



The HorseCountry Quarterly

A PUBLICATION OF THE TRYON RIDING & HUNT CLUB

TR&HC Board Prepares for Centennial Celebration - PAGE 19
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BAILEY SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY

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TR&HC PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Looking Forward: Celebrating 100 Years



Happy New Year to all! As I step into my term as president, I would be remiss to not thank Angie Millon for her dedicated and tireless work over the last three years. I look forward to building on such a solid foundation.

2025 marks not only a new year, but also heralds in a new century of the Tryon Riding & Hunt Club. As we embark on our 100th anniversary journey, let us also take a moment to reflect upon our rich equestrian history, recognize the innumerable contributions of our donors, members, and volunteers, and envision our future.

Carter Brown's early vision laid the groundwork for the many accomplishments we celebrate today. Over the decades, we have navigated challenges and embraced opportunities allowing us to remain relevant and effective in fulfilling our mission – to support equestrian sport, honor our shared traditions, and invest in our community.

Throughout this landmark year, we have a variety of exciting events planned to engage both equestrians and non-equestrians alike. Our anniversary gala, scheduled for April 10, is one such opportunity. It will be a special occasion for us to gather, reflect, and rejoice in our collective achievements. We hope to see you there!

Also, following a key tenet of our mission statement “to invest in our community,” we are proud to announce that our 2025 philanthropy program will be dedicated to supporting the on-going needs of our neighbors in Western North Carolina.

While the challenges and opportunities may have changed over the years, we remain committed to creating a successful path into the next century. Here's to a year dedicated to making a difference in our community!

Joanne Gibbs

Joanne Gibbs
President, Tryon Riding & Hunt Club

DID YOU KNOW?

Adult male horses have 40 teeth, while mares have only 36 teeth.



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The Horse Country Quarterly is the official publication of the Tryon Riding & Hunt Club, published four times a year. Visit TryonRidingandHuntClub.org and click JOIN to receive The Quarterly. Send comments, article ideas and calendar events to leighborreson@gmail.com.

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

SAVE THE DATE!

2025 TR&HC Dates

- April 10: 100 Year Anniversary Party
- April 17-19: Tryon Horse & Hound Show
- June 3-8: 97th Heritage Charity I Horse Show (Spring 6)
- June 6: Charity Horse Shows/CSHHF Induction Ceremony
- July 1-6: Charity II Horse Show (Summer 4)
- November 2: 92nd Any and All Dog Show
- December 5: Annual Meeting/Holiday Party

Visit tryonridingandhuntclub.org for more info.



Congratulations to all the riders who competed in TROT's show at FENCE last November! TR&HC Executive Director Leigh Borreson had the honor of serving as a judge.

PHOTO BAILEY SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

It's rare that we get to work on a centennial celebration, and Tryon Riding & Hunt Club's 100th anniversary marks my second opportunity. In 2022, I helped produce events for a local town's 100th anniversary. It was truly special to dig deep into the past, dust off cherished memories, and understand the moments that shaped today.

I look forward to embarking on that same journey with the Tryon Riding & Hunt Club – learning about the early days, discovering memories that almost faded with members long gone, celebrating the passion of those who carried its legacy forward, and honoring the dedicated equestrian enthusiasts who brought us here today.

As we commemorate this remarkable year, we want to hear from you. Share your stories, memories, or photos with us. We want to capture them all, and perhaps even spotlight them in a future issue this year. Contact the club or email me directly at michellemylton@gmail.com.

Here's to celebrating the past, present, and future together. I can't wait to reminisce with you!

Michelle Yelton

Michelle Yelton
Editorial Director



91ST ANY & ALL DOG SHOW BROUGHT OUT THE FUN

More than 75 Dogs Showed Off their Best Costumes



Lulu and her owner, Kaliana Fowler, were named "Best in Show" and won for "Best Costume."

ALL PHOTOS BAILEY SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY



YOUNG RIDER: LINDEN NGUYEN

by Margie Askins

A Rising Star in the Equestrian World

As soon as Linden Nguyen (pronounced “win”) could walk and talk on her own, she was asking to ride her mother’s horse. An avid horse rider herself from a young age, her mother decided to buy three-year-old Linden a mini named Mascarpony and let her bounce around on it. Her father wasn’t ready to have two riders in the family, and her mother thought she would eventually get bored with riding and move on to another interest. Initially, her mother was right. Nguyen didn’t fall in love with riding, but her desire to improve kept her motivated. For the first three years, she would only trot and ultimately became really good at it. She would bring Mascarpony to her mother’s shows and would leadline around the showgrounds. Over time, her hard work with her mini paid off and she could see results. While some riders fall in love instantly, Nguyen’s love for the sport grew from a desire to learn and improve.

