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The Post-Signal
Thursday, January 3, 1980

SPORT



A photo of the North Texas Cutting Horse Association's July 1979 competition makes it into the look back at the previous year's coverage on the first page of the *Post-Signal's* Jan. 3, 1980, sports section.

Archives/
The Post-Signal

Sports highlights

There was a wide variety of sporting events in Pilot Point during 1979, and these photos recall some of the highlights. Above left: A youngster puts his horse through the paces during the North Texas Cutting Horse Association's competition held in Pilot Point in July. Above right: Julie Strittmatter prepares to make a trip around the track after taking handoff

This is Horse Country

Origin of 'Horse Country' moniker traced back to '70s

By Tatiana Ambrosio
Contributing Writer

Many newcomers know this area as Horse Country and even Horse Country U.S.A.

However, it was not always a land filled with horse ranches. The area was filled with cotton and peanut farms when it was first settled.

Not a lot of documented research has been done on the when and why the area became known in the illusive horse industry.

In 2020, the Post-Signal pub-

lished a story in the Progress Issue about a family, the Turners, that owned most of the land that now makes up Cross Roads since 1903. The family originally purchased the land as part of the original Texas Land Survey.

Bobby Turner grew up on the family land at the intersection of today's U.S. 380 and FM 424/Naylor Road intersect.

When the discussion turned to the growing development of the area, Bobby reminisced that this

was not the first time growth had hit the area.

He remembered in the late '70s when residents in the area were upset about the growth then.

The area's peanut and cotton farmers were not passing their farms down to children anymore. Their children were moving and getting jobs in other areas. So, they began to sell their land to horse ranchers.

Gretel L'Heureux retired from her post as the volunteer and tour

coordinator for the Denton County Office of History and Culture in June of 2021.

She still lives in the area and spent most of her tenure at her post learning about and promoting the area's horse ranches.

It became a passion for her to learn and share the horse country's history with residents and tourists alike.

L'Heureux said that articles have been done on specific ranches or winners of horse shows but not of how

the area came to be known as horse country.

“As far as a really focus on [the history of horse country], I don’t think there ever has been,” she said.

Chuck Morgan, who owns Four Fillies Farm, was born and raised in Pilot Point. His parents and his wife’s parents still live in the area.

When asked about when he first started noticing horse ranches in the area, he said he thought the first horse ranch that was new to the area was Dave Page’s ranch.

“He was here as far as I could remember,” Morgan said.

L’Heureux confirmed that the Page Ranch was the beginning of the surge of horse ranches.

“That’s what I was told, that he was the first one,” she said.

L’Heureux moved to the area in 1996.

However, she also noted later that the Cauble Ranch had been in the area much longer.

Photographs in the UNT Libraries Special Collections Horse Country U.S.A. archive show cowboy cutting practice being held at Cauble Ranch, and the interior of the Cutter Bill Championship Arena dated back to 1960.

Eric Miller wrote an article titled “Last Roundup at the DKG” for

D Magazine that was published on Nov. 1, 1985, which is one of the earliest accounts about the area’s origin and it being referred to as Horse Country.

“They’ve called the Aubrey area ‘Horse Country U.S.A.’ ever since a Midwesterner named Dave Page took a ride about 35 miles to the north of Dallas one day back in 1970 and realized he’d found a gold mine splitting Texas Highway 377,” according to the piece.

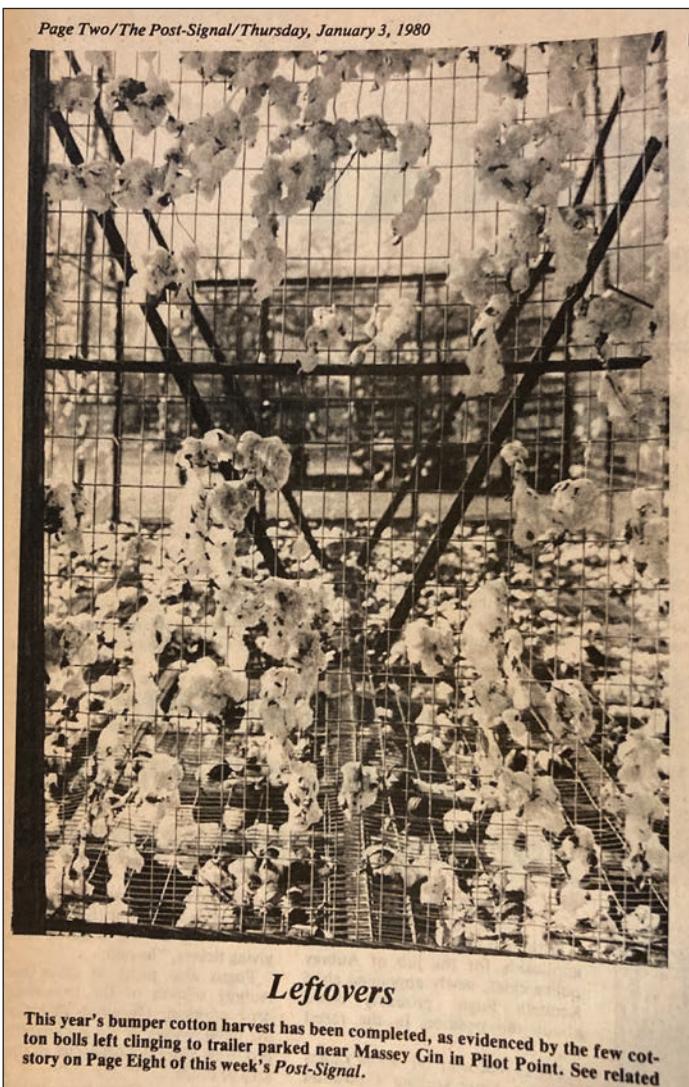
“The soft, sandy grasslands are perfect for raising horses, with rolling hills blanketed with grasses for grazing.

“The soil underneath is gentle on the tender hooves of horses valued sometimes at tens of thousands of dollars each.

“And the land, in those days, was cheap. Page also liked the fact that Aubrey seemed a perfect little country town, yet was close enough to the larger transportation centers of Dallas and Fort Worth.”

The article also cited that there were already over 100 horse ranches in the Aubrey area at the time. That number grew to over 300 by 2006.

Morgan remembers that the area was being referred to as Horse Country U.S.A. as far back as possibly 1982.



Another photo from the Jan. 3, 1980, issue documents the overlap of cotton growing and the young days of Horse Country.

Archives/
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Archives give nod to growth of horse industry in area

He recalled seeing it in the Quarter Horse Journal.

He said he remembers seeing an advertisement in the journal for a group of ranches in the area.

“They took out a whole page ad,” he said.

The ad consisted of a map of Friendship Road, Saint John Road and U.S. 377, showing the locations of the ranches.

Morgan said the ad referred to the area as Horse County U.S.A.

