

Can I Tell You About Pony Club?

WIHS Provided An Opportunity To Explain Everything Pony Club to Everyone

By Dawn Bellinger

I recently helped organize a vendor booth at the Washington International Horse Show (WIHS) at the Capital One Center in downtown Washington, DC.

Twenty minutes from my house, it was easy for me to zip downtown and tell the 20,000+ visitors about Pony Club. I quickly developed a script that I repeated 50 times a day for five days. I loved watching parents faces as I explained what Pony Club was all about – their faces lit up the more I explained!

Pony Club is a National Organization, actually an International Organization, which is where our curriculum comes from. The national

organization also provides our certification system, which means that, wherever your child goes in the U.S. or even abroad, when she walks into a barn and says “I’m a Pony Club C2,” everyone knows what that means and they know that she can ride almost any horse in the barn and more importantly take care of every horse in the barn.

We believe our members need to learn to ride AND take care of their ponies equally. By the time your child reaches the C2 level, they can run their own small barn. They know when to call the vet, what to do until the vet arrives AND what information to give the vet over the phone to help them direct



The Virginia, Capital & Maryland Region Pony Clubs combined efforts to host a Pony Club booth at the Washington International Horse Show in October.

PHOTO COURTESY: DAWN BELLINGER

care until they arrive.

The curriculum and certification program are provided by the national organization. The regions provide the competitions and the local clubs and centers provide your instruction. Just like girl scouts or boy scouts but for horse lovers.

As you may know,

Pony Club supports many different disciplines, offering competitions and teaching Horse Management in all of them. But, not all clubs and centers teach all of the disciplines.

How do you know if there’s a club or center near you?

We have clubs and centers

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Pony Club.....from p. 23 all over the country, which means that if you move, your child will maintain his or her certification and keep going in the program.

You can visit our website, put in your zip code and pull up a map of clubs and centers near you. You will want to explore each of those nearby to ask which disciplines and activities they support.

Which local club or center you join, depends on what works best for your family because what works for my child and my family, doesn't necessarily work for you and your family.

Let me explain the difference between clubs and centers. Pony Club began in England and came to the U.S. in the 1950's as a way for the local hunts to teach their children to ride "safely" AND take care of their ponies.

It began with clubs. Each member had a pony in their back yard. I live in Arlington, Virginia. I can't have a pony

in my back yard. Centers were developed as the cities grew and more and more families couldn't have a pony.

Centers are commercial barns that have "bought into" the Pony Club program. They teach the Pony Club curriculum and attend Pony Club competitions and activities just like a club. The only difference between Clubs and Centers for the members is that most Center members are riding school horses.

Most of the families I spoke to at the WIHS wanted to know where the nearest Riding Center was to them. Those who live inside the District of Columbia limits have no close choices in Virginia and are better off going to Maryland. Those in Virginia have a few choices, some closer than others.

The closest Riding Center to the city just started with 16 members in September, Team VVS Pony Club Riding Center by owner Bill Payne and Administrator Angie Camacho. The VVS is short for Vintage

Valley Sporthorses, which Bill started many years ago. The property in Catlett, Va. has both indoor and outdoor arenas so they can ride year round.

Bill wanted to start a Pony Club Riding Center because he knows how valuable the Horse Management curriculum is to riders. He wanted his riders to have that advantage.

This summer he built a cross-country course on the property and his members were able to attend the region's D level eventing rally (Pony Club term for competition) as a result.

Virginia Region is lucky to have four Riding Centers. In addition to Team VVS, we have Misty Brae in Aldie, and Serene Acres and Red Gate Farm in Bluemont. Red Gate's Pony Club is less than a year old and run by a graduate A from Difficult Run Pony Club in Virginia, Christie McKittrick.

Both Christie and Angie said that the most important tip they could give new Center Administrators is to get as many parents involved as

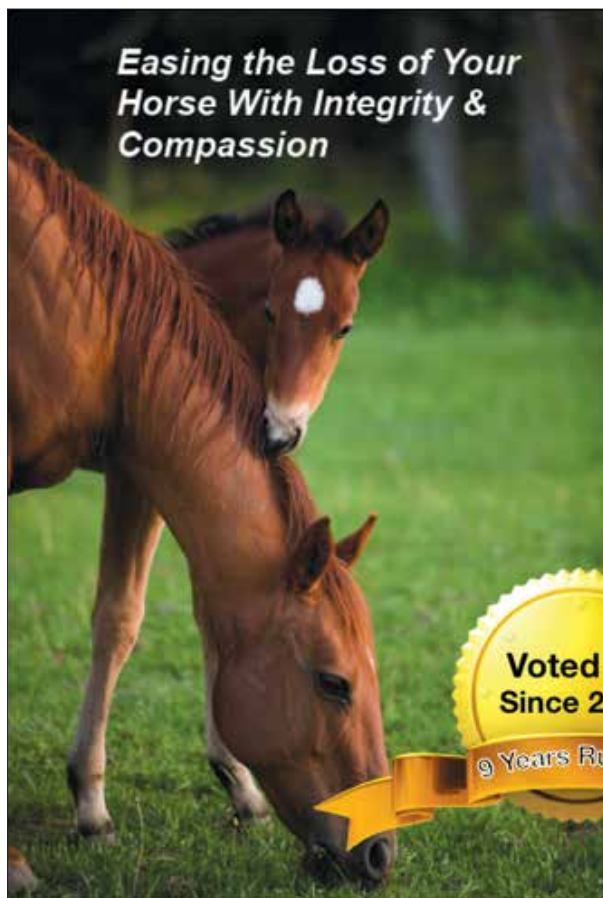
possible, as early as possible. Give them all a job. They will have more fun and feel more vested in the program.

Many of our Riding Centers also have adult members, called Horsemasters. They enjoy the camaraderie as well as gaining the horse management knowledge they may have missed along the way.

Horsemasters take part in the regular lesson program along with the kids, depending on ability, and compete at our rallies on teams with other Horsemasters.

To get more information about Clubs and Centers in Virginia near you, view the map on our website at <https://vrponyclub.org/clubs-centers> or email VRPCmembership@gmail.com.

About The Author: Dawn Bellinger is an alum and mother of an alum of River Bend Pony Club in the Virginia Region. She now serves on the Virginia Region and United States Pony Clubs Boards.



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