or hire for weekly or seasonal positions!

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Stitching an Equestrian Legacy: Kathryn McMahon's Needlepoint Artistry

by Sarah Madden

Nestled at the base of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Landrum, S.C., you'll find Stitching Fox, a full-service needlepoint shop with deep roots in equestrian culture. In addition to classes and retreats, Stitching Fox offers hand-painted canvases from designers across the United States, unique threads and notions, and more. There's

even an Airbnb upstairs for "stitchers" who want to create their own needlepoint-centric getaway.

Even before being stitched, needlepoint designs, hand-painted on mesh canvases, are considered works of art and are sold alongside all the tools needed to stitch the canvases: threads of coordinating colors, needles, and even instructional books and stitch guides help bring each canvas to life. In the world of equestrian art, these canvases capture the movement, grace, and tradition of the sport, translating equestrian themes into stunning needlepoint creations. Canvases can be "finished" into various items such as ornaments, acrylic trays, keepsake boxes, belts, bag straps, throw pillows, and more.

This creative energy is inspired by owner Kathryn McMahon's own connection to the equestrian world. A prolific stitcher since her teens, McMahon has created a beautiful and



Kathryn McMahon, right, turned her passions for art and horses into a business.

PHOTOS MONICA STEPHENSON

enjoyable environment for all to explore their talent. It is McMahon herself who curates the hundreds of canvases displayed on the shop walls, showcasing the talent of more than 150 designers, both online and in the store. Her love for equestrian art is woven into the very fabric of the shop.

"We're here to help you enjoy the relaxing and inventive side of this art form, as well as bring you together with other inspired minds to establish new friendships and memories," explained McMahon.

McMahon is deeply connected to the equestrian community in the foothills region and first opened her shop in a small cabin at Tryon International Equestrian Center in 2020 before outgrowing the space and moving to her Landrum location on Asheville Highway in 2021.

The shop's collection includes a wide array of

equestrian-themed canvases, many of which feature fox hunting scenes, equestrian iconography and horse show designs.

Equestrian imagery is at the heart of Stitching Fox, featuring designers like Bonnie Alexander, whose canvases depict dressage pirouettes, show hunters over fences, mischievous ponies, barn scenes, and more. Search "horse" at StitchingFox.com and one will find more than 200 equestrian designs.

Needlepoint belts tend to sell particularly well among equestrians, especially those designed with classic riding motifs, making them a staple accessory in the horse world. The Farm House also sells belt kits that include all threads, needles, and instructions needed to bring these classic equestrian styles to life.

Stitching Fox Needlepoint offers a wide range of customizable products that make great gifts for equestrians, too, from keychains and frames to "self-finishing" leather goods and more. For equestrian enthusiasts, these needlepoint creations offer a way to express their passion for horses in everyday life.

Whatever you dream up, Stitching Fox will find a way to make your vision a reality.

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New to Polk County? A Newcomer’s Guide to Horse and Pasture Management



By Cassie LeMaster, Area Equine & Livestock Agent, NC State Extension

Welcome to Polk County! If you’re new to managing horses and pastures here, you’re in for a unique experience. I’d like to offer some tips since managing forages/horses in this climate can be much different than other, more arid regions of the country.

Polk County, specifically around Columbus and Tryon, receives an average of 60 inches of rainfall annually. However, this rain isn’t evenly spread throughout the year. Typically, we have mild, wet winters (rain not snow), hot summers, and a dry fall. Summer thunderstorms bring rainfall events that often exceed the infiltration capacity of our clay soils, leading to potential erosion issues. October is historically our driest month, which makes for good riding weather, but often complicates plans for planting and stockpiling fescue or other cool season grasses, in

which fall is the ideal time. Certain areas of Polk County, near Tryon and Columbus, are protected from cold winter winds by the mountains, which create what is known as the isothermal belt, shielding the area from severe winter frosts.

The soil composition and quality can vary greatly between farms as well- depending on past management or forestry practices. These soil microclimates can modify the effect of the greater climate conditions by differing in their nutrient and water-holding capacity, and native fertility. This can have a major effect on the productivity of particular forage species as well. In general, soils here are acidic and low in phosphorus. Warm season forages such as bahia, dallisgrass and native broomsedge do well in these conditions; however, to grow the more preferred forages — bermudagrass, fescue, or orchardgrass — lime will be needed to bring the pH closer to neutral. Utilizing a dry lot or sacrifice pasture is recommended-both for pasture management (at times of the year when grass is drought stressed or the soil is too wet) and also for horse management to control weight and/or limit grass consumption in the spring when laminitis is most prevalent.

