

# **2014 AHA Convention Report**

## **Irvette Timms, President, PAHA**

### **Wednesday, November 19**

The AHA Board of Directors Meeting was a mixture of reports and votes on housekeeping matters. Nominations were accepted for various committees, including Registration, US Nationals, Sweepstakes, Sport Horse Nationals and Endurance. Resolutions on which the Board needed to vote were reviewed, discussed and voted on.

During the Plenary Session, proponents for the various resolutions presented the reason for the resolution and its purpose. A number of this year's resolutions were simply housekeeping issues, i.e. remedies something that was either a past oversight or to bring rules into line with practices. Most of the resolutions produced little to no discussion by the delegates present. The exception to this was Resolution 27-14 which dealt with western style horsemanship and whether a bat or whip should be allowed. The proponent was the unfortunate recipient of a number of vocal dissenters.

### **Thursday, November 20**

#### **GENERAL SESSION**

We were welcomed to the first General Session by Cheryl Hansen. She spoke about the Convention theme – Connect, Collaborate, Create. Since the Convention will be in Denver for the next 2 years, this year the focus was on the Connect portion, next year will be Collaborate and the third will be Create.

Cynthia Richardson presented the State of the Association. She stressed that financially the association is being run much more like the business it is.

The keys points were:

A study was done of the existing headquarters building and it was determined that the best course of action is to stay put. The building is currently valued at \$1.3M, but it is 30 years old and requires some upgrades. These will be taking place and should ultimately produce savings in energy efficiencies and IRS tax credits and ensuring that the staff can be comfortable and able to do their jobs.

A Strategic Plan was done using process mapping to study issues of efficiency in operations. AHA is a service business with a high transaction volume, low transaction value model which requires high efficiency to be successful.

With regard to budget issues, the association has been following a conservative investment strategy. They have reached out to financial advisors and came up with a new policy for investments that will still be conservative but a bit more flexible. The show budgets were finished at Convention and the Executive Committee created a business plan for the year going forward.

Committee work is focused on strengthening AHA and looking at what other breeds are doing to see if there are areas that we can improve on based on their successes or failures.

As Arabian owners, we need to take pride in the fact that more than any other breed, we are FOR OUR HORSES. Cynthia is asking us all to CONNECT with fellow horse lovers, cheering them on and uplifting each other, sharing ideas and bring about change to move our organization to its next phase.

The new website will be rolled out in stages. AHA received grant money from USEF. It is important to remind members that when they join USEF, they need to choose Arabian as their first interest and then a discipline second.

American Horse Council advised that children's activities are chosen by mothers primarily so outreach needs to be done to moms regarding horse riding and ownership as being an lifestyle that teaches values and is healthy and wholesome for their kids. Also, the breed you learn to ride on is the one you most often stay with so promoting Arabians in Learn to Ride is key.

#### Club Charters:

Next order of business had to do with Charter Revocation for clubs. Twelve clubs were up for revocation and two clubs were voluntarily dissolving. The official revocation was postponed until Sunday to allow those clubs that were close to meeting the standard to find additional members.

#### Treasurer's Report from Bob Nash:

Mr. Nash reported that there has been a lot of progress over the last 2 years and the club is looking better financially. All areas performed better than budget due to cost cutting measures for the year ending March 31, 2014. Our cash position is improving. Fiscal 2015 is showing positive movement in revenues and the final results of at least 2 large shows were not yet known. AHA is on track for a \$150K-\$160K positive result by year end.

#### **JUDGES and STEWARDS COMMISSION Q&A** **PROFESSIONAL HORSEMEN'S COMMITTEE**

Originally scheduled as two sessions, these groups combined to go over 9 resolutions and discuss issues that came up during the year regarding the treatment of horses at shows. The Professional Horsemen's Committee reported that there was a concern regarding the overscheduling of horses, particularly at Youth Nationals. The question is whether this is abusive to the horse and would there be any way to mandate evaluations during a show to determine if a horse is being unduly stressed. It was suggested that more education regarding preparation of the horses for the environment, stress and weather be done.