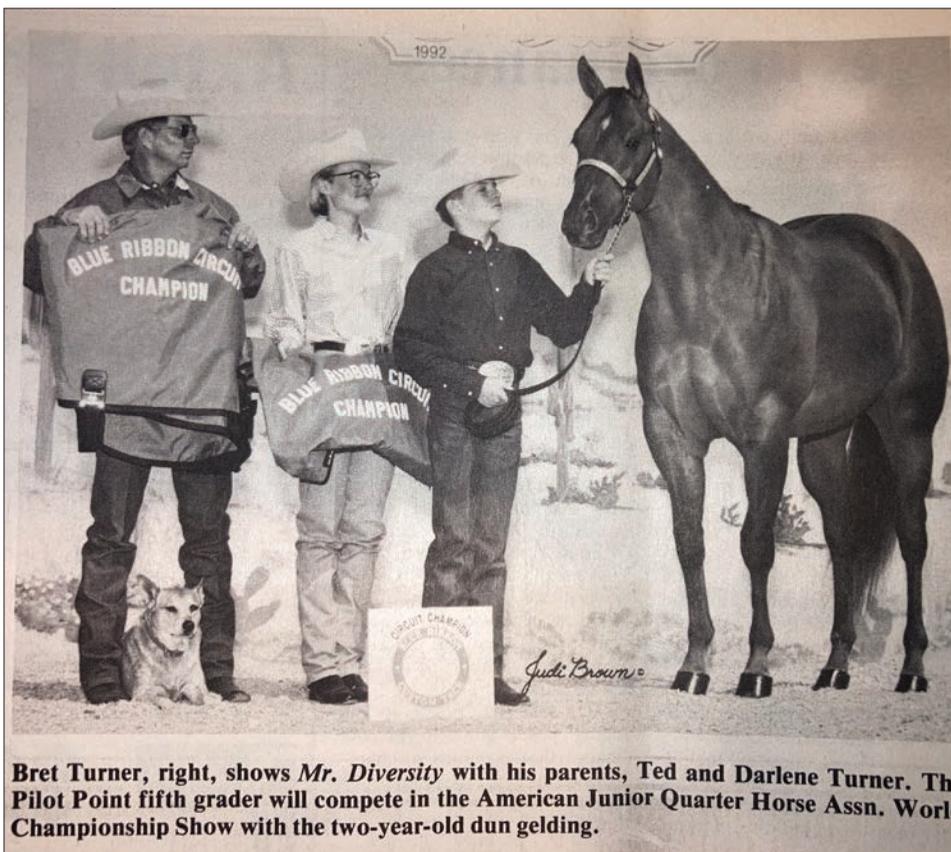
“That’s whenever I remember it being called that,” he said.

He supposed the year might have been 1981.

Morgan went on to say if people were in the horse business they knew where Aubrey or Pilot Point was because of all the advertising and the ranches that were located here.

L’Heureux recalled seeing a sign on the side of FM 428 when she moved here that said “Welcome to Horse County U.S.A.”

The sandy loam soil has been acknowledged by today’s current ranch owners as being beneficial, but also the weather and location in regard to major shows and the lower



Bret Turner, right, shows Mr. Diversity with his parents, Ted and Darlene Turner. The Pilot Point fifth grader will compete in the American Junior Quarter Horse Assn. World Championship Show with the two-year-old dun gelding.

A photo from 1992 documents Bret Turner’s success in the American Junior Quarter Horse Association.

Archives/The Post-Signal

cost of the land when they bought the ranches in the ’80s and ’90s were also reasons for settling in the area.

L’Heureux and Morgan recalled other early ranches and businesses in the area include Tommy Manion Ranch, Equine Express, Valor Farm, Metcalf Quarter Horses and Simons Show Horses.

“These were the beginning,” L’Heureux said.

Both noted that this is not a comprehensive list of the earliest ranches.

Morgan said he believes the area really exploded with horse ranches in the mid 1980s.

“[The area] was getting really popular, and they were really coming in,” he said.

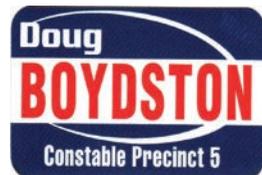
The Post-Signal’s archives show that stories about the cotton or peanut plantings and harvests in the 1970s were soon replaced with stories about the horse ranches in the area being a part of the Fall Fest in 1981.

After the early 1980s, the archives begin to reveal more and more area residents involved in horse shows.



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Jared Stanglin leads one of his equine passengers onto the trailer he and his co-driver, John Gorman, would transport to California in early November.

Abigail Allen/The Post-Signal

Coast to coast with care

Family business extends into third generation

By Abigail Allen
Editor

When it comes to transporting horses, the details matter.

That's why Mike and Jackie Alexander, the owners of Equine Express, along with their staff focus on getting the little things right.

"We've been so successful in this business due to the customer care, customer service that we provide," he said.

That's due in large part to the focus they put on being a company made up of horse people.

"If you're a horse person, you know what to look for, you know when maybe they're breathing a little different or acting a little strange, ... how to han-

dle them when they're nervous to keep them from getting hurt, keep the driver and the horse handler from getting hurt or the customer," he said. "It's so important that we have horse people that can drive."

That staff includes three of their four adult children.

The Alexander children were raised not only around horses but also around the horse transport industry with their grandfather and founder of Equine Express, Joe McGee, showing them the ins and outs of the business.

He and his wife Joan founded the company in 1986, and it was a family company from the start.

Jackie and her brother Greg McGee

helped their parents run the company, which she and Mike later purchased from her parents.

"Joe set a standard, and we're doing our best to continue that," Mike said.

When it was founded in 1986, Equine Express was one of the only horse transport companies in the center of the country.

"[Joe] saw a need and a niche," Mike said. "There's transporters on the East Coast, transporters on the West Coast, but very seldom did they come through Texas to service the Texas people."

The company has had the fortune of being able to transport animals for people who range from backyard enthusiasts to famous celebrities, such as Mi-

randa Lambert, Kelly Clarkson, George Strait, George Foreman and Johnny Depp.

"You meet some of the most beautiful horses you've ever seen and you'll see some of the most gorgeous farms," Mike said. "They'll just knock your eyes out, some of the farms you go in and out of."

For the Alexanders, everyday people's horses are just as important as those of the famous clients.

"There's just a connection with horse people," he said.

The transportation trucks for long-haul transport use an air glide system to help protect and promote the comfort of the creatures inside.

Each area is filled with a wood-shav-

Approach to transport centers on attention to detail

ing lining above a rubberized mat that helps cushion the horse's hooves.

They also have alfalfa laid for them inside each box stall, and they have hanging feeders filled with hay that help provide both enrichment and a healthier ride.

"You want to keep their gut moving," said Colton Alexander as he observed the preparations, adding that doing so helps prevent colic and shipping fever on the trips.

The family and their staff, when driving, work together to deliver the horses safely and to provide a way to move them as quickly and efficiently as possible.

One of their drivers, Jared Stanglin, has worked for the company for 11 years.

He said he loves the environment in which he works and the family for which he works.

"It's rewarding to see the customers satisfied and the horses comfortable," he said. "[There's] a quote—'What's good for the outside of the horse



is good for the inside of a man,' and it's played true in my life."

He and his co-driver, John Gorman, were preparing a trailer leaving for California.

They were getting all of the feed and water buckets set up to help promote the health of the horses on the trip.

The feed and other nutrition components are under the pur-

view of Catherine Alexander, one of Mike and Jackie's three children who are continuing to take on the mantle of the family business.

"I take care of all the horses here that come through," she said. "If any horses have any medications or anything like that, I give them everything they need so that way they'll be

comfortable and happy here."

She also said having the ability to "carry this on" means a great deal to her.

Catherine's brothers Caleb and Colton focus on the transport side of the business.

Caleb and his wife Amanda focus on transport to and from the eastern portion of the U.S., while Colton and his wife Mae-

John Gorman, who has been with Equine Express for many years, loads hanging feed to help keep the horses on board healthy during their lengthy drive.

Abigail Allen/
The Post-Signal

gan focus largely on the West Coast routes to and from Texas.

"It's really an amazing thing to be able to haul the horses we get to haul," Caleb said. "Anything from racehorses to show horses, backyard horse to hauling for movie stars and movie horses. It's just really cool to try to keep that going."

He feels the responsibility of looking after those equine passengers in their care.

"We treat every horse like it's a million-dollar horse, no matter what it is," he said.

Amanda, who has loved and raised horses since she was a girl and who has a degree in animal science, comes from a horse breeding background professionally.

She said she loves the opportunity to help the family business grow and flourish.