Weed management is another critical aspect of pasture management in Polk County. Problematic weeds include buttercup: sweet vernal grass,



clover (if “slobbers” are a concern), Carolina horse nettle, johnsongrass, dog fennel, pigweed, and foxtail, along with too many others to list. Accurate identification is crucial for effective herbicide use, and the Extension office is available to assist with this. Most pastures in the area also contain a fair number of trees, which although are great for shade, can be toxic. Maple, oak (particularly green acorns), cherry, and black walnut trees are all hazardous and should be managed carefully.

Lastly, and possibly the worst pasture nemesis to contend with in the southeast, is the fire ant. If you’re a glass half full type of person, they do help alleviate soil compaction, but that’s about the only positive spin I can put on it. Baits like Extinguish Plus can be used on pasture to help control them and are best applied when temperatures are around 70-75 degrees and the ants are actively foraging. A helpful tip to determine this is to drop a few potato chips near the mound, then come check a few minutes later to see if they have found them. As always, Polk County Extension is here to help with many of your management questions along the way.

If you have questions, you can contact Cassie at 828-894-8218 or cassie_lemaster@ncsu.edu.

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Supporting Local Youth: TR&HC Offering \$6,500 in Scholarships for 2025

For decades, the Tryon Riding and Hunt Club (TR&HC) has been more than just a hub for equestrian enthusiasts. It has also been a vital contributor to the growth and development of young individuals, especially those with a passion for equestrian sports. For 2025, the Club will continue to uphold its legacy of philanthropy by offering college scholarships totaling \$6,500.

Applications are now being accepted and can be submitted online:

tryonridingandhuntclub.org/scholarships.

Scholarships are open to students graduating high school seniors and those currently pursuing higher education; however, preference will be given to those nearing the end of their high school journey. Applicants must reside in Polk, Henderson, Rutherfordton, Spartanburg, or Greenville. Multiple scholarship winners will be chosen.



Sarah Moorshead, a 2024 TR&HC scholarship recipient.

Having an equestrian tie is a key component for the Club. “Our scholarship is unique because of its emphasis on student’s with a connection to the equestrian industry. Whether through direct involvement in equestrian sports or active membership in recognized local or national equestrian organizations, these ties can significantly improve an applicant’s chances,” said TR&HC Director Leigh Borreson. Financial need will also be considered.

The scholarship awards, which will be announced in June, will vary in amount but will be no less than \$500. This financial assistance can be an important stepping stone for students striving to achieve their academic and career goals.

Applications are due by May 15, 2025, giving students ample time to prepare their submissions.

DID YOU KNOW?

Because of the position of the horse’s eyes, they can see roughly 350 degrees around themselves. This is nearly four times a human’s visual range. Horses do see the world differently from us — they can only see 55-65 degrees with both eyes and the rest of their vision (190-230 degrees) is monocular. This means that their depth perception and ability to see details can be quite poor. On the other hand, horses are exceptionally good at detecting motion, and lacking good detail vision, may spook at just about any sudden movement.



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Saddle Up for Tryon Riding & Hunt Club’s 99th Annual Christmas Party

On December 6th, the Tryon Riding & Hunt Club (TR&HC) will host its 99th annual Christmas Party and Membership Event at the FENCE house, bringing together members and newcomers alike for an evening of celebration and business. The event will kick off with hors d’oeuvres and drinks, followed by the Club’s official business meeting.

During the meeting, TR&HC will recognize its esteemed Heritage Families, approve new board

officers and members, and conduct important club business. This event not only celebrates the year’s achievements but also gives members a chance to reconnect and welcome new faces into the Club.

A special highlight of this year’s gathering will be a preview of the exciting plans for the Club’s 100th anniversary in 2025. Members will get a glimpse of what’s in store for the centennial year, which promises to be a monumental celebration

of TR&HC’s legacy. The Christmas Party and Membership Event offers a perfect balance of camaraderie and club governance, rounding out another successful year of upholding Polk County’s rich equestrian heritage.

For more information, please contact the TR&HC office at 828-351-9709 or office@trhc1925.org.

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