



The Carolina Spring Classic

Nothing Could Be Finer

By Sally Kay
A & S Photography

Did you realize that show jumping, which encompasses the traditional hunter and jumper divisions, is the leading equestrian activity in the United States? In fact, over 600,000 horses and ponies compete regularly in recognized and unrecognized competitions across the country. Current trends in the market place indicate that show jumping will increase its dominance in the area of equestrian leisure activities. Higher discretionary income baby boomers, a growing base of senior riders, plus incentive programs within breeds such as the American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA), The Thoroughbred Incentive Program (TIP) and the United States Hunter-Jumper Association (USHJA) Pre-Green Hunters Incentive Program, all serve to boost the ever growing participation in this unique sport. Just imagine the economic impact that these events have on their respective host communities and businesses.



Rick and Cathy Cram, owners and operators of the 26 year-old horse show management company, Progressive Show Jumping, LLC (PSJ) of Aiken, SC, are seasoned professionals who produce hunter/jumper horse shows of all levels throughout North and South Carolina. "We are thankful for the tremendous support of our exhibitors," offers Rick. "The Southeast hunter/jumper industry has embraced our philosophy of continuing the growth cycle for young equestrians. Without the local level shows, the industry becomes stagnant. Development for both the horse and the rider is accomplished by offering shows at cost effective venues for all levels of competition."



All hands are on deck for PSJ's upcoming month-long Carolina Spring Circuit which kicks off April 1-4 with the United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) nationally recognized Camden Spring Classic at the South Carolina Equine Park (SCEP) in Camden, SC, that features a USHJA \$15,000 International Hunter Derby. After providing families the opportunity to spend Easter Sunday together, PSJ is pleased to host 1984 Olympic Show Jumping Champion Joe Fargis as he conducts a two-day clinic at the facility on April 6-7. All proceeds from the clinic will be donated to the SCEP Foundation as well as the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation of South Carolina. The locally sanctioned PSJ Camden Spring Show featuring a \$2500 South Carolina Hunter Jumper (SCHJA)

Palmetto Hunter Derby and a \$250 Pony Hunter Classic will be held April 10-12 also at the SCEP. "Numerous improvements have recently been made in stabling, arena footing, the number of arenas and lunging areas within the Equine Park," offers SCEP Board member John Cushman. "We are particularly pleased to have recently completed another covered arena for exhibitors to take advantage of during inclement weather and/or the warmer months."

"We always appreciate the opportunity to be at home," comments Jack Towell of Finally Farm which is based in Camden. "The Crams do a lovely job, and the hill [at SCEP] offers one of the best views for the International Hunter Derby. That is a special class, and it's wonderful to see the town of Camden come out and

support the show." Towell hopes for more nationally recognized hunter/jumper shows at the SCEP facility in the future. "It has some of the nicest footing in the South and the management is a class act."

Aiken's Highfields Event Center will take over as the hosting facility for the following two weeks of the USEF's nationally ranked premier, and more mature, Aiken Spring Classic's (ASC) Masters and Finale shows. These shows feature both \$5000 National and \$15,000 International Hunter Derbys, \$25,000 Jumper Grand Prixs, Young Jumpers, Take2 Thoroughbred Divisions and World Champion Hunter Rider (WCHR). Additionally, there will be a variety of hospitalities and social activities that benefit Danny and Ron's Rescue and Women Beyond Can-

cer, among others. Needless to say, the phrase 'You've Come a Long Way Baby' is an understatement when it comes to describing the seventeen year history of the ASC.

"We created the original show back in 1998 in an effort to support the area's 'A' show circuit," commented Rick. "The desire to offer a national competition for the Georgia/Carolina region lead us to purchase the date from a show that was originally held in Columbia, SC, and produced it as a single show on the infield of Aiken's Standardbred Training Center, otherwise known as McGhees Mile on Banks Mill Road. That same year, the late Tom Brennan approached us about purchasing the Charlotte Area Knights of Columbus Horse Show which had the dates of the following week. We, in fact, did and then formed the two-week Aiken Spring Classic (ASC) Circuit in 1999."

A change in ownership of the Training Center created a strenuous environment in which to conduct the shows; therefore, PSJ made the decision to move them to the Ford Conger Field at the Aiken Horse Park in 2000. Subsequently, the ASC grew from 300 stalls at the Training Center to 600 at Ford Conger Field. These shows were portable. It took management two months to set up, produce and tear down at the level of amenities it could afford during the time. "We had a couple of years that we hosted the SCHJA Benefit as a three-week circuit, and that was when we were at maximum capacity for an increased infrastructure that the Ford Conger Field could no longer accommodate," added Rick. "The temptation to use the permanent infrastructure that was in place at the nearby Highfields Event Center became too great in 2008. It was an easy decision from a financial point of view, but at the same time, it was hard from an emotional one." When the economy plunged later in 2008-2009, PSJ was assured that they had made the right decision in relocating the shows to Highfields.

The ASC has a perfect fit at Highfields with

Victoria Press aboard Mayfair - USHJA International Hunter Derby Winner at the ASC



600 stalls and five rings available. The 60-acre facility offers turn-out paddocks, plus an abundance of hand-held grazing areas for the horses. There are plenty of cost-effective overnight accommodations and restaurants close by for the exhibitors. "All of our customers love the town of Aiken," agrees Towell. "The show's parties

various activities give us community visibility for our existing and potential new insurance clientele."

"Whether it's Camden or Aiken, the respective businesses all benefit from our shows and we are pleased to help with generating the economies of these communities," offers Cathy.

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"Dietrich & Company Insurance has enjoyed many years of supporting Rick and Cathy," adds Shawn Dietrich. "It has been a pleasure to be a part of the facility changes and continuing efforts to provide a valuable show service. Their

"Sure, it can be challenging at times to keep a wide range of exhibitors happy. We understand that everyone has different expectations and needs for their horse show experiences." That being said, the Cram's goal remains the same, always keeping their standard at the highest level and continuing to make improvements to Highfields Event Center each and every year.

