

President's Page
November/December 2013
2013 Year End Report

NEDA is the largest single chapter dressage organization in the US, and this past year we demonstrated in a variety of way why members keep joining year after year. Although our members are located all over the six New England states, we have created a community of dressage enthusiasts that spans our geography and brings riders, trainers, coaches, and owners together to learn, compete, admire, comment, network and enjoy each other's company.

Our biggest organizational accomplishment for 2013 was the launch of our new Website, replacing one that was serviceable for many years, with more and more being dumped into it to the point where nothing could be easily located. With the user experience uppermost in our minds, a team of board members and members with expertise in this area, headed by Shawn Walker, went to work in December. The site was launched in July, attractive to look at, easy and intuitive to navigate, and able to be easily updated regularly by those who are responsible for NEDA events and activities. As a capstone to the effort, NEDA learned that its new website won the Best User Experience Award this year from USDF in its category of GMO's with over 500 members!! Since improving user experience was one of our main goals in redesigning the website, this was a wonderful affirmation of the work of the team.

NEDA's Christine Shea also won the First Person article award from USDF this year for her article in the Tip about attending the USDF convention for the first time. Congratulations, Christine. This gives me an opportunity to thank Tracie Richardson for her leadership of the Tip and Lee Cullen for layout and design. Our members look forward to seeing their Tip in the mailbox or inbox to learn about what is going on in the dressage world in New England, and Tracie and her crew never disappoint.

NEDA planned and executed a series of first-rate events during 2013. Our spring symposium in early May was designed by Kris Conquest, first-time event organizer for NEDA, specifically for lower level amateur riders and those who teach them, looking at the newly released USDF rider tests and training level freestyle. The rider tests focus exclusively on the rider, so that riders on horses not necessarily bred for dressage can test the quality of their seat and effectiveness of their aids. Alison Head, a well-known dressage judge, went through the tests with riders at Training, First and Second level to demonstrate different aspects of the tests and what judges are looking for. Marlene Whitaker, a professional freestyle developer for top horses throughout the country, spent the second day of the symposium working with riders on developing a training level freestyle. She had actually used the demo rider application videos to develop the frame of a freestyle for each demo rider, complete with music, and gave each rider his/her own CD at the end of each ride. Wow! Auditors were also wowed with the preparation of these two clinicians and came

away with tons of tips on riding tests, developing freestyles, and generally riding more effectively.

Our Fall Symposium with Christoph Hess, top German rider and trainer, gave us a return visit to beautiful Pineland Farms in late September – a spectacular time of year with picture perfect weather and New England fall scenery that drove auditors outside at every opportunity. Pineland Farms is a world-class equestrian facility with a heated arena described by Hess as a “cathedral,” and its generosity in hosting NEDA’s fall symposium last year and this deserves thanks from the entire New England dressage community. Beginning with an invitation-only day for professional trainers sponsored by Pineland Farms followed by a two-day symposium sponsored by NEDA, Christoph Hess delivered an in-depth lesson on developing a feeling for the horse and working to develop the horse within that feeling. Hess was informative, effective, charming and funny, engaging the audience in assessing the riders and horses’ needs and diagnosing problems. Riders demonstrated “feel” for what the horse needs on that day, and auditors similarly developed the same sense of how to assess and respond to the horse’s needs and capabilities on any given day, from starting babies right up to developing quality movements in the Grand Prix. This was Jenn Dillon’s final outing as organizer extraordinaire of the last several fall symposia. Thanks to Jenn for her super work on these daunting events.

As interesting and well-executed as these events were, and rich in learning opportunities for those who attended, they were not well-attended. We constantly receive survey responses from members indicating a wish for more learning opportunities for lower level riders, but the spring symposium had quite a small (but enthusiastic) audience. The NEDA board is beginning a conversation about our education program as a whole, the changing environment in which we organize and carry out programs, and how best to respond to the education needs of our members and serve the dressage community in New England. If you have thoughts about this subject, please send them to me at president@neda.org, so that we may include them in our thinking going forward. We have made no plans for education programs in 2014 while we have this conversation, so the slate is clear for new ideas.

Earlier in the month NEDA hosted a USEF Young Horse Symposium with Scott Hassler at Apple Knoll Farms in Millis, MA, that was successful and well-attended. Also in the education realm are the ongoing USDF “L” judge training programs, run by Sally Davenport, helping to open the door to judging for countless dressage riders and trainers. These sessions are in high demand across the country, vastly oversubscribed, with people coming from everywhere to participate. In addition to the licensing of new judges, the object of the course, these sessions are a great experience for auditors, who will learn in detail exactly what and how a judge is scoring for each movement.

NEDA hosts two recognized shows each year and a schooling show series at Strongwater Farm. The schooling show this year offered western dressage classes that attracted a few competitors and many observers, interested in learning what this new discipline is about. Our spring show in Marshfield was successful and well-subscribed. This year, for the first time, the spring show included NEDA's year-end awards banquet for 2012, a rollicking affair attended by nearly 200 people, with dancing and celebration. For 2013 our year-end award banquet returns to the fall with an event in downtown Boston on November 23, and its future location and time will be a board discussion item for 2014. Next year we will be debuting a recognized summer show in July, bringing back a long dormant NEDA tradition. Stay tuned!

NEDA Fall Festival of Dressage claimed the prize this year for the largest dressage show in the United States, with over 600 horse rider combinations and over 1600 rides. It incorporates the Region 8 championships, a CDI competition, Region 8 Breed Show Championships, a Paraequestrian competition, and an Open competition mainly supporting the championship participants' desire for practice before championship rides. This year, for the first time, NEDA had the HITS grounds in Saugerties, New York, to itself, and the reaction from competitors, trainers, volunteers, sponsors, and vendors was a big wow! This enormous show has been run for many years by the amazing team Deb Reinhardt, Region 8 director and head of Centerline Events, and Beth Jenkins, who continues to amaze with her organizational skills and calm in the midst of seeming chaos.

These are major accomplishments for an organization that has no staff. Deep thanks from the dressage community go to the organizers of these events, NEDA board members, and to the volunteers without whom they could never happen. We look forward to a great 2014, as we continue to seek to respond to the interests of our members and keep New England in the forefront of dressage education and competition in the United States.