There was also concern voiced over the shoeing of English horses. This is an ongoing item. Stan Mourey addressed this, saying there has been progress made. In 2012, four hours were lost at Nationals due to lost shoes vs no shoes lost in 2013. The pros present felt that lost shoes had more to do with arena footing and conditions at the shows than with the actual shoes themselves.

Stan talked next about positioning ourselves for the animal rights groups. Should we try to lead the way somehow? The problem seems to be that no matter what we do or say, it can be used against us. This tied in a bit later to the discussion regarding social media and how toxic that can be. Social media makes it even more difficult for us to get a positive message out. However, we need to focus on that aspect and make

every effort not to undercut each other. Again the subject of horse activities being healthy, active and building responsibility came out.

The Commissioner's office investigates complaints against officials as well as granting accreditations. Of the 327 competitions this year, 60-65 evaluations were received. Of those 20 were negative and of those only 2 were filed as formal complaints. Since the fee to do this is only \$10, Stan felt that this showed that most officials are doing their jobs well.

Judges School takes place in the first week of December. It is a great opportunity to learn what is being looked for in the ring and exhibitors are encouraged to attend. Judging should be about rewarding excellence, not placing horses as they enter the ring.

### **EQUINE STRESS/RESEARCH AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

The issue of shoeing came forward at this session as well. Education of the public is key. What are we trying to accomplish with the shoeing methods used? We need to be proactive rather than reactive. Explaining to a non-horse person or a non-show person that the horses are athletes and like human athletes they need help to stay comfortable and healthy for the long terms seemed to garner support with the group. Other practices that look abusive to casual observers were also discussed, such as bagging the halter horses. These things need to be addressed with outreach. Horses thrive on work and interaction so letting horses stand unused in a field is actually not beneficial to them. Again, being positive in our approach to communication with each other and the public.

### **DRESSAGE**

I attended the end of the Dressage session. Two resolutions were discussed and recommended for modification. Sport Horse Nationals has added judges for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> level and established a third ring to prevent the day from running 12 hours. There will be Western Dressage exhibition classes.

### **PROMOTING POSITIVE CHANGE**

The TAIL program reached many kids this year. It was suggested to engage Girl Scouts who have a horse badge, Home Schooling groups, foster homes and grade schools to give children a chance to interact with the horses. The idea of leasing and co-ownership was discussed. Something needs to be done to grow our base. The Horse Tales literacy project is another way to engage youngsters. Putting booths at women's expos is also an idea since it has been shown that women whose children have now grown up or who are settled in their careers make up a large portion of the new horse owners.

An idea that doesn't cost anything but could get people to an event would be to offer "free tickets" to a horse show and/or doing a VIP table raffle for the show to raise money for a charity.

## **Friday, November 21**

### **MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE**

The committee was to review 3 resolutions. One was withdrawn (3-14), 4-14 was voted down (this was later withdrawn by the proponent) and 8-14 received approval.

There has been a move from direct memberships with AHA to club memberships. Competition cards are less expensive through a club but noncompetition cards are more expensive. In order to build club membership, club presidents were urged to contact the regional director to access information for those on direct memberships (including email addresses). Brenna Whitlock is a good staff person at AHA to help out with questions or obtain information.

Building social interaction between club members was discussed. Consider waiving club membership fees for spouses of members already paid.

Of the reports that go out each month, only 25% are read. Membership overall is down 7% this year, but this is true across breeds. However, registrations are up 9% so that is a good sign and perhaps we can use this to build.

There were 11 clubs with less than 10 members. 3 had disbanded and 2 others had unofficially disbanded. Other clubs were trying to find members to fill their ranks in order to live another year.

Georgia Tachoire stepped down as committee chair.