By the age of six, Nguyen began with cantering, graduating from her mini to jumping with her new pony, Piper. Within a few months, she was jumping anything her parents would give her (and Piper) permission to try! Nguyen added, “I was scared to canter. I thought speed would kill me, but the first time I cantered, I realized how much fun it was. I now love speed. My mother is terrified!” Now a fourth-grader from Lake Lure, North Carolina, and Savannah, Georgia, Nguyen has been showing Piper for three years, starting with the walk trot classes and currently working with short stirrups. “Hopefully, I will be ready to show Piper in the Green ponies soon. It is my dream to take her to Pony Finals,” Nguyen stated. This dream duo has participated in too many shows to name, earning them champion or reserve titles at almost every show including TIEC, WEC, Harmon Field, Camden and more. Nguyen also has two other ponies that she also shows/rides—Sterling and Noah—but Piper will always have her heart. “If I do what I am supposed to, she does the rest and we win. I feel like she would do anything in the world for me and that is how we feel about her,” she added.

Training and showing can be hard to juggle with school and gymnastics, but Nguyen fits it all in. She trains at least four times a week at Clearview Farm and shows in a few competitions in the fall and winter and bi-weekly in the spring/summer seasons. She credits her main

trainer, Leigh Rice, and her mother, for teaching her traditional values and horsemanship. When speaking of Rice, Nguyen added, “We talk a lot about how and why we do things the way we do with horses. I think a lot of kids show ponies that do a lot of the work for them. All of my ponies are green or inexperienced, so I have to learn how to ask correctly. I think this is what has taught me to be a better rider.”



Above, Nguyen and Piper proving that these champions know how to have fun in and out of the show ring. PHOTO SUPPLIED

Linden Nguyen with Piper at TIEC, left. BAILEY SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY

Nguyen’s drive to become a champion and master her craft is what keeps her motivated. At one of her earlier weekend long competitions, Nguyen struggled and initially placed fifth and second on the first day. She asked her mother what it would take to be a champion, and her mother told her exactly what she needed to do to

win — Piper had to place in both categories and her other pony also needed to do well. The next day, Nguyen did exactly that and secured wins with Piper in both classes. Determined and focused, Nguyen plans to continue riding, jumping, and showing, and ultimately, be the champion she always strives to be!

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TR&HC at 100: Giving Back Behind the Scenes

by Tricia Orcutt

What began in the early part of the century as a practical idea for a local horse club blossomed into not only one of the most highly esteemed and effective equestrian clubs in the country, but has stepped into the role of full-blown philanthropy.

One hundred years ago, Charles P. Brown, founder, director, and officer of the Tryon Riding & Hunt Club, established its mission. The club would encourage local members to work together in preserving and supporting the equestrian tradition of the Tryon, North Carolina, area for generations to come. His vision and purposeful contributions have added richness of life to the entire community. It brings educational programs, teaches horse skills, sponsors nationally recognized sporting events, and aligns with like-minded groups to help preserve walking trails, riding trails, and carriageways in scenic Tryon. Simply put, the club encourages the naturalistic and wholesome equestrian lifestyle by word, deed, and contribution.

Ok ... so, the Tryon Riding & Hunt Club is known for wearing many hats. But philanthropy? Who knew?

If a survey was taken among the local population proposing the question, “What does the Tryon Riding & Hunt Club do?” few would know the far-reaching impact that this historic club has contributed to the development of the entire foothills area. Some may think the club is merely a production agency that organizes equestrian events. Onlookers might perceive the club as the “horse set,” looking no further than the images they see portrayed on the cover of the latest Ralph Lauren catalog. On the contrary, the demographics would show that the club includes a broad spectrum of folks from all walks of life coming together, making our entire Tryon horse country area a marvelous place to live.

Along with the responsibilities of the active club members come dirt, sweat, and long hours. Many of them are full-time business owners or hard-working folks who believe in the vision, rolling up their sleeves and opening their pocketbooks to make it come to pass. They are property owners who have stepped up to generously make their land available as



TR&HC Founder Carter Brown with his son, Austin Brown, who succeeded him as club president.



open green spaces for others to enjoy. All come together for the same definitive purpose: to carry on the legacy that Carter P. Brown birthed almost a century ago.

The TR&HC is recognized on a local and national level for some of its enormously successful events, such as the Block House Steeplechase Races, the Charity Horse Shows, the Tryon Riding & Hunt Club Horse Trials, and the extremely fun-loving Any & All Dog Show. Some of these events have drawn crowds of more than 20,000 people, contributing to the economic advancement of local business owners and employment.

But did you further know that, in the last five years, the club has dispersed over a half-million dollars to benefit the community? It has given significant donations towards local public facilities, such as Foothills Equestrian Nature Center (FENCE) to help build 100 new stalls and barns, as well as Harmon Field for the advancement of equestrian activities. Sponsorships have been awarded to talented riders in the area for their participation in USEF’s Emerging Athletes Program, National Pony Club Finals, and International Finals in China. TR&HC’s philanthropic funding reaches organizations such as the Boy Scouts of America, local fire departments, rescue squads, the Humane Society,

Rotary and Kiwanis Clubs, and the local high school band. Educational scholarships have been created and awarded to deserving local students through TR&HC and Polk County Community Foundation. The list goes on and on.

What is so amazing about the generosity and success of this worthwhile organization is that it is made possible by all kinds of people: all age groups, financial status, varied educational backgrounds, and curiously, some of whom have not even the slightest interest in horses. The Tryon Riding & Hunt Club is a nonprofit organization that takes its meager annual membership monies to support and help build an entire community that will, on some level, impact each and every area family in some way.

