

## In This Issue

1. **EQSV Partners with Audubon Lifestyles & the International Sustainability Council to Create Equestrian Facility Program**
2. **The Importance of Lesson Horse & Tack Selection:**  
*Lessons From the Bergen Equestrian Center*
3. **Stronger Together:**  
*Advancing the Equestrian Agenda Through Cooperation & Collaboration*
4. **In the News:**  
*Dressage Today*
5. **Operations & Management News:**  
*Rhonda Gailey Joins Oaks Staff*
6. **Project News**
7. **Submit a Question:**  
*What is a Risk Mitigation Plan?*

# EQSV Partners with Audubon Lifestyles & the International Sustainability Council to Create Equestrian Facility Program

In conjunction with Equestrian Services LLC and the International Sustainability Council, we are currently under development of the The Audubon Lifestyles Equestrian Facility Program. The program will include sustainability models for economic, environmental and social criteria. Our approach will not only include safety protocols for horses and riders, but also criteria for facility planning, environmental practices and operations. Through these standards, equestrian facilities will be recognized for following design and operational parameters that promote all aspects of sustainability.



## The Process:

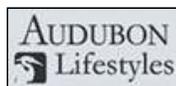
This program is a collaborative effort while it is designed and refined, but once established, it will be a stand-alone program and rating system implemented and managed by Audubon Lifestyles, in conjunction with Equestrian Services. The five categories currently include:

1. Economic/Business Model
2. Horse Care & Human Safety
3. Facility & Operations
4. Environmental Practices
5. Outreach & Education



Based on a point system, an equestrian facility can apply for an approval rating of anywhere between one to five stars. Any facility securing a 3-star rating or higher will also receive the International Sustainability Council "Seal of Sustainability".

We anticipate the launch of this program by First Quarter 2009.



To learn more about Audubon Lifestyles, [please click here.](#)



To learn more about the International Sustainability Council, [please click here.](#)

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## The Importance of Lesson Horse & Tack Selection:

## Lessons From Bergen Equestrian Center

By Alejandra Abella

Selecting the right horses and tack for a lesson program is not only of the utmost importance, it is also so logical and obvious that it doesn't merit an article! Or does it? We all know that having quiet, dependable horses for a lesson program is what keeps students safe and happily learning, but, as it turns out, lesson horse and tack selection has many facets and nuances and can be as complex as a science and as beautiful as an art.

During the month of September, and as part of our management of the Bergen Equestrian Center in Leonia, NJ, I had the pleasure of conducting a lesson horse and tack evaluation staff-training session at the Center. The capable staff was a pleasure to work with and helped me peel and study all the layers of the fascinating process of evaluating and selecting two of the most important pieces of the lesson program puzzle.



### It's Not Just About Temperament

Temperament and disposition are some of the most desirable qualities we want in an individual, be it a lesson horse or a person! It's fascinating how many lessons learned transfer across species and experiences, and a willing, calm and friendly attitude goes a long way for anybody. However, lesson horses have many roles: they must carry us through our riding lessons safely, but they must also earn their keep and participate in the financial health of the general facility program. As a result, a willing temperament is the obvious and most important characteristic, but it's not enough; the lesson horse must also be a versatile, healthy mount with a low, long-term price tag.



Versatile lesson horses are those that have been exposed to several different disciplines and levels of training. Especially in areas where riders have many and varied interests, the lesson horse that can speak to the largest portion of the market is also the most versatile and the most likely to always have a job at the facility. Within markets with a strong interest in the English disciplines, a versatile, well-rounded horse typically can do flat work/dressage up to Second Level, is capable of jumping up to at least 2'6" and can carry a rider with three good gaits (walk/trot/canter), in a balanced and quiet frame, on uneven terrain, such as across country and/or on trails. The ultimate versatile horse in this type of market may also drive and be able to serve all levels and ages of riders, from beginners to advanced, children and adults - but that jewel is hard to find! Just as it is impossible for us to ask that our human colleagues wear every hat there is to wear, we also cannot ask it of our equine colleagues. And when we find what we need in a lesson horse, we must praise him, admire him, thank him and take very good care of

him!

Training (type and level) therefore becomes an important factor to consider when ensuring a match between a lesson program's needs and what a lesson horse can offer. In addition, health plays a major role in not only what the lesson horse wants to do, but also what he actually *can* do. Let's not forget that horses are incredibly generous, willing, gregarious animals that have - for centuries - been kind enough to let us lead them around and ask all kinds of tasks from them. Horses have carried us into battle and changed the borders of countries, they have moved us and our belongings and products from place to place, they have helped us work our farms and cattle, and they have quenched thirst (have you ever had mare's milk?!) and prevented hunger in many cultures around the world. In the US today, they mostly provide us with entertainment, physical exercise and companionship - a tall order. For all this, the least we can do is make sure that we select the horse with the right health status to do the job required.