### **AMATEUR COMMITTEE**

The Amateur Committee considered resolutions 11-14, 13-14, 14-14, 17-14, 19-14, 20-14, 21-14, 22-14, 23-14, 24-14, 25-14, 28-14 and EE-14. Other resolutions for this committee had been withdrawn prior to the session. All were approved with the exception of 28-14.

There was a discussion about leveling and how that will affect shows in the coming year.

A discussion of leasing horses to be shown took place. A second discussion regarding the allowing of two unrelated individuals to own a horse and for one or both of them to show as an amateur also was held. A rather lengthy handout was distributed with information on both ideas. After discussion, a vote was held to see what the committee felt about exploring one or both of these options. Both were referred to subcommittee and a group was formed to address this and report back.

### **GENERAL SESSION II**

Glen Petty gave his EVP report. One interesting fact was that the participation in non-breed horse activities are also showing a decline whereas they were previously steady or growing. As reported in Membership, registrations are up by 9%. However, transfers are down and we will be dealing with an aging horse population and declining membership. How can AHA assist clubs in turning this around?

Russ Taylor of the Sweepstakes Commission gave his report on the program which he said has been turned around and is now a solid program. AHA protects our horses and their heritage and Sweepstakes supports the future of the breed.

Volunteer Service Awards were given out. I was the proud recipient of a Region 15 award.

## **Saturday, November 22**

### **GENERAL SESSION III**

A very entertaining and enlightening keynote speech was delivered by Scott Trees, an equine photographer/videographer. Scott pointed out that our industry has lost sight of the horses. For every 100 horses, 90 will be average, 5 will be above, 3 will be exceptional and 2 will be super stars. Showing is only a small part of the business. Public perception is critical to growth and unfortunately, we still suffer from the notions that Arabians are pretty, but expensive and that you can't do anything with them. We need to emphasize that our horses are versatile and that they are a family horse. In chasing a shrinking amount of discretionary income, it is important that we can show that one horse can be used by many riders and do many things well. In short, we need to capture a new market and make our horses seem attractive for more than show ring use.

Holly Schnader gave a report on the Youth Board as president. Jacklyn Abernathy was the recipient of the \$1,000 Youth of the Year scholarship.

The Convention Planning Committee is looking of bids for 2017 for a location outside of Denver.

Four (4) club charters were revoked but the remainder of those who had been on the list managed to get the required number of members.

Nancy Harvey gave a report on the Arabian Horse Foundation. Research is being done at UC Davis and University of Florida on cerebella atrophy, Cushings, laminitis and epilepsy. AHF has donated funds toward these programs. AHF's 501 (c ) (3) status enabled AHA to realize \$30,000 in savings on the purchase of software.

Marketing's Julian McPeak shared the various ways she feels she is "works for the horse", rather than the association. There is a big push in social media. Updates are being made to the marketing plans to elevate the visibility of the breed. Slogan – "Life looks different with an Arabian Horse"

Gary Millar of Marketing reiterated that it is about horses and community. Horses can change lives and this is an outreach will be facilitated by the new website. We need to emphasize that competition is just one aspect of horse ownership. It is a healthy lifestyle choice. As owners and breeders, we need to share out passion with someone each week.

Mary Trowbridge gave her presentation on the Arabian Horsemen's Distress Fund. The fund received over \$10K in pledges immediately following. This was later doubled at the President's banquet by an anonymous donor.

Terry Andreason gave an updated on Arabian racing. Arabian Jockey Club is getting global coverage for racing due in part to the Arabian gallery at the Kentucky Horse Park. They are also working on two ways to expand the market – showing how race horses can have second careers and also leasing horses so people can try out the sport of racing for a smaller investment.

Stan Morey reiterated the statistics he had reported during his session earlier in the convention. He did say that everyone could do a better job of letting his office know about the good as well as the bad. He announced the judges for nationals.

The session concluded with the announcement of all election results.

