

REPORT ON THE 2013 ARABIAN HORSE ASSOCIATION CONVENTION...LINDA MANWILLER

The Arabian Horse Association membership convention was held in Lexington, Kentucky, November 20-23, 2013. A total of 301 delegates were credentialed out of an eligible 435 people. The convention consists of a schedule of committee meetings and three general sessions. Most of the committee meetings are open to general membership as well as committee members. All committees are expected to discuss resolutions that have been assigned to them. In addition, this is generally the only time that a majority of committees meet person to person during the year. The bulk of pre-convention work is done by electronic media and telephone conversations. I attended several open committee meetings over the course of two days.

The first of these was the Bylaws Resolution Workshop. This was extremely sparsely attended (I think I counted six plus the committee itself!) and I expected it to be b-o-r-i-n-g, even though I knew the bylaws resolution was expected to be hotly debated. In fact, I stayed the entire length of the meeting and was impressed with the work the committee put into their resolution. Basically nothing was changed. However, articles were renamed and rearrange to make information easier to find. They took their audience over each area of the bylaws. You could tell how much time and effort they invested in the work. In the end, however, this resolution – after much debate – was referred back to Committee.

I also attended the Forum on Marketing 101 presented by Bill Harless, the AHA Director of Marketing. I have been to several of these and a similarity is found in all of them. We are in a heated competition for recreational dollars and time. Harless also believes that AHA has an identity crisis...we say we are heading toward the same goal, but we are using different lanes. We need to firm up who we are and what we do in reference to product, price, place, and promotion. It is necessary for clubs to articulate their 'WHY' – why do your members join, why the Arabian horse? Clubs need to define 'WHO' they are and what the value is to belonging to that club. The big catch-phrase for this marketing forum was "Sell the Life Style" by using all formats of public and electronic media, by following up prospective members, and by making good use of available AHA promotional tools – Discovery Farms, Learn to Ride, TAIL Program, One-Day shows, Mentoring, and Open Houses/Farm Tours.

The Sports Horse discussed the hunter/dressage split for halter classes at the SHNational and how they would be run. They also mentioned that 50% cross-entries would be needed to pay for the anticipated 16 new classes (at a cost of \$905/class). The mixed attire and appointments that are being seen in show hack under saddle classes are causing consternation among the judges of these classes. Riders need to ride with the appointments that match the attire. On the other hand, it also appears that judges are not always certain what is proper judging for a show hack class. A show hack primer will be included in the judges evaluation packets.

The Membership Committee spent a good portion of their time slot in discussing the proposed membership dues increase and why it is needed. This started with a general discussion on the financial needs of AHA. The Aurora building is an aging building that needs work. It has been determined that AHA would not be able to sell it at a reasonable price because it doesn't meet code in many areas. There is also the job market drain. There are more attractive, better paying jobs available. New computers are needed, job raises are lacking, and health insurance costs have gone up 18%. The Oracle database is antiquated. Programs are funded as money is available or if they pay for themselves. We have also suffered from a decline in registration for both

purebreds and partbreds and a decrease of membership renewals. The recent membership drive was a bright spot – kudos to Irvette Timms and her PAHA victory! The only consolation is that other breeds are in a similar situation.

As with the other committee meetings, the Youth Committee considered the resolutions assigned to them. They then presented a synopsis of the past year. They were able to double their fund raising efforts (the trailer raffle profits were over \$26,000 and the 2012 Silent Auction netted \$12,000) and actually had their best budget to date. A judging clinic is planned for the 2014 Youth Nationals as a prep for the judging contest at the National show. The TAIL program at the National Show was very popular. There has been a decline in the youth Creative Contests – they may have to reconsider their importance.

The majority of the overt action at Convention is generally found during the General Sessions. There are a number of reports to the membership in the form of speeches from the President, the treasurer, Executive Vice President, etc.. There was constant references to the idea of “selling the lifestyle” as a way to counter the decline in registrations and in membership. The financial outlook is getting better, but no one should relax over this. Money is still tight and there are expenses to the building and the computer system to consider. EVP Glenn Petty noted that the target audience has now become the 50 something woman with grandchildren! He also remarked that the first step is to capture her interest in horses, per se, before concentrating on the Arabian Horse. He also mentioned social media can be our friend – but it can also affect the perception of the horse adversely as well. The importance of local clubs was also a reoccurring theme in his talk.

A special tribute to Bazy Tankersley was a part of the general sessions. Another special recognition is the presentation of the Volunteer Awards. Kriss Phelps and Ed Peterson were the Region 15 winners for 2013.

The main reason for the General Session, however, is not to listen to speeches, but to discuss and vote on the resolutions. There were 21 resolutions presented to the delegates. Four were defeated, the bylaws restricting and the allowing of two unrelated amateurs to co-own and show a horse were referred back to committee. Six of the resolutions came to a vote in an amended form from the original. This last shows why a resolution that is originally discussed at club meetings may not be the final format of what the delegates are asked to vote on. Sometimes there are several forms to consider! Even the membership dues increase was approved to \$40 per individual (\$105 for three year membership) effective April 1, 2014.

An added enjoyment this year was a chance to visit the Al Marah Galleries at the Kentucky Horse Park. These are truly impressive – even when viewed with seven tour buses of people involved – it was akin to a cattle drive! I was most impressed with the fact that Ginny Kelsall personally knew a large number of the people mentioned – and even has one of her horses as part of the exhibit! This is definitely a museum that needs to be revisited at leisure.

If you go online www.arabianhorses.org you can download a copy of the Family Emergency Preparedness Plan that was distributed to convention attendees. And if you watch the short video clip from the convention, you can catch glimpses of both Irvette Timms and Kriss Phelps!

Commissioner’s Review Panel:

The duty of the Commissioner’s Review Panel is to review any and all complaints brought to the Judges and Stewards Commissioner. This group acts as a “jury” to determine infractions and act as a review panel for any penalty suggested by the Commissioner.

A discussion was held on the use of social media by judges and what should be done if any messages are deemed inappropriate, threatening or malicious.

Went into closed session

Arabian Professional and Amateur Horseman’s Association:

Discussion centered on new directions of the APAHA and the start of a grassroots program with six districts for better communications. The development of “Think Tanks” for each area to get more local ideas and activities.

The establishment of amateur subcommittee for different regions/areas of the country.

Changes in High-Point program to include incentive for horses showing in Halter and Performance.

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE:

The main topic of discussion was the resolution dealing with the need for an increase in dues.

1. Age of AHA building and the need for repairs as this would need to be done to sell as building is not even close to current codes and ADA requirements.
 - A. roof
 - B. HVAC
 - C. elevator
 - D. computer hardware
 - E. software licensing
2. Salaries of the staff have been at the same level for five years.
3. Increase in the cost of health insurance.

Consensus was that even though not popular the necessity was there.

Note resolution was passed by a large majority in convention.

Judges and Stewards Selection Committee:

This committee is just as its name suggests, they are responsible for the selection of Judges and Stewards for all the national shows. Usually only in closed session but a request was made to speak to them this year about the judges used and the Sport Horse Nationals and the obvious lack of concern for the exhibitors.