Health in a lesson horse is also important in terms of the bottom line: a lesson horse with a high monthly vet/care bill may be taking on a full workload, but if he costs more to keep healthy than he makes, then he loses the facility money. Equestrian facilities are not big profit centers and most frequently struggle to break even, so maintaining a lesson horse that costs the facility money is not good business. Lesson horses that need extra care must be placed in programs or homes that won't tax them beyond their bodies' capabilities and that will be able to take on the financial responsibility without suffering from the financial loss. Most importantly, however, we owe the lesson horse the right start in terms of health: only horses with the right age and conformation to do the job required should be selected for lesson programs. All of us - riders, trainers, and managers - have the responsibility of not breaking horses down by working them beyond their physical capacity or their conformation.

Tack selection for lesson horses plays an important and



frequently-misunderstood role in the health and price-tag of a horse. The wrong size and type of bit can truly hurt a horse's mouth and cause riding issues, and bad saddle fit is the number-one cause for back pain in horses. It can lead to a myriad of problems, from soundness issues, to dangerous reactions to the pain (frequently mistaken for misbehavior and treated as such). Saddle fit is complex, and saddles have several parts where problems typically arise (the gullet and panels are frequent culprits). With these parts and their pitfalls in mind, saddles for lesson horses - and the lesson horses themselves - should be selected with the general characteristics of the lesson herd conformation in mind. This is because some saddle brands and designs fit some breeds, sizes and/or types of horses better than others and, even though every horse should receive a proper and individualized fitting, purchases can generally be planned based on breeds, sizes and types. As a result, carefully-planned lesson herd and tack purchases can help prevent the constant wild-goose chase for the right saddle, can lead to better back health for the horses, and can save the facility money. How? Because \$2,000 lesson horses can quickly become \$6,000 horses if they require a custom-made saddle and bit to stay healthy and do their job!

## A Puzzle or a Game of Dominoes?

A puzzle is not complete unless all of its pieces are in place. So must we think of an equestrian lesson program, and the pieces of the puzzle are many: the program must serve the needs of the clients, and the horses and tack must fit into both the program's needs and those of the budget. When we don't consider all the pieces that go into horse and tack selection, the consequence of our oversight is a ripple effect that affects the health of the horse, the equestrian experience of the client and the bottom line. So is it a puzzle or is it a game of dominoes? It's both, but it's also a science and an art, and like all of the above, it is fun, interesting and exhilarating!

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## Stronger Together: Advancing the Equestrian Agenda Through Cooperation & Collaboration

By Michael Donovan

Interest and participation in many areas of equestrian activities is growing at the same time that this country's economic challenges are forcing many equestrians to acknowledge the economic realities of their involvement with horses. Proper horse-keeping is costly, and despite that, the vast majority of business activities involving boarding and lessons do not make money because current rate-structures simply do not cover all expenses incurred. Reconciling this growing rift between what equestrians (both active and "passive") want and the sustainability of services available to them is a key issue facing all who have an affinity for the horse.



Many groups and individuals exist that are committed to the continuation and expansion of man's relationship with the horse. These include riders from English and western disciplines, seasoned competitors and leisure riders, generational farm owners and master-planned community developers, active equestrian participants, and those who simply enjoy seeing horses. However, perceived differences between these groups often prevent their voices from speaking in unison or even have them sound off in opposition to each other. We must seek the common ground we all share – dedicated lands for riding, pasture and growing hay; sustainable operations that provide quality care and livelihoods for horses and barn staff; and the opportunity to deepen our understanding and appreciation of these majestic animals – through education, practice, competition and just observation. Strategies to achieve these goals begin with the understanding that as equestrian enthusiasts, our similarities are more important than our differences. Other strategies include:

## Don't View Developers as the Enemy



Many equestrians, particularly those owning rural farmland, view development only in a negative light. Development does mean change – and certainly development has taken place that has been detrimental to equestrians. Nevertheless, our growing population and the economic vitality of this country require some development take place. Our challenge as equestrians is to work with developers for the inclusion of equestrian-friendly elements in their plans.

Most development (and certainly all master-planned communities) is subject to a municipal approval process. This process will include some number of meetings or public forums where your wishes (and the wishes of all other like-minded equestrian enthusiasts) will be considered. Community support is a key component of the approval process, and most developers seek out the endorsement of local groups.

Additionally, more developers now understand the economics of equestrian operations and use the community framework to subsidize their equestrian amenity. In this manner, they can provide a truly sustainable operation at less than "true-cost" to the active equestrian.