Tracing it back to its roots, by one man’s vision, a club was born. Through the practical and financial efforts of a passionate organization, an incredible community has been built. The Tryon Riding & Hunt Club’s efforts continue to be a labor of love conserving the equestrian lifestyle while committing itself to supporting the broader community.



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FEATURED ARTIST: MONICA STEVENSON

by Margie Askins

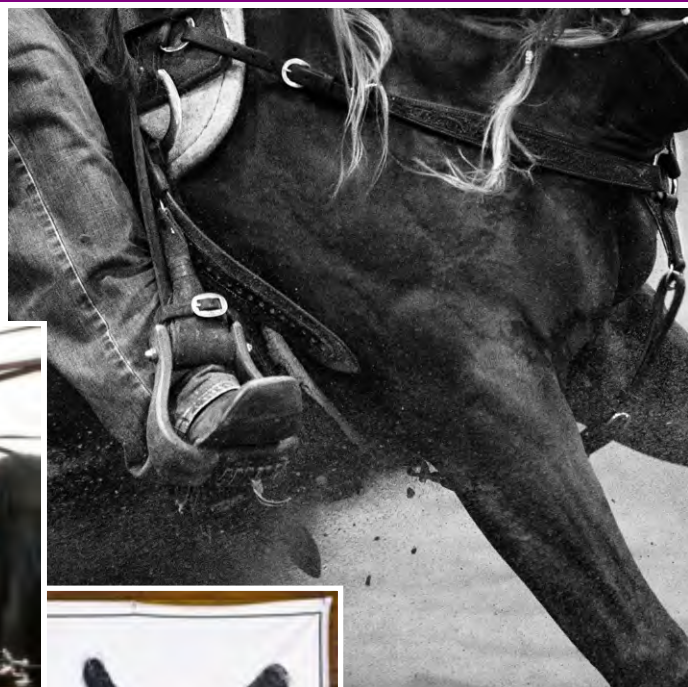
Capturing Spirit through a Lens

When Monica Stevenson was six years old, she created a pretend camera out of a carton with a cellophane window, some paper, a few colored pencils, and her large imagination. She drew pictures of her family, then later “took” the pictures by holding the box to her eye and pulling out her premade “photos” from the box. This immediate love for photography deepened as her father then began teaching her how to develop film in the makeshift darkroom he created in their bathroom. She was immediately drawn to the entire process, from the initial shoot to the processing of the film under the red light. It was within these early years that a photographer was born.

Her love for horses grew alongside her love of photography as she followed in her mother’s footsteps and began riding, eventually owning her own horse. With a deep passion for both photography and equestrian life, Stevenson made a name for herself by blending artistry with a deep understanding of the horses she photographs.

Although her work as a photographer began decades ago as strictly commercial, her reputation in that space stood out instantly for her ability to create movement in still life photographs by infusing wit, humor, and unique techniques. As a commercial photographer for decades, Stevenson delivers a refined perspective shaped by years of collaboration with high-profile clients, including Chanel and Coca-Cola. She is celebrated for her mastery in crafting complex lighting setups while capturing a wide range of subjects, such as accessories, liquids, powders, cosmetics, jewelry, and beauty products. Her use of color is both sophisticated and playful, often incorporating surprising elements, yet always

maintaining technical precision for each specific project. Stevenson’s work has been featured in top magazines and fine art publications, earning her numerous industry accolades.



Stevenson blends artistry with a deep understanding of the horses she photographs.

Eventually, she began photographing horses and aspired to capture the emotions of the horse. By focusing on the smallest details, she brings them to the surface of the photograph. She explained that her unique style “discovers ways to see the unseen...to make the impossible possible!” Stevenson credits her artistic sensitivity to her success as a photographer. She has spent her entire life around horses and barns, and knows her subject well. When photographing horses, she looks beyond the surface. Stevenson stated, “The flow of a horse’s muscles, the whorl of hair on their flank, the angle of hoof and shoe, the sheen from the water that we bathe them with—all these things communicate beauty and sensuality, and thus JOY. It is this joy in reveling in the things that surround us that I try to bring to viewers of my work. Sensitivity brings beauty, brings magic,



brings peace, brings happiness, brings creativity, brings good will.”

Stevenson’s passion made her an exceptionally talented horse photographer whose captivating images beautifully capture the grace, power, and spirit of horses—and the finer details that often go unnoticed. “More than anything, I really enjoy MAKING pictures, and not just TAKING pictures. I like conceiving and formulating ideas, and then, by using props, surfaces, models, backgrounds, and lighting, bringing these concepts to fruition.” Thankfully for her admirers and clients, her work as a professional photographer is nowhere close to the finish line. “I feel like I need to live for 150 more years because there are still so many beautiful photographs to take,” Stevenson said.

Stevenson welcomes scheduled visitors to her studio in Tryon. For inquiries about her commercial work, visit monicastevenson.com. Her equestrian work can be viewed at monicastevensonphotography.com.