"I was able to bring that knowledge here and apply it to what we do and building the trust and the confidence with our customers that we are horse people," she said.

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Alexander family strives to honor Equine Express founders

space on their land in Indiana for Equine Express to use as a layover station to help with horses that need to be quarantined after they come in from the international airports in New York and Chicago, as well as animals being transported from the East Coast needing to have a place to rest outside of the truck.

She also hopes that one day her children's generation will be able to also inherit and grow the company.

"[Camryn and Coleman are] so excited to be able to see the facility here in Texas but then also see the facility we're building in Indiana and be a part of both," Amanda said.

Equine Express, which is on FM 1385, works with KB Ranch in Aubrey as a layover area nearby.

That's where Colton and Maegan met, and they continue to share that love of the creatures who brought them together.

"It kind of goes hand in hand," she said. "... We do it together, so that's pretty special."

Maegan has raised horses and competed in the horse industry since she was a young girl.

"I have that extra connection with the customers when I'm on the phone with them," she said. "I have my own horses,



Caleb Alexander, left, Amanda Alexander, Mike Alexander, Jackie Alexander, Colton Alexander, Catherine Alexander, Maegan Alexander, Chelsey Lance, Chris Rinearson and Brooke Taylor work together in the office, and beyond when needed, to keep things moving for Equine Express.

Abigail Allen/The Post-Signal

so I can relate to them. It makes it a lot easier for me. I already know everything about horses, so if a customer has a certain question, I can answer that, no problem. ... Doing what we do, you have to know the horse's ins and outs."

Her love of both the family and the horses fuels her desire to help the company grow.

"We want it to continue on for generations to come," she said. "... We just want to continue to make sure it thrives and

that it's always there for everyone in the family."

For Colton and his siblings, it is a huge honor to continue the legacy of what their grandfather or their grandparents built and to be able to continue the family business.

"It's a big responsibility," Colton said. "... It means a lot, with it being a family business. I just want to see it go into the future."

Part of that, too, is the chance to honor their grandparents, particularly Joe, who would take Colton and Caleb with him on trips.

"He's definitely been the pillar for all of us," Colton said. "He taught every single one of us everything we know about horses and about transporting them."

Both Jackie and Mike feel a sense of pride and gratitude that their children and their daughters-in-law have the desire to work together to operate the business as smoothly as possible and to reflect the care and consideration that Equine Express has made its hallmark.

"It's a privilege," Jackie said. "It's exciting to have the kids take it on. ... It's an honor to take [my dad's] legacy on."



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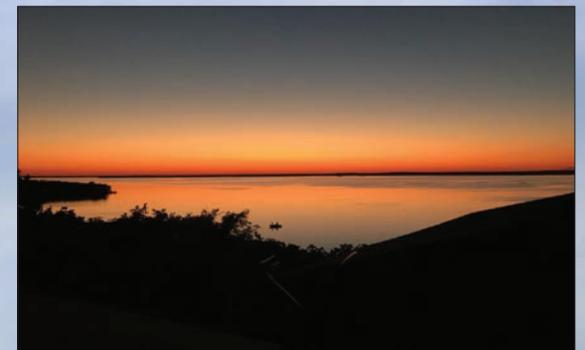
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Area offers competition riding options

By Basil Gist
Staff Writer

The stretch of U.S. 377 the Ranch Cities is on isn't called Horse Country for nothing.

The quadrupeds are everywhere, and so are the people who make their living in the equine industry.

Between English and Western, pleasure and competition, the industry is huge and, for many, a daunting proposition.

"You've got to Google search, 'horse riding near me,'" Equipoint Holdings Owner Kent Billiter said. "What I encourage parents to do is call and ask questions, ask to do a tour and ask to watch a lesson."

The spectrum is broad and the disciplines are varied, but the core distinction, English or Western, is the first choice parents are presented with as they find a barn and program to join.

"If they're looking at English, I encourage them to find a barn that is SafeSport certified," Billiter said. "It is for any athletics where there is one student and one trainer, and they may be hands-on to protect from isolating, grooming and bullying."

Other Olympic sports like figure skating and gymnastics also use SafeSport certification.

He further pressed attention to the cleanliness of the barn and the trainer's stalls.

"The attention you put to safety is often reflected in the attention you put to the cleaning, because unclean is un-



Brooke Wendelken practices riding at the new Equipoint facility on Friendship Road.

Basil Gist/The Post-Signal

safe," Billiter said.

Brandon Clinton of Brandon Clinton Sport Horses also encouraged parents to ask how often the lesson horses are ridden, saying the horses at Equipoint are ridden no more than two hours a day with substantial breaks between the hour lessons.

Following a verification of safety, both spoke about the monetary requirements, saying, though substantial once lessons become competitive, training should only start to show up in earnest after a child has shown persistent interest.

"If you have someone who is in gymnastics, piano, tennis

and now horsemanship, what I encourage parents to do is find out what the kid really wants to do," Billiter said. "This is your kid riding on a live animal, so we want their attention and focus. If your kid likes tennis more than horsemanship, by all means go do tennis."

They further encouraged

parents to be wary of programs and trainers that try to push leases of the most expensive investments like saddles and horses prematurely.

"Riding in a custom saddle is the difference between a Payless shoe and a custom orthotic, but let's not have that conversation until you are rid-

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Trainers provide understanding of riding disciplines

ing two or three times a week,” Billiter said.

Many saddle companies incentivize trainers to sell saddles in exchange for free equipment, he said.

“As a parent who is green and doesn’t know any better, you’re now out of pocket \$4,000 to \$7,000 because you were told your kid needs it,” Billiter said.

As for purchasing the starter horse, Clinton said a dedicated, talented kid may be ready after a year.

“If you’ve got someone that’s really committed, and they’re riding multiple times a week and are ready to go and do it for real, it can be about a year,” Clinton said.

Billiter expanded, explaining the need for a true equine partner only comes for kids who want to make the sport a discipline. To keep it only an activity, most programs will never require a horse of the child’s own.

For parents with no background in horsemanship, Billiter also advised care and attention toward the quality of instruction.

“You could turn around tomorrow, slap on a cowboy hat and say you’re giving lessons,” Billiter said. “There is

nothing we as horse trainers have to go on to pass or get certified to do this.”

That said, Clinton explained, there are several optional certifications to help lend a trainer credibility.

“Ask where they went to school, their qualifications, who they did their apprenticeship with and asking for some reference,” Billiter said.

The folks at Equipoint teach English hunter jumper and equitation, all areas in which Clinton has seen personal success, both on the horse and as a trainer.

Another trainer who happily takes young clients, Megan Vanderslice, takes an even broader range.

“I do the all-around quarter horse; we do everything—Western and English,” Vanderslice said. “We have a lesson program called the MVP Academy for beginner kids to start out and get their feet wet without making a huge commitment. Some end up coming to the show side of it, and some just take lessons.”

Vanderslice made it clear that it’s OK just to take lessons and that, even for her casual lesson kids, they get private care.

“It’s safer that way, and the kids learn a lot faster, too,” Vanderslice said.

“I just love helping kids. Even if they never show, at least they have great experiences on a horse.”

That opinion was shared by the team at Equipoint, which has the EquiHope program, a therapeutic riding program that can graduate kids to competitive riding or may keep them at the lessons stage indefinitely.

There are additional opportunities, though more specific, for kids to get familiar with horses without necessarily riding.

Halter horse shows, like the ones Anna Horn trains and breeds for, focus first on the form of the horse, its aesthetic appeal and then on its function or how capable it is in performance.

“It’s for everyone to come show their horse, come show your baby,” Horn said. “It also helps us to stabilize what their value is despite the economy.”

Youth divisions in halter horse competitions accept participants as young as 9 years old but, Horn explained, the discipline is more readily accessible for those with horses of their own or already connected to the horse industry.