## Think Beyond Your Discipline

It makes sense that most equestrians focus their energy on a single discipline. There is more time to be spent learning all the intricacies of one riding style than most lifetimes can provide, and from a business standpoint, the financial implications are significant. In a profession where, historically, most have had to scrape to get by, taking a dressage rider into your hunter/jumper barn generally means less income for you. However, there are larger issues facing equestrians today that require inter-disciplinary cooperation to ensure the outcomes that benefit us all.



Hay for our horses, and the land on which it is produced, has become more scarce, due to recent development practices as well as climatic changes. While we may not be able to change the weather, we can affect what lands will be available to produce hay, and to whom the farmers will sell their crop. Regionally-associated equestrians collaboratively approaching hay farmers to contract hay purchases is a relatively simple undertaking that benefits the farming and equestrian communities alike. Keeping enough hay fields from becoming condominiums can be more challenging, but with sufficient

broad-based equestrian support (and forethought) it is imminently achievable.

Also related to the hay issue, maintaining open space for equestrian activities like riding and driving generally involves participation in municipal (e.g., city, county or township) master-planning processes or the approval for specific developments. Here again, equestrian enthusiast voices speaking in unison will exert maximum influence.



## Engage the Passive Equestrian Enthusiast

This represents perhaps the largest single opportunity – and the hardest for most to realize. The number of people that feel a connection to or an affinity for the horse – but ride rarely, if ever – far exceeds the number that regularly ride. The emotional well-being we derive from the company of animals is well-documented, and it's no surprise that the graceful and majestic horse strongly generates this response. It all begins with bringing people together with horses in a safe, non-threatening way. Developers of successful equestrian communities and their facility-management teams understand that this is the lifeblood of these communities. From clinics, demonstrations and un-mounted programs, down to hosting a seasonal picnic or barbecue – giving people an opportunity to simply experience being around these magnificent animals is likely to engage them in our cause.

Our efforts to shape the future must include participation at the grass-roots and policy-making levels – from social networking with other equestrians to attending the master-plan meeting at your county or township. Development is a fact of life and will impact the equestrian lifestyle. That impact can also be shaped and influenced to meet the needs of all constituents who make their positions known. Through cooperation and collaboration, we have the opportunity to preserve, direct and enhance the quality of experience we all have with horses.



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## In the News: *Dressage Today*

Equestrian Services, LLC continues to make headlines and bylines. This past September, we were featured in the article "[Living Green](#)" in the magazine



*Dressage Today.*

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## Operations & Management News: Rhonda Gailey Joins O'Connor Signature Staff at The Oaks as Resident Equestrian Facility Manager

Rhonda Gailey has joined the O'Connor Signature Team as Resident Facility Manager for The Oaks. Rhonda brings diversified equestrian experience and over 14 years of proven professional business and management expertise to O'Connor Signature at The Oaks.



Rhonda's professional business experience entailed obtaining national builder clients (over 46 communities) and producing high-volume sales for residential, built-new homes in master-planned communities throughout the Southeast.

She oversaw large sales and marketing campaigns and managed budgets, initiated and provided training seminars for new home-sales representatives, opened multiple offices, managed an in-house office staff of 24 and oversaw and managed 180 real estate agents.

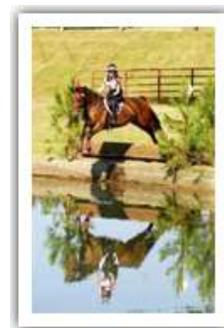
Rhonda is an avid rider, competitor and horsewoman. She is an active member of the United States Equestrian Federation, The United Dressage Federation, the United States Eventing Association, the Area III Adult Rider program and the United States Pony club. She is also in the process of obtaining her ICP certification with the USEA.

Rhonda has been around horses all of her life. She has been riding and competing in Dressage, Show Jumping and 3-Day Eventing for many years. In 2003, she designed and built her own farm, which she is able to manage day-to-day while teaching lessons, training, and buying and selling horses for herself and clients. She has competed and placed at the area championships and the American Eventing Championships for the past several years, with a variety of different horses. She has been trained by, and ridden with, many Upper level, Advanced and Olympic Riders, such as David O'Connor, Karen O'Connor, Imtiaz Anees, Ralph Hill, Denny Emerson many other Grand Prix riders.

She enjoys teaching children and adult amateurs to prepare them for Pony Club ratings, recognized shows, and coaching at shows.