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TR&HC PHILANTHROPY UPDATE

Six Local Nonprofits Receive TR&HC Community Grants

The Tryon Riding & Hunt Club (TR&HC) demonstrated its ongoing dedication to the community by donating to six local nonprofits in 2024. Through its Community Grant Program, the club continues to strengthen ties with the local area and make a meaningful impact.

The six nonprofit grant recipients in 2024 were:

Polk Central Elementary School – Supporting education and youth development in Polk County.

REIN Rescue – Providing care and rehabilitation for horses in need.

Girl Scouts – Empowering young women to develop leadership skills and confidence.

Habitat for Humanity – Building homes and providing housing solutions for local families.

Homeward Hounds – Dedicated to the health and welfare of former fox hunting hounds.

Heart of the Foothills Animal Rescue – Rescuing and rehoming animals while promoting responsible pet ownership.

TR&HC President Joanne Gibbs emphasized the club's enduring commitment to the community, especially in light of challenges faced by Western North Carolina in recent months. "The club's mission has long been to give back to our community. With the recent devastation in WNC, our Community Grant Program will continue to be a key focus in 2025."

As TR&HC approaches its centennial celebration in 2025, a legacy of philanthropy remains a central part of its mission. The club encourages community members to engage with its initiatives and support these vital nonprofits, which contribute to making the region a better place for all.



Polk Central Elementary School and REIN Rescue are two of the 2024 TR&HC Community Grant recipients.



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A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A HUNTSMAN

Beth Blackwell is a Hero to the Hounds

by Leigh Borreson

Dogs are man's best friend — and Beth Blackwell is a true friend to the hounds who drive the energy of fox hunting. Yet there was a time that she would never have dreamed of becoming a "hero to the hounds."

Blackwell was a hunter/jumper trainer, very involved in the show world, and candidly, she hated trail riding! But nearly 25 years ago, a chance meeting with her mentor-to-be, Herb Schneider, changed everything.

"I was riding some young horses for him and he suggested we take his Basset Hounds out for a run," she explained. "They never caught any rabbits, but chasing happy little dogs through the woods ... and like that, I was totally hooked!" That, of course, led to some actual fox hunting, and it was then that the hounds changed her life.

"I went out twice and just fell in love with the hounds! So, I shut down my show barn, moved to Greensboro, Alabama, and married the Huntsman there!" And for the past quarter century, Blackwell has gotten to hunt all over the country.

Today, Blackwell is in her ninth season as the professional Huntsman for Tryon Hounds. She inherited Herb's Bassets, but the majority of their 49 hounds are Penn-Marydel Hounds. As Huntsman, Blackwell is in charge of all operations at the kennels.

A day in the life of a huntsman is a long and busy one. Responsibilities include training, feeding and medical care of the hounds, as well as managing the staff horses. In the summer, feeding starts at 4:30 a.m. to avoid the heat; cooler weather means feeding at 5:30 a.m. Blackwell is also responsible for all the recordkeeping and tracking finances, which she acknowledges is a lot of paperwork. But it's all worth it for the hounds. She also credits the dedicated team at Tryon Hounds for making every hunt possible.

Although mornings are busy for the hounds, they are amazingly laid back and usually sleep all afternoon. Blackwell says the dogs are fairly sedentary... but that all changes on the day of the hunt. The hunts start right after Labor Day, after which they go out twice a week. "They always know when it is a



Tryon Hounds Huntsman Beth Blackwell.

PHOTOS DON WEST



hunt morning and they just go crazy," Blackwell said. The huntsman also decides which hounds go out each time. That decision and how they are paired is critical — it really is a science. "The older hounds

know my voice commands and signals. Ninety percent of what the younger hounds learn comes from the other hounds," Blackwell explained. "They are extremely intelligent and sensitive." Her passion and love for them is obvious. "There are many unspoken signals when I'm working with the hounds. The bond with them is just incredible!"

As the huntsman, there are many things Blackwell enjoys about her job, all based on the hounds. She explained that watching the hounds work is amazing and breathtaking — but she also loves that she gets to have three fox-hounds sleep with her each night! "The hardest thing is losing a hound — it's just so heartbreaking. But I make sure I am with them to the end."

Blackwell's enthusiasm is unmistakable, and she knows why: "Being a huntsman is a great life! Every single day is different and new. I never would have dreamed it!"

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Saddle Fitting Through Your Horse's Life Stages

by Michelle Yelton

Fitting a saddle to a horse is far more than a matter of aesthetics or discipline—it's about ensuring the horse's comfort and freedom of movement through every stage of life, from a growing and developing young horse, to a mature competitor, and into retirement. Kelly Snyder—a lifelong equestrian, licensed N.C. massage therapist with certifications in Neuromuscular Therapy and Equine Structural Integration, and professional saddle fitter—shared her insights on how saddle fitting evolves alongside the horse.

Saddle fitting is not a one-time event, but an ongoing process influenced by a horse's age, physical condition, and activity level. While Snyder's evaluation covers many areas, the goal is always the same regardless of the age of the horse—to make sure the saddle distributes the rider's weight evenly over the back while allowing the horse the greatest amount of movement.