“What I’ve noticed is this is a big family event,” Horn said. “There are three people who can show the same

horse, so you’ve got a youth, a non-pro and a grandparent or mother-in-law showing in the select.”

If the sport is starting with the kid, and not mom, the child is most likely hearing about showing horses through 4-H or FFA, Horn said.

“Then hopefully they’re linked up with a reputable person who can give them some guidance,” Horn said. “As breeders, we all have at the end of the year horses who don’t suit our level but that creates a perfect situation for someone who’s just starting off, which we could donate, write off or take to a horse sale.”

Each trainer explained that the free form nature of the industry creates a space where letting the person a parent entrusts their child to requires more investment on the parent than it may for other extracurricular activities but made it clear getting a child involved does not have to be as insurmountable as it can feel.

“Typically, riders start by riding once a week,” Billiter said. “After that, like any sport, frequency will improve athleticism. The first step is finding a facility that can do for you what you want it to.”

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MEAT PROCESSING

More than just horses

Highpoint pairs award-winning equine program, exotic animal haven

By **Tatiana Ambrosio**
Contributing Writer

Business partners Jason Martin and Charlie Cole moved their established horse training operation, Highpoint Performance Horses, to the area from Chino Hills, California, in 2000 because of several factors.

Since then, their operation has changed and expanded to include breeding, barrel racing and even exotic animals.

Martin said they moved their quarter horse training operation to Pilot Point because the location was convenient for their customers.

“We were traveling a lot,” he said. “All our big shows were in Oklahoma or Florida or Ohio.”

This, coupled with the cost of owning a ranch in California, compelled them to look for a new home base.

“We already had some friends out here,” Martin said about how they found Pilot Point.

Highpoint Performance Horses is a training facility and breeding operation.

“We are quarter horse all-around trainers especially in the all-around events,” he said.

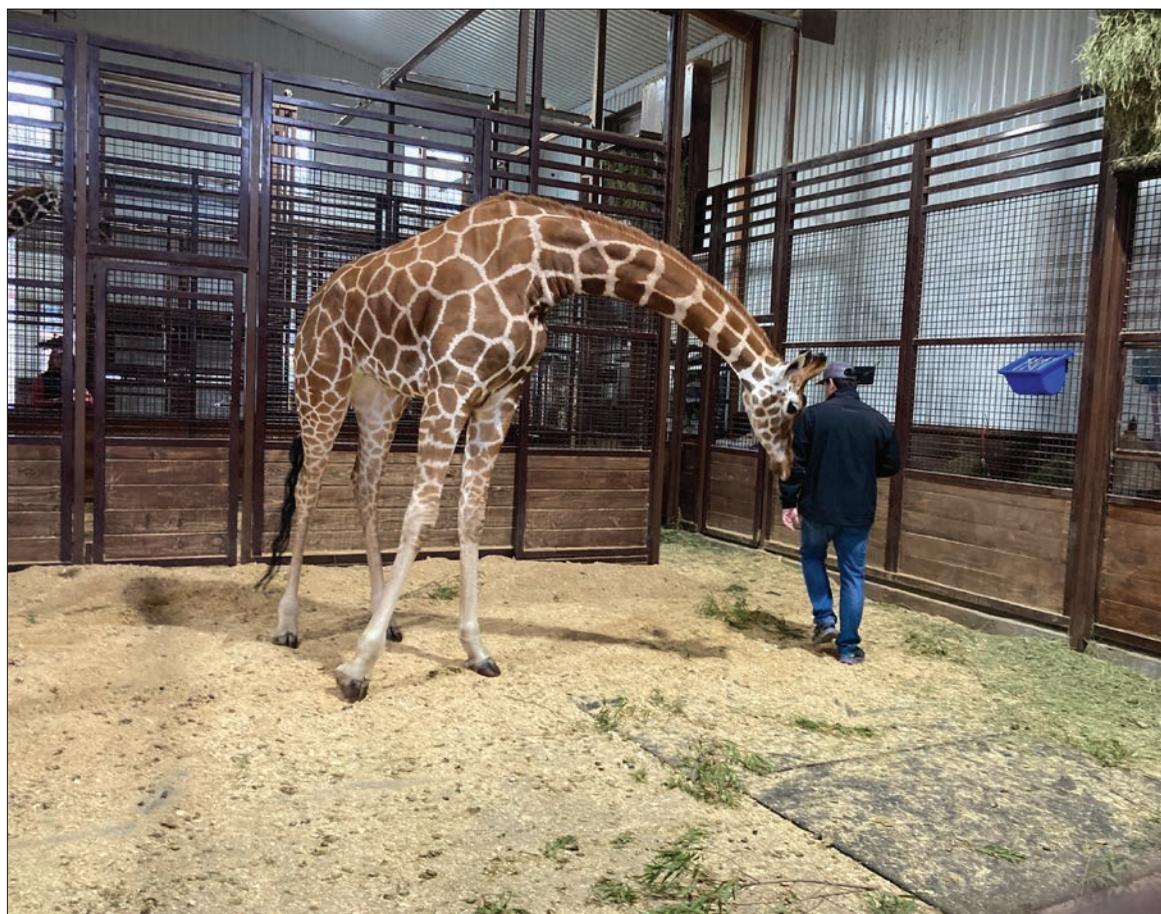
The duo have made quite the name for themselves in the industry, winning many accolades showing horses. Between them, to name a few, include Martin’s 34 American Quarter Horse Association World Championships and wins as a leading exhibitor at the AQHA World Show five times.

However, Martin said, in recent years, their focus is on breeding.

They breed prize winning stallions and mares.

“We stand 35 stallions, bred 2,800 mares last year,” he said, adding that they now have a big presence in the barrel horse industry.

In breeding quarter horses, Highpoint is not limited to live cover breeding. They are able to collect from the stallion, split the dosage and mail the speci-



Gerald snuggles into his owner, Dan Houck, who is one of three business partners who own Highpoint Performance Horses and Highpoint Haven.

Tatiana Ambrosio/Contributing Photographer

men throughout the country.

Roughly 90% of their business is done across the United States, but they also ship to clients in Brazil, Australia and Canada.

Quarter horse stallions can breed hundreds of mares a year using this method.

“A top stallion will breed over 200 mares a year,” Martin said.

When asked if they have had any notable horses in their stalls, Martin named a few.

“We’ve had a lot of famous horses in our years,” Martin said. “Acadamosby Award just passed away at the age of 33, AQHA’s all-time leading World Champion and three-time Super Horse.”

They also stand the all-time winningest and money-earning barrel stud of all time, Slick by Design, Martin explained.

“Now he’s a \$6 million pro-

ducer,” he said.

Martin noted that the horse has finished in the National Finals Rodeo four times.

They also own other barrel horses for pleasure, “not really as business,” he said.

“We keep their horses,” he said. “We show their horses; we meet them at horse shows. We are kind of cutting back and retiring.”

In fact, Martin retired from showing this year. However, Cole is still showing.

Although they are retiring, they certainly don’t seem to be slowing down.

Highpoint Performance Horses is only one side of the ranch. The other side is Highpoint Haven.

As far back as the beginning of their training business began, Martin and Cole acquired a desert tortoise.

It was so long ago he didn’t

remember how they acquired it.

“I don’t remember if someone just had one or if we found one,” he said.

From there, their affinity for exotics and their collective brood grew.

“We started with tortoises, and then we got bigger tortoises and bigger tortoises and that just kind of sends you down a road that you start getting [more] exotic things,” Martin said.

Highpoint Haven is actually run by the duo’s third business partner, Dan Houck.

Houck said their venture started when they met at a rodeo in 2007 and slowly formalized from there. However, it was a pivotal purchase that served as the catalyst.

