



Walking Soundly – The Sound Horse Conference

Submitted by Kathie Morrow

Having read for decades about the cruel methods used to sore walking horses, I was thankful for the opportunity to attend the Sound Horse Conference this year. It was encouraging to see that there were representatives from nearly all of the gaited-horse organizations in attendance. Farriers, veterinarians, trainers, gaited horse owners, concerned horsemen and horsewomen from all over the nation came to learn and show their support. NWA was proud to be a sponsor of this important event. I was excited to meet a few of our NWA members there, too.

The conference started on Thursday evening with round table workshops for the owners, trainers, and judges. My assignment took me to the judges' workshop led by Dr. Heird of the AQHA. The group agreed that clearly defined "ideal standards" for the divisions and the education of both judges and owners were essential. Many expressed a need for a return to general good horsemanship and diversified experience (less specialization) to develop good judges. Lastly, Dr. Heird urged the gaited horse community to join together and strive to project a positive image of our horses to the world.



Elissa Dauberman and the Animal Welfare Institute award.



Madaline Pickens talks with SHC attendees

Friday and Saturday brought numerous interesting and knowledgeable speakers to the podium. They discussed a wide range of issues from the social implications of soring to the new technologies and tests being developed to detect it. NWA member, Gary Lane, participated on the panel regarding new information resources. Trainer Winky Groover delivered a heartfelt speech about his move from soring to soundness. And, it was an honor to meet Senator Tydings, the author of the Horse Protection Act. One of my personal favorites was Jaime Jackson, legendary hoof care practitioner, who spoke on Natural Hoof Care.

Several presenters discussed retraining the show horse for a second career. Classical training (Dressage) is being used to retrain the horse's body and to heal the mind. Another trainer explained how "trick" training can be used to develop confidence in the horse. We got to witness examples of these training techniques at the Louisville Equestrian Center on Friday evening. I was quite impressed with all of the horses and trainers. The mare, Lady C, was exceptional on the balance beam exercise during the "Imagine the Horse" presentation. Gaited horses are now enjoying successful second careers working in bird dog field trials. And, did you know that a Tennessee Walking Horse recently won a 100-mile endurance race!

Special presentations were made during the luncheons each day. On Friday, Mrs. Madeleine Pickens, a strong advocate for horse protection, presented information on her new horse sanctuary for wild mustangs. She was named Horsewoman of the Year by the Humane Society of the United States for her efforts. At Saturday's luncheon, Christine Sequenzia of the Animal Welfare Institute presented Mrs. Bob Blackwell (in memory of her late husband Bob Blackwell) and Elissa Dauberman (representing NWA) with awards for their support and promotion of the sound horse. During Elissa's presentation, a biography of her life with Craving Blue was read while the video of her 2010 World Equestrian Games ride with Blue, and partners Allison Thorson and Vigor's Dixie Chick, was shown to the delight of the audience. Many people thanked NWA for so beautifully and positively bringing the Tennessee Walking Horse back into the public eye at the World Equestrian Games.

I left the conference knowing that there are a lot of good people working hard to end soring. Our NWA members are already working hard to bring the walking horse back to the world in a positive light. We must continue and educate others, hopefully, making soring a thing of the past . . . soon.