She always begins by evaluating the horse's posture, muscle development, and hoof balance. "If the hooves are imbalanced then it throws the skeletal system out of balance, which affects the horse's posture and muscle development. This, in turn, can affect how the saddle sits on and fits the horse," shared Snyder.

Young Horses — Young horses present unique challenges since their growing bodies – especially the withers and topline – can change dramatically. Snyder recommends starting young horses "with a correctly fitting, inexpensive saddle, and then once it is older, go for your more expensive, dream saddle. Providing it has ample wither clearance,



Professional saddle fitter, Kelly Snyder, emphasises the importance of saddle fit for a horse's comfort and performance at every stage of life.

that first saddle can be wider than you actually need and use a thicker pad/blanket to take up the space. As the horse starts to fill out, you can move to a thinner pad."

Competition Horses — Surprisingly, Snyder notes that the discipline doesn't change the fundamentals of fitting. "You always need to look at the

same factors – even distribution of the rider's weight over the horse's back while allowing for optimal movement. This is true no matter what the horse does for a living," she explained. However, as competition horses build or lose muscle, Snyder said adjustments to the saddle tree or flocking may be necessary, and corrective shim pads can be a valuable tool.

Retired Horses — Older horses often experience changes such as muscle loss or arthritis, so a saddle may need to be reflocked or supplemented with a shim pad to maintain a comfortable fit. "Movement is critical for arthritic horses, so the saddle must encourage comfort and freedom," Snyder explained.

For horses with swayback or lordosis, caused by years of poor hoof imbalance or improper riding, she recommends a carefully leveled saddle with ample wither and shoulder clearance. Address any gaps under the seat and flap with shims or flocking.

Lifelong Saddle Maintenance — Ultimately, a horse's saddle should be checked regularly throughout its lifetime—every few months for younger horses and at least biannually for mature ones. Investing in a well-made saddle with a wide gullet and a quality shim pad ensures longevity. For personalized guidance and expert assistance with your horse's saddle fitting needs, consulting with a professional like Snyder can help ensure comfort and performance at every stage of your horse's life.

Meet Lila Kilby: Equestrian Director at Balsam Mountain Preserve

If there's one word to describe Lila Kilby, the equestrian director at Balsam Mountain Preserve, it's passionate. From her first pony ride at age six in Greenville, South Carolina, to managing a thriving equestrian program in the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Kilby's journey has been a lifelong adventure in the saddle.

"I wasn't interested in a show career," Kilby remembered, "but I've always been drawn to improving my riding and understanding horses better." After earning a degree in Animal and Veterinary Science from Clemson University, she worked with Palm Beach Equine, traveling to major horse shows across the country. Yet, her heart led her back to Greenville and eventually to Balsam Mountain Preserve, a private mountain community in Sylva, North Carolina, known for its emphasis on conservation and outdoor recreation, where she's been since 2017.

At Balsam, Kilby oversees a growing program that includes boarding, trail rides, lessons, and signature events. She's especially proud of the boarding program, which has flourished under her leadership. "It's incredibly fulfilling to know our boarders trust us with their horses, even when they're states away," she said. "We pride ourselves on being a turnkey operation where everything from vet visits to bodywork sessions is handled seamlessly."

"Lila's passion and dedication have transformed our equestrian program into one of the most cherished aspects of Balsam Mountain Preserve," said the community's developer, David Southworth.



Lila Kilby, equestrian director at Balsam Mountain Preserve which is home to 40+ miles of private equestrian trails.

Photos courtesy of Balsam Mountain Preserve.

"Her ability to create meaningful experiences for our members and their horses reflects the values of our community. We invite those who share a love for nature, adventure, and horses to explore all that Balsam Mountain Preserve has to offer and consider becoming part of our unique mountain lifestyle."

One of Balsam's standout features is its growing collection of 40-plus miles of private trails, offering everything from mountainous climbs to long, meandering roads. "The ride to Beetree Gap and

onto National Forest land is one of my favorites," Kilby shared. "The helipad view is always a treat." Her team also works diligently to maintain the trails, balancing equestrian use with environmental stewardship. "We've added all-weather paddocks and work closely with the community association to address erosion and keep the trails natural but sustainable."

When asked about her favorite horse, Kilby's answer is full of affection—and diplomacy. "That is a loaded question," she laughed. "I have a favorite, a best, a most popular, the one I want in an apocalypse, and the one I'd steal away with me. All the horses here are so lovely—that's the goal in our barn: pleasant, safe, well-mannered, and fun partners in crime."

Recent upgrades, including a new four-stall barn and expanded paddocks, have allowed the program to grow further. "It's been a fun season of growth," Kilby shared, noting plans for an additional eight-stall barn. She's also excited about new ventures, including hosting hunter paces and fostering a community of riders exploring local shows and clinics.

Whether introducing a child to their first pony ride or helping a seasoned rider return to the saddle, Kilby finds joy in every aspect of her work. "Seeing people connect with horses—whether for the first time or after years away—is what it's all about."