“Charlie had arranged to purchase a male Aldabra tortoise because we had a female,”

Houck said.

They went to purchase the animal from the man that had raised the animals for a prominent car dealership in California that had animals like lions and tigers for their customers to enjoy while shopping for vehicles.

Houck said California was shutting that operation down because of health concerns for the animals.

That day, the man told Houck he could take as many animals as he could fit in his three-horse trailer.

He came home with a kangaroo, a pigmy goat and a zebu.

“So, we took them to Texas, put them in a horse stall and all three of us looked at each other,” he said with a chuckle.

After that, people would hear about their facility and donate animals. Even the sheriff would drop off animals.

“We kind of got a bit of a menagerie,” he said. “We knew what we could do well. Anything that eats leaves or grass, we could do well.”

That eventually led to giraffes.

Gerald the giraffe now sits at the center of their operation and mission.

Houck went to many zoos and asked questions about their giraffes like how could they manage giraffes better. They took the knowledge they have gained along the way and built the facility in 2012 fueled by his fact-finding mission.

Gerald was the first giraffe. He came from a ranch in North Carolina as a six-month old in June 2014.

“He was a special giraffe,” he said, adding that “they’re unbelievably smart, incredibly gentle, super curious. Gerald is very out-going. He loves people and attention.”

Houck explained that people originally thought giraffes were mainly solitary animals because of the males being seen traveling between herds.

He said the females will stay

Ranch breeds world-class horses annually

together, while males will neck for dominance. Then the losing male will travel in search of a new herd.

“They’re not [solitary],” he said. “They’re very social. They communicate a lot.”

They also have three female giraffes.

Harriet came next. She was then paired with Gerald and has since had two daughters, Joy and Sophie.

Joy was born first. Sophie came with the next pregnancy and required an intervention that saved her life when she wouldn’t nurse after she was born.

“After about eight to 12 hours, that becomes a serious situation,” said Lauren Kimbro, animal care manager.

They had to give Sophie two transfusions of giraffe plasma, which had to be flown in from one of the two giraffe plasma banks in the country.

“That brought her back to life,” Kimbro said.

Harriet is currently preg-



nant with her third calf. When asked which sex he hopes for, Houck said he only hopes for a healthy baby.

With the new baby will come a new barn and expanded pas-

ture for the animals.

Gerald, indeed, was very outgoing as he spent the duration of the interview alongside Houck and Kimbro, asking for attention and more of his crack-

ers. However, he was just as satisfied with a rub and a curious lick as he was with his treat.

Martin noted that a focus for the exotics side of the business is to get into conservation

for these animals.

“We’re in a lot of different studies to help with the longevity of the species, especially for the giraffes and the tapirs,” he said.

The team has worked with Save Giraffes Now, the Giraffe Conservation Foundation.

In a full-circle event, they are working to have Sophie start being a plasma donor so she might be able to help other giraffes in need.

Another animal that High-point is involved with is the tapir.

“They’re actually related to the horses, but kind of like a pig with an elephant trunk,” Martin said.

They are the largest terrestrial mammals in South America.

Houck has traveled with organizations to help tag and monitor tapirs in the wild to learn more about them.

Houck’s enthusiasm for his animals is apparent.

He owns an asphalt business

Slick by Design, one of the High-point stallions that was sired by Designer Red out of dam Dreams of Blue, stands in his stall during the Stallion Showcase held in late October.

Tatiana Ambrosio/
Contributing
Photographer

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Highpoint Haven offers safe space for unusual animals

in California, and he travels weekly, every week, back and forth to Highpoint for what he calls a dream to be able to raise these animals.

“[Highpoint Haven] was never intended to be a business,” he said. “Our only real desire is to improve the standard of care for giraffes.”

They have trained the animals for foot care, blood draws and other tasks essential to caring for the animals in captivity. They also monitor the animals almost daily for hormone and nutrient deficiencies through their fecal matter. This process allows them to know where females are in their cycles and to check how the animals eating habits might need to fluctuate for overall health.

“We’re trying to make the next progressive step for our giraffes to be an example for the giraffe world,” Kimbro said.

Highpoint Haven is now home to the four giraffes, Galapagos tortoises, two tapirs, a sloth, a camel, zebras, a kangaroo, capybaras and an anteater.

Highpoint recently hosted its Stallion Showcase. Martin, Cole and Houck open up the ranch to all visitors during this once-yearly event for horse owners to visit the facility to view all the stal-



Houck looks up at Gerald within the stalls in the Highpoint Haven portion of the facility.

Tatiana Ambrosio/
Contributing
Photographer

lions at once while they may be deciding their breeding options. The ranch also happens to be open to the general public for this event.

Eventgoers are treated to something akin to a small fair. Highpoint brings in live music, food trucks and vendors.

“It’s also the one time a year that we open our facility up to view our exotic animals,” Martin said.

With heavy rain in the forecast, Martin was unsure ahead of the event if they would have as many visitors as the year prior. They had 1,500 visitors at the 2022 showcase.

However, after the event, Kimbro said they actually had more and estimated they hosted 1,700 visitors this year. Gerald did not disappoint. He spent the majority of the day greeting his visitors and being just as curious about them as they were about him.

Readers don’t have to wait for next year’s event to know how Gerald and the other animals are doing. He can be found with daily posts on his Instagram page—Gerals.Life—or at Highpoint Haven’s Facebook page.

They still have the tortoise. Rocky is his name, and he’s 102 years old.

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Finding a new way

Oakley discovers mentorship as way to share knowledge

By Basil Gist
Staff Writer

A seasoned cowboy and staple in the industry, Troy Oakley continues to find new ways to ply his trade.

From World Champion and Congress winner to all-around trainer, Oakley has spent his life all over the horse industry, but as age and health concerns limited his ability to drive those long hours and mount those horses, the man has shifted to exclusive coaching, being a second eye, something few do in the horse world.

“I started training horses when I was 15 years old,” Troy said. “I’ve always made my livelihood with the horses, but in 2009, I had an aortic aneurism, [and only] 4% survive that surgery.”

The aneurysm was followed by a stroke two years later and a spilled gall bladder after that.

“My wife was told I had an eight-hour window, or I’d have been dead because I was so eaten up with infection,” Troy said.

Carrie Oakley, Troy’s wife, explained that spillage nearly made him roll the dice on the 4% chance all over again.

“When they sonogrammed him, there were abscesses all over,” Carrie said. “They had attached to the graft from what they’d repaired originally.”

The spillage, which went unnoticed at first, left Troy with a brain bleed and sepsis in addition to the weakening graft, forcing his doctors to try to solve other issues before they could tackle the largest one. The graft didn’t give them that choice, however, as it started seeping before the work was done.

“They called the family in because they felt I wasn’t going to make it,” Troy said.

Despite the string of medical misfortunes and near misses, during which he also lost his voice, Troy’s trajectory seems to have steadied.

“I don’t know if it’s interesting or not, but it’s quite a story,” Troy said. “But I can’t stress that health insurance—it’s something you can’t afford, but you can’t afford to be without it either. If we didn’t have it, I’d have bankrupt us.”

Before life dealt him a string of bad hands, Troy was a successful Western all-around trainer.

“I’ve been blessed in that I can train a horse, but I’m also very good at teaching people,” Troy said. “When you can teach someone else and they can now do it, it



Seasoned cowboy Troy Oakley mentors Cole Miller in LaGrange, Indiana, sharing some of his hard-earned understanding of the creature.

Courtesy Photo

keeps your business going.”

What he was doing before, Carrie said, was very physical.

“Driving 18 hours a day, riding several horses a day,” Carrie said. “He just can’t do that anymore.”

His shift started with an adjusted focus toward not a quantity of horses and people but a more selective group.

