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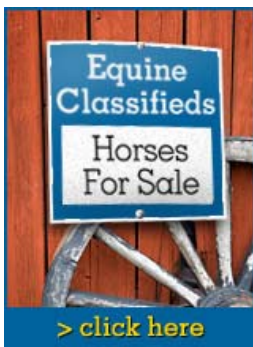
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WHTA President Groover Addresses Sound Horse Conference

Wednesday, November 10, 2010

Editor's Note: The following speech was given by WHTA President Winky Groover at the recently completed Sound Horse Conference in Louisville, KY. The conference was held November 5-6, 2010. For more information visit the conference's web site at www.soundhorseconference.com.

I appreciate the opportunity to be a part of this conference as both, an attendant to learn more, and as a speaker to communicate and share ideas that benefit the TWH. I am a horse lover of all types and am blessed to have a profession where I interact with horses each and every day. You can say that I train both performance and pleasure horses, but the truth is they teach me far more than I teach them. All I do is try to develop their God given talent, soundly and humanely, to the best of each horse's ability. My wife and I also have mares and raise some colts. Sheila, my bride, is an avid trail rider along with her two children and my son has shown performance horses and is primarily focused on the pleasure horses since retiring his WGC performance horse at the age of 18.

During my life I have done about everything wrong that one could as a trainer and a person. Yes, I have had violations from the USDA and HIO's and have served suspensions for those acts. I am sorry for the hurt I have caused horses as a trainer and I'm sorry for the grief that I caused family members, customers, and friends as a person. I have a past that I am not proud of, but with the help of many, I made a decision to change my life and training techniques.

I am not trying to bring religion into this topic, but I am a man of faith and the decision to accept Christ as my Savior has been the primary source of inspiration for me to work toward becoming a better person and a better trainer. Also, many of you in this room have helped directly or indirectly and I want to thank you for contributing to the realization for the need for change and reform that is taking place within our industry. Perhaps we owe the gratitude to the AAEP task force committee. I especially want to thank those vets that not only had the perception and insight to summarize our problems, but also to recommend constructive solutions that are bringing change and putting an end to the practice of soring.

Reading the AAEP white paper when it was released did more to further motivate me to pursue change in my training operation and take a more active role in promoting reform within the industry. Having been raised in a training barn during the pre-HPA era, "A culture of Abuse" hit home with me. I do not want to waste a lot of time dwelling on the past when we need to be concentrating our efforts to mold our future, but in a nutshell – I thought the AAEP nailed it in their assessment of the industry. Perhaps the most profound statement was, "effective change in the current culture of the industry must come from within, it is incumbent upon industry participants themselves, owners, trainers, and all support personnel to take full responsibility for developing a program which succeeds in eliminating the

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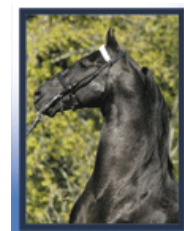
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THE PUBLIC POLL

Do you like the new date of the Southern Championship Horse Show?

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recognized abuses that are at the core of the problem". I believe this program is in place and we have already seen sweeping, effective change come about in the industry. We have more to do but we have come a long way in a short amount of time.

As a trainer, I began thinking on what I, as an individual, could do. I had already "conceived" the concept and was ready to move on to the "Improved Methods Of Evaluations". I'm one of those people that have to see it, do it, try it – to understand it and believe it. I do enjoy learning and learn something new everyday of my life. My wife and I enrolled in a thermography clinic. After going through a clinic conducted by Dr. Tracy Turner and others we received our certification for equine thermography. I learned many things about the basics of a horse at this clinic. Everything from the anatomy to how a horse lands his feet on the ground and how this affects the horse and the resulting thermographic images are fascinating. I was able to purchase an infrared camera and apply the results to both training and shoeing horses. I have to applaud the USDA for hiring Dr. Turner as a consultant. He is one of the most knowledgeable vets with the added bonus of a background in horsemanship, shoeing, and working horses for competition. He is an asset to both our regulators and our industry and perhaps has the best feel for our progress and our future path. Being an outsider of the industry allows him to be more objective.

I also had a customer that attended the 2009 Sound Horse Conference and purchased a pain trace machine. She took to heart the statement in the white paper that said, "We believe that owners are the only individuals who can bring adequate pressure to bear on each other and their trainers to eliminate these intolerable abuses". She has been pain-tracing her horses and those of other customers, before and after shows and training sessions. She had already been maintaining radiographs of her show horses and with the assistance from vets, we studied relationships with x-rays and thermographic images to improve shoeing and exercise routines. For those of you that may not realize it, horses can have a "not normal" thermographic image for many reasons that have absolutely nothing to do with soring. This applies to flat shod, barefooted, padded as well as any breed of horse.

At this stage we have not only embraced technology, but are utilizing it and sharing it with others within the industry. We promote technology as a tool to prove that your horse is sound because some within the industry think that every VMO or DQP takes the approach that the horse is sore and truth is if he moves when palpated he may be sore. The AAEP white paper stated that, "continued reliance on the traditional techniques dependent upon the subjective response of the horse would appear a wasted effort". I have seen horses respond differently at different times for different vets, different VMO's & DQP's with palpation. In most sports we have a "play review", a challenge by a coach, and different means to aid in making those calls more accurate by our referees.