For Kilby, it's more than a job—it's a dream come true in a breathtaking setting. "Getting to do what I love every day, surrounded by these mountains and amazing horses, is just the cherry on top."

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HURRICANE RELIEF SPOTLIGHT Local Nonprofits Unite to Help Hurricane Affected Animals

by Sarah Madden

When Hurricane Helene struck Western North Carolina, Fleet of Angels—a national organization supporting equines and their owners during disasters—quickly mobilized to help affected WNC animals and their owners. Director Elaine Nash reached out to Mary Adams, owner of the Sanctuary at Red Bell Run in Columbus, North Carolina, who then contacted Sharon Decker at Tryon International Equestrian Center. Tryon International had already launched an emergency supply distribution and donation center in its Indoor Complex and immediately offered space for a livestock-centric relief operation in partnership with these two nonprofits.

In the weeks to follow, Mary Adams, her Red Bell Run staff, Anita Williamson, and dedicated volunteers from the community worked together to receive, sort, and distribute donations to people and animals in need. The distribution center operated daily from October 3 through November 15 at Tryon International, before relocating to Red Bell Run's Sanctuary in Columbus, North Carolina. Donations arrived from more than 18 states within

days of requests for help, including from as far as California, Wisconsin, Maine, New York, and Texas.

The collaboration grew beyond the three organizations. They coordinated with the WNC Ag Center in Canton, North Carolina, along with relief workers, first responders, and others to identify and share items of greatest need. As calls for donations rippled across the country, in came trucks, trailers, flatbeds, and personal vehicles filled with hay, feed, troughs, blankets, halters, medical supplies, fencing, chicken and stock feed, and more. Supplies were sent to the hardest-hit areas immediately or delivered later by volunteers.

Polk County Emergency Services, the North Carolina Ag Department, a SURGE team of volunteers, and the North Carolina National Guard were all valuable players in the massive operation.



Volunteers worked to unload, organize, load, and deliver supplies generously donated from around the country to those in need.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RED BELL RUN



“The work that Mary Adams, Anita Williamson and an abundance of volunteers [did in just the first] six weeks is indescribable,” said Sharon Decker, President of Tryon Equestrian Partners,

Carolinas Operations. “We are so thankful for Mary’s leadership and the willingness of so many who are ensuring no farmer goes without what is needed to maintain healthy animals, livestock and equines this winter. Spring will come again, and we will recover! It is efforts like this, neighbor helping neighbor, friend helping friend, that I pray will continue far beyond the immediate emergency,” she added.

Mary Adams mirrored the sentiment: “The suffering is beyond imagining, but the empathy, generosity and kindness that has been so freely sent to Western North Carolina is truly uplifting. We will recover, and we will be stronger and more united because of it. Red Bell Run is thankful and honored to be a small part of this effort.”

Fleet of Angels Director Elaine Nash stated that “in our 12 years of working in collaboration with others to provide emergency feed, supplies, and services for equines in crisis, we have never experienced a higher level of generosity of spirit, positivity, time, and commitment to the cause than we have with Mary Adams and Tryon International.”

The Sanctuary at Red Bell Run committed to operating a Fleet of Angels Hay Bank and will distribute hay, feed, and livestock supplies to those needing assistance over the winter.

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To support the Fleet of Angels Hay Bank, contact Red Bell Run at Sanctuary@RedBellRun.org or 828-863-2017. Donations can also be made online at FleetOfAngels.org or RedBellRun.org—be sure to designate “NC hay bank” when donating.

Revolutionizing Rider Safety: Innovations in Equestrian Protection *by Margie Askins*

While replete with benefits that bond riders with animals and nature while delivering adventure, equestrian activity is also notably dangerous. Even experienced riders face risks, including serious brain and spinal injuries; however, the equestrian industry continues to prioritize safety, with innovations in rider protection emerging.

AIR VESTS: Inflatable vests have revolutionized rider safety. Also known as “airbag vests,” these vests are designed to protect the rider’s vital organs, such as the neck, spine, and chest in the event of a fall or accident. The concept is simple, yet effective, like an airbag in a car: a lanyard runs from the trigger on the vest to a saddle strap that’s installed on the saddle. When the rider falls, the vest inflates rapidly, cushioning impact and reducing injury risk.

Ride EquiSafe, at Tryon International, specializes in equestrian safety gear. Dedicated to rider safety consulting, they help riders select gear tailored to their needs. “Depending on their protection priority, we give them the information about what each product does and doesn’t do, so that they get into the most suitable product for them,” explained Catherine Winter, the company’s owner.

When consulting with adults, Winter and her team ask about medical conditions that may influence product recommendations and can affect the type, size, brand, and model of air vest they suggest.

AIR VESTS AND CHILDREN: A child’s weight, height, and the horse’s height are critical factors in determining whether an inflatable vest is safe and will activate during a fall. Winter also advises having someone available to reset the vest after inflation and considering the cost of replacement canisters.



Ongoing research drives continuous advancements in equestrian protective gear.

HELMETS: Helmet technology has benefited from decades of research. “There’s been a lot of focus on concussion prevention, and so we’re seeing a lot of innovation coming on that front,” shared Winter. She only stocks helmets rated three stars or higher and certified by multiple safety standards.