“From 20-30 clients he went to about five,” Carrie said.

About 10 months ago, he realized those five needed to become zero.

“Every day in the morning I’d look in the mirror and see my scars,” Troy said, his shirt lifted. “I kept thinking, ‘I’ve got to find something else that I can do,’ and I was always good with people.”

His answer was to pivot from trainer to mentor.

“I don’t want to be a clinician; I don’t like that word,” Troy said. “I want to be a mentor. It doesn’t matter if you’re a

professional, an assistant or a trainer. It doesn’t matter if you’re a non-pro, amateur or a youth. I’ve helped them all.”

Troy has taken his background in horsemanship, Western pleasure and equitation, an apprenticeship under Lester Howard in North Carolina, and designing facility layout—over 40 years of experience in the industry—and turned it outward.

“I’d like to think I’m pretty respected in the horse industry, and people are asking me to come mentor them,” Troy said. “I started here a month ago, and I’m already booked until January.”

In that month, he will travel to Ohio, Indiana and Michigan and is set to go from California to Georgia, and plenty of places in-between.

“I may just sit with them for a couple hours and give them my ideas,” Troy said. “I can communicate on a horse, or I can communicate from the ground. Be-

ing able to express my knowledge to people is a unique ability, but I say that in a humble way. The good Lord’s blessed me with knowledge, and I want to share my knowledge.”

Howard and Alex Ross, Troy said, were a blessing he didn’t even recognize at the time during his four years of study under each.

“I didn’t notice at the time, because I was trying to make my bones, but I got to work under two of the greatest people to ever step on a horse,” Troy said. “They were revered.”

Troy concluded with praise for the industry he’s devoted his life to.

“The horse industry is very competitive, but they’re very generous, too,” Troy said. “When someone is down, whether it’s a financial crisis or health issues, the horse industry are the first people that are there to help. I just want to be the guy that gives back to them.”

Young equestrian answers series of questions

By **Tatiana Ambrosio**
Contributing Writer

The world of horses and the horse industry that surrounds Pilot Point requires a vast amount of knowledge to understand as a layperson raised on the other side of the fence. To help our readers, we have asked a local expert in training in the field.

Pilot Point fourth grader Taylor Sweeney has been raised with her own horses and ponies. She is currently learning and competing in Western pleasure and hunter jumper.

Taylor's parents, Joe and Rosemary Sweeney, moved to the area from Plano because of their affinity for horses. They decided that when it came to commuting, boarding and lessons, it made more sense for them to buy their own land for their horses and have the trainer come to them.

The family has a horse and two registered members of Pony of the Americas.

Taylor helps her parents with the daily feedings as well as sometimes helping the horses with their own personal beauty time, giving them a makeover and braiding their hair.

Q: What is the difference between a pony and horse?

Taylor: A pony can only be like 14.2 hands but anything taller than that is a horse.

A hand is a unit of measurement that dates back centuries meaning the width of a hand including the thumb. It is standardized today at 4 inches. The measurement for the animal would be from the ground to the top of its shoulders, also known as its withers.

Q: When does a foal turn into a colt or a filly?

Taylor: When it's first born and then like a month after it turns into a colt.

Taylor's mom steps in for clarification and explains the term colt or filly



just means boy or girl and can be used interchangeably with the term foal at that time in its life.

Q: How long is the animal a colt or a filly?

Taylor: They're a colt or a filly for one year and then they become a yearling. Then they're a full adult.

Rosemary steps in to help Taylor along and clarify about when adults become mares, stallions and geldings and that horses may be called a colt or a filly up to the age of 4. At which point, Taylor says, "Mom— my interview..." and then continues to explain.

Taylor: A mare is a girl when it's a full adult. A gelding is when it's a fixed boy, but a stallion is where it's not fixed.

Q: How long is a horse pregnant?

Taylor: A horse is pregnant for about a tiny bit longer than a human is. So, they get pregnant in the spring and the next year they give birth in the spring, so I'd say about 11 to 12 months.

Mares usually have a gestation period of 330 days or 11 months.

Q: Always in the spring? Why is that?

Taylor Sweeney stands with her ponies. She loves learning about the horse industry and sharing what she's learned.

Tatiana Ambrosio/
Contributing
Photographer

Taylor: Because if the baby is born in the winter, it's too harsh and it's too cold for the baby so it's hard for them to survive, but if they're born in the spring, they have more time to grow before the winter comes.

Q: What is the difference between English style riding and Western style riding?

Taylor: English has a different saddle and normally you do jumping with English. Western is more like you can either do Western pleasure or like barrel racing and rodeo stuff because it has that saddle that's meant for speed, but English riding is more like looks and jumping.

There are many types of English riding. Some of the most common are dressage, show jumping, cross-country, eventing, hunter, fox hunting, equitation, saddle seat, hunt seat and endurance riding.

Q: What is Western pleasure?

Taylor: Western pleasure is when you're not really focusing on speed. You're really focusing on looks. Your horse's head is low and you have loose reigns, and it's all about looking good.

And people go to these shows and they wear jackets with like jewels all over them, and it's normally one-handed.

Q: What is reigning?

Taylor: A reigning horse—... they can herd cows, but they do a lot of controlling with their reigns and go around poles and stuff and they go through like obstacles. But they only use the reigns, and they back up and twist and stuff like that.

Some other types of Western riding include cutting, team penning, break-away roping, team roping, working equitation, ranch sorting, pole bending, goat tying and Western dressage.

Q: What kind of riding do you do?

Taylor: Hunter jumper, and it's more of the hardest ones to do because you have to train your eye to how many strides there are left just by looking. And certain horses have certain strides of how long they can go. A full horse goes to about 12 strides in hunter jumper, but a pony goes about 10 strides between jumps. My pony goes 4 strides.

A stride is the complete movement of all four legs. In the instance of hunter jumper, the rider needs to have the horse ready and in the right place in its movement to be able to clear the jump.

Taylor also wanted to share some safety rules for people that may be new to horses.

Q: What are some top safety rules for being around horses?

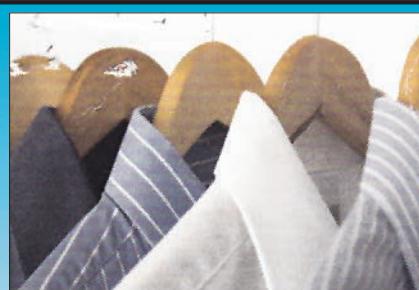
Taylor: The first one is walking behind the horse. You either want to walk really close to the horse and touching the horse so that they know that you're there, or there [be] about another horse [length] around. You either want to walk really far behind or really close. Do not walk in the middle because if they kick they can hit you.

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Dr. Kayla Richer, who is a chiropractor for both humans and animals, helps equine patients through injuries and day-to-day wear and tear on their joints.

Courtesy Photo

Therapeutic methods benefit equine patients

By Basil Gist
Staff Writer

Often professionals in the horse industry will allude to the fact their animals are workers and athletes.

Just like their human counterparts, the equine members of the industry require medical support both when something goes wrong and to keep everything

going right.

From on-site physical therapists to veterinarians and chiropractors, horses, especially the top-dollar athletes, benefit from a lot of help to keep them in top form.

“Just like human health care, there are a lot of different sides, especially in this area, where we have such a high

concentration of horses that are in work or in training, as well as breeding farms,” large animal veterinarian Kevin Claunch said.

Claunch, who works at Weems and Stephens Equine Hospital in Aubrey, has a specialty in surgery and spoke to the horse’s propensity for digestion issues.

“Besides the care that gets done day to day, we also offer a referral hospital,” Claunch said. “We have horses that come from as far as three or four hours away for intensive medical care, from intense colic to broken bones to neurological issues.”