Respectfully submitted,

Irvette Timms

***CONTINUE FOR ADDITIONAL REPORTS***

## 2014 AHA Convention Report

Wednesday, November 19<sup>th</sup>.

The Sport Horse Committee has finally started work on creating Sport Horse Showmanship. Sport horse showmanship will be run on the triangle and the handler will be judged. We ran these classes at Games this year and it was well received. I was named the chair of the sub-committee to create the rules applicable for this new class and will be working with three others. Our thought is to model these classes after the dressage sport horse breeding classes. The dressage folks already have these classes and scoresheet.

The Plenary Session was fairly uneventful while proponents discussed the merits of their resolutions. Many of the resolutions were fixes to existing problems. The one that did stir up quite a bit of discussion was 27-14 regarding carrying a whip or bat for western style showmanship. The proponents wanted consistency in attire between us and the stock horse breeds; carrying a bat or whip is not allowed in western attire. Ultimately, this resolution was withdrawn.

The Working Western Committee was divided up into smaller, focus groups. I was in the trail group. The general consensus is trail and working western is growing around the country. English trail appears to be growing on the east coast. I suggested soliciting the sport horse folks for English trail. Some shows struggle to get trail equipment. A one day working western show was held in Texas with great success. For those well versed in trail, the comment was made that good English trail courses are not the same as western trail set at English trail distances. English trail courses should be designed with a forward momentum in mind. Many around the group admitted that they use the same course and reset the distances.

The USEF Arabian Division Rules Committee was tasked with discussing and approving rule changes and clarifications from USEF. They had 38 items to address. Most are effective 12/1/2015, but some of the clarifications are effective immediately. Also discussed was USEF no longer printing rulebooks. The new CEO of USEF sees not printing the rulebooks as a cost saving measure. Many of those on the committee would at least prefer the option to get a hard copy of the rulebook especially for judges, stewards, and show secretaries. The problem, however, are the new rule changes which can occur throughout the year.

Thursday, November 20<sup>th</sup>.

The Convention's first general session began with our president, Cynthia Richardson's, state of the association address. Financially, we are slowly becoming more stable and the repayment of the borrowed Sweepstakes funds is making headway. The decision was made to keep the current office building which has an appraised value of \$1.3 million. While at Convention, a new HVAC system was being installed as well as new lighting throughout the building. The HVAC was shot. For a few dollars more, the new lighting system will hopefully mean a reduction in monthly utility costs and AHA was able to take advantage of IRS tax credits. Additionally, her message was about connecting with horse lovers. All breeds are in a shrinking market place and as more families chose non-horse activities, we need to connect with others in all walks of equestrian life to keep all of our activities alive. It's not so much an us versus them in a battle of the breeds, but a battle of all horse people to keep interest alive and flourishing. The simple thing we can all do is when renewing our USEF membership, please make sure to select Arabians as our activity/breed of choice. USEF gives money

back to AHA based on breed numbers. We need to all check Arabians first, then a secondary discipline or breed, if applicable.

The second Sport Horse Committee meeting focused on the resolutions that were assigned to this group. There was brief discussion about the low hunter resolution. For the most part, the group was in favor of the sport horse resolutions. The idea of adding 14.2h and under sport horse under saddle class will be brought forward to the appropriate committees.

The Sport Horse National Show Commission is now being led by Cathy Gage. Bill Pennington has stepped down. Jim Porcher was voted in. Cathy presented to the board of directors a new scoring system for the two judge system. Since the sport horse in hand splits by type was an over whelming success, the show commission would like the option to use total score for placings instead of ranking and points. Score A will be added to score B and then the class will be placed according to the total score. Since the SHIH type classes are now being judged by either two hunter or dressage judges, the commission thought this would be far easier for the exhibitors to understand. The groups concern was how will this affect placings? A gal in the audience agreed to get the results and re-pin the classes using the total score method. The Commission agreed to wait until her research was complete to see if the placings varied. Additionally, the Commission is looking to add sport horse under saddle by type for Nampa 2016 and has added two western dressage exhibition classes for 2015.