“The rules of thumb with helmets, first and foremost, is what fits best, protects best. You can have a helmet that isn’t very well rated, but if that is what fits your head the best, then that’s the best helmet for you,” explained Winter. “Beyond fit, the more certifications, the better, because each is testing for different [criteria]. It’s important to understand what those certifications are and how they meet the level of risk of the activity that you’re participating in,” she added.

SAFETY AS A ROUTINE: For Winter, safety is non-negotiable. “Personally, I don’t get on my horse without a safety stirrup, without my air vest, or without a good helmet, not even for a trail ride, not for any purpose. It’s just part of my routine of getting on at this point,” she said.

For riders feeling overwhelmed by the many safety options available, companies like Ride EquiSafe provide expert guidance to match products with specific needs. Thanks to ongoing advancements in materials, design, and innovative technology, the sport is becoming safer for riders at all levels. As these innovations continue to evolve, riders can enjoy their passion for horses with confidence and peace of mind.



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Blanketing Horses: What Does the Research Say?



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



During winter conditions, a horse's body must often work to maintain its normal body temperature. This occurs through normal metabolic processes, such as fermentation during digestion, piloerection of the hair fibers, vasoconstriction, or muscle contraction. A horse's lower critical temperature is the temperature at which a horse would have to burn more calories than usual to maintain that same internal body temperature. This is influenced by the ambient temperature, wind, sunlight, precipitation, and relative humidity. The lower critical temperature reported for horses has a wide range depending on the climate the horse is accustomed to and other factors, but can be anywhere between 45 °F to 5 °F, and is more represented by the "feels-like" rather than the actual temperature.

The most common causes of cold stress that horse owners battle against are wind and precipitation. Many horses with thick winter hair coats can tolerate quite cold temperatures, but the hair loses much of its insulative quality when it is wet. This emphasizes the importance of shelter so horses can remain dry, which in turn helps them stay warm. Since remaining indoors all winter isn't ideal for other health reasons, blanketing is another option to keep horses' coats dry, trap heat, and protect from wind, which also allows horses to experience the benefits of regular turnout. In areas like ours where winters tend to be chilly but wet, horses that are thin, immunocompromised, geriatric, clipped/without a thick haircoat or who live outside 24/7 should likely be blanketed regularly under wet and/or cold conditions. Conversely, healthy horses in good body condition that have been acclimated to the area, have access to shelter, have a thick winter coat, and plenty of forage to eat, probably do not need to be blanketed.

Since blanketing horses seems to be a widely debated topic among horse owners, let's look at some concerns and research surrounding the topic:

Argument: Putting a sheet on a horse with a thick hair coat weighs the hair down, eliminating its ability to fluff up and trap air in between the hairs, making him colder.

There is no scientific research that says that blankets flatten the hair coat and actually make horses colder. In research trials, when thin blankets were used during extreme cold conditions (-13 °F to -25 °F) in comparison to heavier blankets and control (no blankets), surface temperature of the horses increased with each treatment (thin, medium, heavy blanket) as compared to control.

Argument: Horses don't like blankets.

Yes, there are horses that don't seem to like blankets, destroying them almost instantly. However, in a study done in Norway, researchers trained horses to convey blanketing choices by pointing to symbols. The horses were then exposed to different weather conditions and then indicated their choice to have a blanket on or not during weather that was wet, windy and cold. When only considering air temperature, and not the impact of other weather factors, the horses preferred to put the blanket on in 90% of the tests when the temperature was below 14°F. As air temperature increased, the preference for blanketing decreased. When only considering wind, the horse's preference for having a blanket put on in-

creased with increasing wind speed, with 100% preferring blankets on days with strong breeze (about 20-30 mph). On days without precipitation, the horses preferred to have a blanket put on in only 43% of the tests, whereas on days with rain the horses wanted a blanket on in 85% of the tests. On days with snow or sleet, the horses chose to have a blanket put on in 75% of the tests.

As a horse owner/manager, it's important to understand signs of cold stress and how your management practices may affect your horse's ability to maintain their own body heat. If blankets are used, it is imperative that it be checked regularly to be sure the horse is dry. Both failing waterproofing or sweating could lead to skin issues or worse conditions than if the blanket had been left off all together. Also realize that horses do have individual preferences and situational differences that affect whether or not a blanket is right for that animal. If you have concerns about your horse, consult with your veterinarian.

You can contact Cassie at 828-894-8218 or cassie_lemaster@ncsu.edu.



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TR&HC Members are Festive About the Future

by Michelle Yelton

The Tryon Riding & Hunt Club members gathered for their annual holiday party and meeting to celebrate the year's accomplishments and prepare for an extraordinary milestone—the club's 100th anniversary! Outgoing President Angie Millon shared her enthusiasm about the club's exciting milestone. "Our centennial is a big deal ... I am pretty sure TR&HC is one of the oldest equestrian clubs in our area. When our founder, Carter Brown, came to Tryon, he had a vision that this could be a premier equestrian destination. So he invited all his friends to visit and they fell in love with the area, moved here, built homes and farms, established businesses, and so on and so on," Millon shared.