The colic and associated issues, Claunch said, are chief among the rea-

Horses face specialized health challenges



Gianna Auriemma of McCutcheon Ranch provides hydrotherapy for one of her equine athlete clients.

sons he may need to open a patient up.

“We generally do between 60 and 80 colic surgeries a year here,” Claunch said. “Emergency abdominal surgeries for GI issues can run the gamut of having to remove simple obstructions to having to remove sections of intestine and reconnecting it back together again.”

Horses are particularly prone to that manner of issue, Claunch said, but medical science has improved to the point where that, and even fractured legs, does not necessarily preclude a horse from working after recovery.

“If you look at horses that undergo a major abdominal surgery, they gen-

erally get right back to work,” Claunch said. “Fractures are one of these things that still has a stigma where every horse that breaks its leg has to die.”

That is simply not the case, he said, though the situation is more touchy than it might be for a human with a similar break.

“We can’t put them in a wheelchair, [and] there’s still some fractures that we consider to be non-repairable in horses,” Claunch said. “The nature of horses being as big as they are and needing to use their legs immediately after surgery means it all revolves around where that fracture is.”

Some, he said, can return to work as

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Therapy methods give specific benefits

good as new while others may be limited but make a great leisure horse.

On the less dire side, the veterinarians also handle general care.

“Sports medicine and lameness evaluations are a big part of what we do and trying to make sure these horses stay comfortable in what their intended use is,” Claunch said. “We want that horse to stay sound for as long as possible.”

It’s here where the wholistic side of field comes to play.

“In terms of our horses, performance horses, we’re talking about athletes,” chiropractor Kayla Richer said. “We’re asking them to go to shows, perform at their absolute highest capacity and, just like humans who come back and get their ice bath, chiro and massage, the same things need to happen for horses.”

Chiropractic work focuses on keeping the spine and every other joint in its proper place in the body, which supports not just muscular but also nervous system health.

“When we have misalignments, we start to see nerve disturbance not only in the back and the neck but in other areas of the body,” Richer said. “That’s why

it’s ideal to keep these working horses adjusted.”

Because horses are constantly straining themselves, the value of regular adjustments is a topic Richer spoke on.

“It’s not a one-and-done,” Richer said. “If a horse is doing pretty good but you want to stay on their maintenance, usually 4-6 weeks is a good schedule as long as nothing seems to be bothering them. Something’s going to go out of place just from daily life.”

Richer also expanded on how she practices her trade which, for anyone who has been to a chiropractor, may seem unfeasible to accomplish with such a large animal.

“We learn how to position our body in a way that we can have the most ideal force and position to get that adjustment,” Richer said. “We use our body and their body to our advantage, so it’s easier on both of us.”

She expanded, saying the regular customers will start looking forward to and recognizing the process.

“They show me during adjustments when something feels good,” Richer said. “They know the drill; they’re ready

and excited.”

Both Claunch and Richer, though they work in different spheres of equestrian support, share in the scope of their education, with both having several years of post-graduate schooling similar to human health care professionals.

This includes a board certification from Claunch and an American Veterinary Chiropractic Association certification for Richer.

“It was about eight years of schooling, and for both chiropractic and animal chiropractic, I have continuing education classes,” Richer said. “It keeps us always learning new things. There’s always new research coming out.”

Before a trip to the veterinarian or chiropractor, or after a serious injury, many barns will also have on-site rehab and physical therapy professionals who may use a slew of horse-sized therapy equipment like ice baths and treadmills.

McCutcheon Ranch is among those with Gianna Auriemma on staff to make sure the equine athletes are taken care of between training sessions.

“I have my bachelor’s degree in equine rehabilitation and western spe-

cialization,” Auriemma said. “I did an internship here for 15 weeks, and then I got offered the job.”

Several of the devices on site, Auriemma said, focus on maintaining and enhancing circulation. The spa, a massive salt water ice bath, and the vibrating TheraPlate are chief among them.

“If you have something mild like a tendon injury, it’s really good for the blood flow and circulation,” Auriemma said. “We also have a laser machine that helps with blood flow and clotting as well. [The spa] is also good for injuries as well like a cut or something that’s open. The salt water is good for that.”

As large and powerful as the animals are, each professional emphasized that they benefit from support the same way their human counterparts do.

“Horses are extremely funny creatures,” Claunch said. “They tend to be both extremely sturdy and extremely fragile at the same time. It’s amazing some of the things they can live through, and it’s amazing some of the things that, at a moment’s notice, can have the horse in a lot of trouble.”



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Farrier Ben Coley, left, observes the work of his apprentice, Zane McClusky, at the barn of one of his clients in Pilot Point.

Joe Fragano/The Post-Signal

An individualized approach

Tioga-based farrier matches shoes to needs of clients

By Joe Fragano
Staff Writer

Tioga resident Ben Coley spent years in school and under the tutelage of a more experienced farrier before starting his own business shoeing the horses of the surrounding area and taking on an apprentice of his own.

At 21-years-old, Coley was a ranch hand in Ardmore, Oklahoma, where he watched the local farrier work on horses each week. A younger, less-established Coley

was still looking for a career path he could commit to and opted to attend school to learn the trade.

"I decided I needed a change of pace," Coley said. "I went to a horseshoeing school there in Ardmore and came out of it in about six weeks. What really got me hooked up in this area was an apprenticeship with a guy named Mike Chance. ... I rode with him for about three years studying with him and under him. ... After that, ... I had a full clientele list of performance

horses that I kept up with."

Performance equine activities are popular in and around Pilot Point.

Coley stays busy trimming the hooves of and fitting shoes to show horses and other kinds of competition horses as his main client base.

Not every horse fits into the same set of shoes.

Some horses have special needs based on what discipline of showing or competition they participate in, and others have anatomical

needs that require specific fittings to keep the animal healthy.

Like many industries in the equine field, a farrier's job is both highly specialized and critical to the health of the animal.

There is a reason more show horse owners and trainers don't trim and shoe their horses themselves. The process of maintaining the hooves of an animal and giving the animal an advantageous foundation to stand, trot and gallop on is not a simple one.



Smoke coils around Coley as he works to fit the new shoe to his equine customer.
Joe Fragano/The Post-Signal

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Farrier, apprentice work to keep horse hooves healthy

“The large portion of my customers are show horses and the overall Western pleasure industry,” Coley said. “I have a very minimal amount of using or working horses. ... [People can shoe their own horses], but they don’t tend to have the same desire to create the same results some of these horse shows are looking for.”

“Shoeing horses is all about keeping horses going and keeping them sound. The No. 1 reason to shoe a horse is because you have some sort of lameness that you’re trying to address. ... We can also affect the way that they move, ... to create smoother or more animated movements, depending on the discipline and what [the owner is] after.”

Every horse is different, and so is every competition or show that the animal might participate in. To provide the best service possible to both the owner and the horse, Coley has to maintain a high level of familiarity with the animals and the people with whom he works.

By manipulating the size, shape, weight, material and other aspects

of each shoe, Coley can help take stress off a horse’s joints and improve the overall health of the animal.

“Each animal is individualized,” Coley said. “So much so that sometimes they’ll need at least a pair [of shoes] for the front and the hind that are going to be different. I have horses that need four different shoes on each corner, whether it be the modification of the shoes, the placement of the shoes or just the material used for each application.”

In the pursuit of keeping the horse’s health a priority and maintaining the integrity of his business, Coley has found the human side of the farrier business to be just as important as the technical side.

“I’ve heard guys say to me that nothing lasts forever,” Coley said. “That the people you start shoeing for aren’t going to be the people you’re shoeing for when you get done. Personally, I’ve taken a bit of a different approach, and I’ve invested in the relationships with my clients. ... I try to invest some

time just listening and communicating with them on their horses and sometimes on a personal level, so they feel that I value them as an individual, as a professional, and that I value their horses and their wellbeing. I try to make it very apparent that their success is my success.”