She has successfully completed classes on the following equine-related topics:

- Parelli Natural Horsemanship
- Equine Nutrition (by Kentucky Equine Research)
- Show Jumping Course Building (with Richard Jeffrey)
- Safety System for XC Riding
- Saddle-Fitting for the Equine Athlete
- Rider Fitness: The Mind/Body Connection
- The View From C: A Dressage Judge's Perspective
- Horsemanship & Stable Management Skills
- Olympic Event Show Grooming
- Understanding the Horse's Mind (by Robert M. Miller)



### Rhonda's Philosophy:

Rhonda is passionate about horses and the world of riding in general. She focuses on the development and education of horses and riders of all levels. She takes delight in assisting riders of all ages and levels in accomplishing their goals. She is also persistent about safety, furthering her understanding of the horse and sharing her knowledge with students. Her philosophy is that "everyone will learn something new every day." She enthusiastically professes to teach "anyone who wants to learn!"

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## Project News

- **Equestrian Services continues to work with The Ford Plantation.**
- **Equestrian Services completes Feasibility Analyses** for projects in California and Michigan.



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## Submit a Question: What is a Risk Mitigation Plan?

The Risk Mitigation Plan (also sometimes referred to as a risk response plan or risk management plan - RMP) communicates how specific risks (generally safety-related in equestrian centers) will be dealt with and the action steps that are required to carry them out. It gives staff members a clear sense of the actions that they are expected to take during an emergency and provides management tools with an understanding of what actions are being taken on their behalf to alleviate risk.



RMPs at equestrian centers are often overlooked but are a very important tool because they can minimize, and often prevent, injuries to employees, clients, visitors and animals. Focus on the safety and security of the facility, the neighboring community and the environment are some of the goals of a RMP. A comprehensive RMP calls for a bi-annual evaluation, with creation of protocols and procedures for handling a variety of risks. These can include risk avoidance, risk reduction, risk acceptance and the transferring of risk.

A very simple thought process about risk assessment includes:

1. Identifying risk issues (i.e., What would happen if...? Is it possible that...? Could someone...?)
2. Identify the causes - think about what could cause the problem to occur.
3. Impact - What could be the consequences? What is the likelihood of that occurring?
4. What is the risk?
5. What could reduce this impact?
6. What are the recommended actions? - Identify practical steps to prevent the risk.
7. What is the action plan? - Create a chart to prioritize the actions for corrections.

The components of the Bergen Equestrian Center Risk Mitigation Plan includes a thorough risk assessment of the buildings, the rings (footing and fences), the total landscape, fire suppression systems (quarterly testing of sprinklers and alarms in all barns) and our on-site staff housing, to name a few. Operationally, it includes reporting incidents and tracking them, addressing suspicious activity and behavior from one or more individuals trespassing on the property, emergency situations for injuries, a horse or human fatality, bringing in educational programs (such as the fire department training staff on fire extinguishers), and doing emergency drills. We also have a chapter on what to do in the event of a natural disaster, and how that would affect the care of our 70+ horses and employees that live on-site. We also have a chapter on special events, such as shows and clinics. We keep all of these in a binder in the General Manager's office, and incident reports are included in our monthly status reports.



Last month, we ran a fire drill exercise one evening at the Bergen Equestrian Center. We had three fire departments and two police departments participating, and there were eight pieces of equipment, including a ladder truck and ambulances. A few weeks prior to the drill, we invited the local and county Fire and Police Departments to come to the Center. We performed introductory training with the Departments on equine behavior and taught them how to lead a horse. We also tested the horses' response to the firefighter equipment worn by the men. The horses snorted and were leery of the breathing apparatus, but eventually the horses began to ignore them. In-depth discussions were held about the potential reactions of the horses when the fire trucks roll up with sirens blaring, and (depending on where the fire was) how

our horses would be evacuated, and how we would get the horses to the staging areas for evacuation. We divided up the horses in the main barn per paddocks and turnouts and color-coded them, so our staff would have direction as to where the horses would all go. With over 70 horses on-site, and over 50 in the main barn alone, organization is critical. During the fire drill, we timed the response of the departments and figured out what we would need to do for those first few moments before they arrived. During the drill, we blew smoke into one of the barns and the grooms worked the evacuation, as planned, side-by-side (fantastically!) with the Departments during the drill. The horses trusted us to lead them through the smoke into safety. We had very good training.

Granted, during a real fire, with various materials burning, the black toxic smoke will be the biggest killer of both humans and horses. We are hopeful that our fire suppression systems will do their job if we ever face such an event.

All agree that practice and drill to the point that an evacuation is routine will be the best response to a fire, and this will increase survival rates for horses and humans alike. I highly encourage all managers to develop those relationships with first-responders, who are a great group of people and always willing and able to help. In addition, it is paramount that each equestrian facility develops a RMP and that drills are created and performed on a regular basis. Being prepared is half the battle.

*Kristi Seymour*  
*General Manager, Bergen Equestrian Center*

**Note:** First photo in this section is courtesy of [www.myequinenetwork.com](http://www.myequinenetwork.com).

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