She reflected on Brown's legacy to both the club and the region. "Carter Brown established TR&HC in 1925, set into motion our signature events, the Charity Horse Shows, the Blockhouse Steeplechase, the Any and All Dog Show, the Carter Brown BBQ, and the Morris the Horse Trials. Now some events have come and gone over the years but those have stood the test of time. They have been on Tryon's social calendars for decades, they have almost become synonymous with Tryon.

Millon also highlighted the benefits of club membership, noting that an equestrian background is not a requirement. "Often people ask, 'Why should I join TR&HC? I don't ride, I don't even know what they do.' Well, my response is because this club is all about supporting and giving back to the community that it helped put on the map! Our events are community oriented, they are fun spectator events, and they bring people to our town who need food and lodging, love to shop, and come back year after year and bring their friends and family. Your investment and support in our club turns right back around and supports the community you call home."

Millon concluded her remarks by welcoming her successor, TR&HC President Joanne Gibbs. "I am now literally going to pass the torch to Joanne Gibbs. I have reached my three-year limit as president of TR&HC. It has been an honor being president of this club. I will still stay on the board, and look forward to seeing where we go in 2025!"

Members then heard from Gibbs, received their 2025 TR&HC calendars, and enjoyed an evening reflecting on the club's achievements in 2024.



TR&HC Welcomes New Board Members and President

The Tryon Riding & Hunt Club is pleased to welcome three new members to our board - Rhonda Lockhart, Paula Alcock, and John Hanselman - along with new president, Joanne Gibbs. These leaders bring a wealth of experience, passion, and dedication to advancing TR&HC's mission of supporting equestrian sports and local causes.

John Hanselman: Retired at age 49, Hanselman spent much of his career in finance, transitioning from Senior Vice President of Liberty Mutual Insurance Company in the southern region to founding his own healthcare management company. A newer resident of our area, Hanselman's equestrian journey began later in life.

"Although he was late to take on horseback riding, he is a natural athlete and an excellent student," said former TR&HC president Angie Millon who boards and rides at the same barn as Hanselman. "Not only does he work hard on his show jumping skills, we convinced him to fox hunt with Tryon Hounds. John quickly earned our respect for his willingness to learn all about the sport ... I was impressed."

Beyond his passion for riding, Hanselman has an extensive history of volunteer work, including roles with the Humane Society, Guardian Ad Litem, and Angel Flights, where he piloted patients to medical care. His board experience includes serving on the Board of Retail 1st Insurance Company. Hanselman has a son and a daughter and two grandkids, and enjoys playing the saxophone, flying airplanes, and sailing boats.

Paula Alcock: Alcock is a senior vice president with Bank of America. Her decades of experience in the financial industry and relevant non-profit board experience bring a unique blend of enthusiasm and expertise to the Tryon Riding and Hunt Club. When asked about why she joined the TR&HC board, Alcock said she "looks forward to carrying out my passion around advocating for animal rescues and youth causes that TR&HC so generously supports." Alcock is very active in the equestrian world. She trains and competes with her KWPN gelding, Honey Badger, aka Hank, with KS Sporthorses.

Rhonda Lockhart: Lockhart's deep connection to horses and her passion for riding is beautifully illustrated in her journey. Having spent nearly two decades riding in this area, she has built a rich history with horses and equestrian disciplines. Her dream came true when she and her husband Chris purchased Rest-A-Bit farm in the Green Fields subdivision, which she once admired during a hunter pace event. This sense of home and belonging is further emphasized by her fondness for Rest-A-Bit farm, as it represents not only her lifestyle but also her ideal vacation spot. It's a perfect example of how one's passion and dreams can align beautifully in life.



TR&HC Board Members (L-R): Erin Straus, Angie Millon, Nancy Wilson, Rhonda Lockhart, Donna Younkin, Joanne Gibbs, Paula Alcock, Pagan Gilman and John Hanselman. Members not pictured: Sally Frick and Gena Meredith.

BAILEY SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY

Lockhart also has an impressive professional background, serving as Vice President of Human Resources for one of the largest privately held corporations in South Carolina. Before that, she worked for over 15 years at Phillips Petroleum, gaining extensive experience in human resources and management.

Joanne Gibbs, TR&HC President

Joanne Gibbs has taken the reins as TR&HC's new president. With her experience serving on the TR&HC board as treasurer, Gibbs is eager to tackle new opportunities for the club, starting with celebrating its centennial. With extensive experience in nonprofit management and a lifelong connection to equestrian sports, Gibbs aims to strengthen TR&HC's programs and expand its impact in the community. Under her leadership,

TR&HC is poised to continue its tradition of excellence in equestrian events while furthering its philanthropic initiatives.

A Bright Future: With these talented individuals at the helm, the TR&HC is excited to build on its century-long legacy and continue fostering a thriving equestrian community while supporting local causes that make a meaningful difference. The club wishes a heartfelt thank you to departing board members Lee Cone, Molly Oakman, and Kathy Woodham for the incredible contributions they made during their terms.

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 and follow us on social media.

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