Like many trade workers, a lot of farriers get their start as an apprentice. Coley apprenticed under Chance at the start of his career, and now tutors a young farrier of his own, Zane McClusky.

“In the beginning, it’s just an opportunity to be able to work on things that you’re not actually capable of doing,” Coley said. “It’s something that’s outside of your abilities and outside of what you’d feel comfortable doing on your own. ... It’s a really good opportunity to have a guy that is well established and well accomplished and has a lot of knowledge. Over those years that you ride with them, they share that knowledge with you. ... [I’ve told McClusky] there’s two ways to run this business. The [first] is that your business will run

you, and the other way is that you will run your business. It’s very important for a guy to be mindful of what he does and create balance.”

As Pilot Point, Aubrey, Tioga and the surrounding areas continue growing, Coley sees the local equine industry growing, too. As long as there are horses to ride, people will ride them. That means farriers like Coley, and soon his apprentice McClusky, have a responsibility to keep the industry on its feet. Coley credited his faith and the people he works with every day for helping him learn how to do just that.

“Since I’ve been on my own, I’ve seen quite a few barns multiply,” Coley said. “I see a lot of growth in the industry. A lot more clients, a lot more horses, and I don’t see it slowing down any time soon. [This is] a really good area to shoe horses in. ... The No. 1 reason that I have the success I have today is my faith in Jesus. He has provided and opened all these doors for me to be able to have these relationships and opportunities with all the people that have poured into me over these last 10 or 12 years.”



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Portrait of a horse family



Little Donna, left, looks at her son, Duke, and the recipient mare who carried and nursed the baby. Duke was sired by Smart Chic Olena.

Courtesy Photo

Linde, Smith family bring up horse family

By Abigail Allen
Editor

Little Donna has nine children, but she's only carried one to term herself.

That's because she is a mare who has a career as a reining horse, and her human family has opted to use recipient mares to carry and birth all but one of her offspring.

"We did an embryo transfer on them ... so that I could keep riding and showing the mama without her having to carry her own babies," said Courtney Linde, co-owner of Liberty Ranch and Little Donna, who started reining in 2003.

Linde provided an explanation of the breeding process using a recipient mare.

"You breed the [biological] mother,

and then seven days later, you flush the embryo," Linde said. "You literally attach a saline solution bag and you run water into their uterus, and it flushes out and then there's a little catch pan. When it comes out, it looks like a little bubble ... but it's a little bubble that sinks."

That is then transported to the recipient candidates, where the embryo is implanted into the mare who will carry and nurse the baby.

Sometimes the process of removing the embryo can be a bit tricky in timing, as there's a small window in which the embryos can be removed from the biological mother safely.

"They get really big," Linde said. "They double in size every day. ... One time, during an ice storm, we had to wait an extra day, and the embryo was so big that my vet took it to the [recipient] place in a petri dish, not in a test tube because it was so big. So, we called her baby in a bowl."

The breeding process itself is one that Linde loves being part of from

start to finish, helping catch the embryos and then caring for the recipient mares from the 45-day mark when the pregnancy is verified as viable through when they wean the babies.

"I'm responsible for caring for all their nutrition and vaccines and vitamins or anything like that that I want to give the mamas," she said. "They're carrying precious cargo for me."

The births can be tricky, too.

"There's staying up all night long watching the cameras because if it's a hard labor and you lose the baby and you were sleeping, that would be awful," she said. "So, it's late nights and stressing."

Most of her babies are born in February or March, which means the weather can make the births even trickier.

Linde described Little Donna as her "absolute favorite horse," wanting her temperament to be passed down to her babies.

Some of those children, including three of her youngest, have been sired

by Magnum Chic Dream, who was sired by Smart Chic Olena out of Sailin Barbee.

He is an \$11 million sire, according to magnumchicdream.com, and he is a part of the National Reining Horse Association Hall of Fame.

"He's quite a bit older, so he's no longer standing at stud," Linde said. "They have frozen that they can still use, but once that's up, that's it. That's why this year I did two of him, because I really like the cross and I wanted to get two last babies of him."

Linde loved the combination of the two horses.

"Her weaknesses were his strengths, so I really thought the combination of the two would kind of even it out, and I really think it has," Linde said.

Three of her four offspring who currently live on Liberty Ranch—Duke, Bruno and Madonna—have the same striking light blue eyes that their mother has.

Duke, who will turn 2 in January,

Characteristics sought in competition sought in breeding

is much like his dam and will also be a reining show horse.

“I think he’s going to be something special,” Linde said, adding that “he is kind and beautiful and athletic, so I’m excited to see what he does. We’ll get him started in the next couple of weeks, get him under saddle and just go from there. It’s all excitement now. It’s anticipation and all the potential.”

Another of her babies, Ella, was sired by Patriot, and she has a different look than her dam and her half-siblings.

Patriot is also a descendent of Smart Chic Olena, who was the sire of Patriot’s sire Smart Spook.

He has earned \$836,028 and is the 2022 Run for Million Champion, according to stallionregisterdirectory.com.

“When she was born, she was the most timid baby,” Linde said. “She wasn’t sure about people and she was always scared, and now she’s the exact opposite. Now she’s very friendly.”

Linde and her partner Nate Smith prefer to not have humans handle the foals often when they’re young intentionally.

“I want them to be horses,” Linde said. “I want them to socialize with



Little Donna spends time in her stall while recovering from weaning her baby. She has been the dam of nine offspring, but she has only carried one, Madonna, to term herself.

Abigail Allen/The Post-Signal

horses. ... And other mares will teach them manners.”

All four of her babies on site share Little Donna’s friendly disposition and temperament.

Its characteristics like those that Linde and her family look for when they’re choosing who to breed.

“I want to better the breed,” Linde said. “I want to make sure that her confirmation is right, the personality is right, her talent is right, her try is right, because some of them, they’re so talented and there’s really no try.”

She’s also hoping Little Donna’s daughters will also be able to be a good candidate for breeding in the future.

“I normally sell the boys and I keep the mares,” Linde said.

Although surrogacy is typically the route that Linde and Nate have taken with Little Donna, they opted to allow her to carry Madonna to term herself in the hopes that they will be able to continue breeding Little Donna for many years, “and it will probably be the only one that she carries,” Linde said.

“They will reach a point where the lining of their cervix will actually harden, and then it’s harder for you to get embryos in flush,” Linde said. “So, if they carry at least once, it stretches



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Family hopes to continue breeding program for years

everything out and should make it so that she's got a longer breeding career in the future."

It's interesting to Linde that Little Donna has been a witness to several of her offspring's first moments as a calm observer only.

"A good portion of them have been born in that stall, and she literally watches her own babies being born," she said.

Linde and Nate involve their daughter Piper Smith in the process of raising the horses, not only in having her help with the horses but also in allowing her to be the primary name-giver for the new foals.

"She went with the Cinderella theme five years ago, and every year since then it's been at least one that has some Cinderella theme," Linde said.

The human horse family is in the early stages of being involved in horse breeding, being only the first and second generation to do so.

"The one that she carried, [Madonna], that's probably my best prospect that I hope to keep and breed and start doing the generational thing," Linde said.

Linde hopes that her human and equine families can remain intertwined for years to come.

"It's like my little girl childhood dream come true," she said. "There's something about bringing my daughter up to a baby that's 30 minutes, an hour old and is still wet, and it will walk right up to my daughter."

Linde wouldn't advise going into horse breeding without being sure.

"It has to be a passion," she said.



While Ella bears a bright white blaze on her face, similar to her dam Little Donna, she has her own look.

Abigail Allen/The Post-Signal

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