There has never been a perfect horse and the only perfect person they hung on a tree and we will probably never have a perfect 100% of the time inspection system. Occasionally mistakes can be made, those are both ways, as an unsound horse may sneak by, but also a sound horse can be turned down (and trainer penalized), but we strive for it to be correct for the majority of the inspections and most of the time, the correct decision is made. With the current technologies, it is like having an instant replay or a challenge in our world of competition. What do you do when a horse has a normal thermograph, has a normal digital x-ray, pain traces normal, swabbing results are normal with

at the River Terrace
Resort in Gatlinburg,
Tenn.

no foreign substance, but that horse moved during palpation for a DQP or VMO and is pegged a sore horse? I believe that most knowledgeable horsemen within our breed can base a better decision on that horse's way of going when he led the cones and is ridden under saddle. DQP's and VMO's strive to make a quick call as to whether to say he had a pain response, bring in another VMO or DQP for rechecks, delay inspections with other horses stacking up and that it is not always an easy decision to make. They try to make decisions in the best interest of the horse. So do our law enforcement officers and they are correct the majority of the time as well. In our court system innocent people are sent to jail and sometimes years later, through technology, they are proven innocent.

I actually offered to bring a current WGC performance horse to this conference, let everyone that wanted to, mash on his feet, view his condition, pain trace him, thermograph him, x-ray him, and let anyone that wanted to ride him. I wanted the audience to get a first hand, real life view of what our inspections are like, to see through technology that the horse was sound, and to view or experience the gait in the saddle. I was very disappointed when I was informed that the committee rejected this because I wanted to show you the real process and not just give you words. I hope there will be a time in the future when the opportunity arises to do this.

An HIO was activated in April of 2009 with the mission and desire to implement inspections employing AAEP recommendations. This HIO called SHOW, is headed by an AAEP vet and they took actions to resolve conflicts with DQP's, organize clinics both for owners and trainers and also with USDA involvement and direction. SHOW has also implemented an inspection process that is tough and fair whether the USDA attends the shows or not. A fund raising entity, FAST (Foundation for the Advancement and Support of the TWH Show horse) was also developed to fund the education and projects in accordance with the AAEP recommendations that "funding must come within the industry".

We have had another very positive influence this year. Many of you know Donna Benefield as a "sound horse advocate". She also has an extensive background in training horses. She has been instrumental in not only recommending sound training techniques but also working with trainers to successfully implement and achieve them. She is also helping us organize more clinics for trainers and having been the head of an HIO, she has worked with SHOW and their DQP's promoting further progress, evaluation and recommendations. She is an asset to the industry and has the will to provide actions for success and not just words. Donna has contributed her skills and time to make it happen and we are most appreciative of her continued efforts and involvement.

Our society tends to focus on negatives, wrong calls, and the bad in the world instead of the positives in life. We see it in the news media, public forums on the internet, political campaigns, our WH web sites, we see it everywhere. A couple months ago we saw the media and forums bashing Pat Parelli over some exhibition in Europe. I was not there and did not see the clinic and only saw the negative press clips. He is undoubtedly one of the greatest trainers of this era and whatever transpired, I feel certain that he had the horse's best interest at heart. But you see how the media likes to spin it and play on negatives. I just do not understand it because in my world, it is very obvious that PEOPLE ARE DRIVEN BY POSITIVE INFLUENCE.

My wife came across a book called "How Full Is Your Bucket". It's a motivational book written by Tom Rath and Dr. Donald Clifton. It is based on 50 years of research that

shows how positive motivation produces positive results. One of the projects discussed how they took top achieving students and surrounded them with only negative input for a certain length of time and basically demoralized these students. They took a far inferior group of students and focused only on their positives for the same length of time and constantly gave them praise and support. Both groups of students were then retested and those over achievers that had only negative input dropped way down in test scores while those less talented students rose to the top and scored way higher than the group purely from the power of positive influence and motivation. We train our horses, dogs, even our children with praise and reward.

You trainers know the reward of giving a horse his head. A pat of praise when he responds positively makes it so much easier for the horse and trainer to learn when we encourage them with praise and reward. They do not retain scorn or punishment for a wrongdoing but do remember the praise for doing right. I believe this is true in both people and animals. You cannot tear down either one and expect positive results. Both people and animals excel with praise and encouragement.

Our show horse industry is in a state of transition and fast moving reform. We have made great progress this year and our efforts have to remain constant and everlasting. Every one of you in this room can help us succeed with having sound horses for every show discipline. Right now, we have more owners and trainers on this page than ever before. We need fresh and constant enthusiasm and know that positive motivation is the key element for successful results in both your professional and personal life. As we work towards successes in our show horse industry, we all need to be mindful of ways to positively impact changes as we re-educate trainers, owners, spectators and all segments of our industry. I would appreciate any of your ideas or suggestions that might help us in this regard. Please feel free to contact me any time.

I appreciate the opportunity to be here and want to thank Lori and her committee for inviting me.

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