The Dressage committee worked on fixing the dressage seat equitation resolution. While many in the room agreed the judges need more guidance on how to execute these classes, the group's concern was that these equitation classes are being run too differently than the equitation classes for the other seats. The proponent copied verbatim the rule section from the dressage chapter to be included in the Arabian chapter. The sticking point for most was the use of test versus pattern especially regarding the Medal classes. The dressage folks do not utilize a prepared pattern as we do. The resolution was amended to include a written pattern for the Medal classes and to adhere to the rules regarding the timely posting of patterns. This, the group believed, was being consistent with how the other Medal equitation classes were held.

Much of the discussion in the Promoting Positive Change group focused on engaging Arabian owners that do not show. Showing is not the end all for the majority of owners. Another topic was getting AHA to help identify and repaper rescued horses. Too many are out there without their rightful heritage.

Friday, November 21<sup>st</sup>.

The first order of business in the USEF Arabian Division Rules Committee was to vote on the assigned resolutions. There was discussion about the resolution to not allow a whip or bat in western style showmanship; the committee disapproved it. The resolution was trying to align our rules with how it's done in the open stock horse world. A fundamental difference between the main ring attitude and the sport horse attitude came to light to me. I believe the main ring folks are not necessarily concerned with how things are done in the open or rest of the world whereas the sport horse folks tend to want to match how things are done in the open world. This may be a sweeping generalization, but on many occasions, I found it to be true.

During the dressage committee, Karen Homer-Brown was present to update the group on western dressage. The second western dressage world show was held and the number of rides and horses entered

more than doubled from the previous year. I voiced my scheduling concerns about intermingling western dressage rides with dressage rides and as quickly as the discipline appears to be going, under current rule interpretations, not being allowed to mix rides could create an undue scheduling burden on shows. Karen commented that not being able to inter-mingle rides is a particular person's rule interpretation. Western dressage will be added to SHN as an exhibition class. The first round of western dressage judges have been approved by USEF.

The second general session was a true working session as most of the resolutions were voted on; there was one that was postponed to the next session. Various committee and officer elections were held and the regional volunteer service awards were presented.

Saturday, November 22<sup>nd</sup>

Scott Trees, keynote speaker of the third general session, spoke about how our industry has lost focus on the horse. A previous convention touted the lifestyle of living and showing with Arabian horses. It appeared very elitist. Ask the public about what they think about Arabian horses and they will tell you they're pretty, expensive, and you can't do anything with them. We need to change all of these notions and embrace what the Arabian horse is known for: its versatility. Everyone's experience with Arabian horses is equally important.

Nancy Harvey updated us about the Arabian Horse Foundation. AHF is donating research funds for studies involving CA, Cushings, and laminitis. Because of AHF's non-profit status, AHA was able to take advantage of a discount on recently purchased software saving the organization thousands of dollars. AHF has also started sportsmanship awards at Youth Nationals.

Julian McPeak, of the marketing department, gave us a brief look at the new AHA website that is still in development. Focus needs brought back to the Discovery Farm idea and getting new riders into lesson programs.

The Arabian Jockey Club announced there will be three Arabian races held in 2015 making an Arabian Triple Crown. A selling point in gaining the sponsorships necessary to hold these races was the Arabian Galleries at the Kentucky Horse Park. Where else can one go and visit a museum solely dedicated to the Arabian horse? No where.

Stan Morey advised of the 300+ competitions held, his office received 60+ evaluations. 20 of those were negative. He received only two official complaints accompanied by the \$10 filing fee. As much griping that goes on in social media about the judging, things are not as bad as they would appear. We all need to do a better job of letting his office know of the good and the bad. Stan finished up with the announcement of the nationals' judges.

Respectfully,

Cricket Gates