

# The Loudoun County Equine Alliance

## Equestrians On A Mission To Preserve And Promote The Industry They Love

By Sophie Desmond

“Oh no, don’t knock over the wine!” someone laughs as Cletus, a very good hound belonging to Loudoun County Equine Alliance (LCEA) vice president Michelle King, wags his tail a bit too close to the coffee table. “Everyone mind your snacks.”

provides to first responders – and horse owners – is an understanding of the equipment available to rescue them,” says Van der Vaart, “as well how to handle issues like barn fires, etc. And it’s not just horses, it’s cows and other large animals too.”



PHOTO COURTESY: STEPHANIE JENNINGS

**Loudoun Hunt Master Larry Dale, looking dapper in his formal hunt attire, with LCEA board member Marion Lee at the Annual Expo.**

Several members of the LCEA board had gathered at King’s house for an informal meeting. Once everyone had a plate and a beverage, they immediately begin discussing a plan to bring the Technical Large Animal Emergency Rescue (TLAER) training program to Loudoun’s first responders. “It’s training on how to extract a horse from a difficult position,” Janet Van der Vaart, LCEA member and mounted search-and-rescue rider, explains. “What’s common is horses going down in their stalls that aren’t able to get up, horses going down in creeks that aren’t able to get up. They fall into pools a lot, into wells, and have trailer accidents.”

“There was the pony that climbed into the loft of the hay barn,” adds Stephanie Jennings, a horse trainer and LCEA’s treasurer.

“So what the TLAER training

This particular training has been in the area before. In a perfect world, it would be available every two to four years. The last time TLAER was in Loudoun was about eight years ago, so one of LCEA’s current efforts is to organize a training seminar at the Loudoun County Fairgrounds for the summer of 2020.

“We’ll need grants to put it on,” says LCEA president Kelly Foltman, an equine veterinarian, “and sponsorships, because these first responders don’t get money in order to do this. And not just first responders but veterinarians as well – they can get their continuing education credit doing this. So that would be the hands on training, and then anyone else, other horse owners, would be able to pay to watch and audit the course. It’s a big expectation for us, but I think it’s our next thing.”

Currently, the biggest event for the LCEA is their annual Equine

Expo at Stone Tower Winery in Leesburg. Led by Jennings, the Equine Expo is an opportunity for local horse businesses to share information, showcase their products and services, and to talk to riders, trainers, landowners, and other business owners from the area.

Since the first Expo four years ago, it’s become so big that the LCEA has had to turn some businesses away due to space. It’s also become a go-to event for anybody seeking political office on the local level. Loudoun Board of Supervisors Chair Phyllis Randall (D), Catoctin District Supervisor Geary Higgins (R) and Blue Ridge District Supervisor Tony Buffington (R), all made an appearance at this year’s Expo, as did several new candidates for county and state office. “That goes to show how meaningful the Expo has become,” says Foltman.

Loudoun County, and western Loudoun in particular, is home to some of the most established horse country in the state. By the numbers, there are more horses in Loudoun than any other county in Virginia, and the horse industry

generates approximately \$180 million in economic activity for the county, according to a 2015 survey conducted by the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at the University of Virginia.

Loudoun is also one of the most rapidly growing counties in the state, and with growth comes development.

“We’ve lost hundreds of miles of trails,” says Van der Vaart. “Loudoun used to be home to a 100 mile endurance ride. You can’t do that here anymore.”

The horse industry relies on affordable land and open space in order to thrive and to have the economic impact that it does.

“That’s really what our work comes down to,” says Foltman. “We have a very important task. In order to thrive and to have the economic impact you need to conserve the rural areas. You need quality show and training venues and miles of multi-use trails that allow equestrians. These efforts will bring more equestrians to Loudoun in the form of residents or equine tourists. We see the urgency. But we see the potential as well.”



**Above: Izzy’s Mark trained by Susan Cooney won the Maiden Flat race followed by Somerset Rose and Gandhi’s Teardrop at Blue Ridge.**

