



MHC UPDATE

mdhorsecouncil.org

President's Report

by Mike Erskine

It's been a great year for the Maryland Horse Council. We have just completed an 18- month strategic planning period and we are pleased this year to be rolling out even more benefits, not only for MHC members but for the equestrian community as a whole. We have just launched our annual Business and Health Seminars, and each initial seminar was extremely successful.

Legislation

Because the Maryland Horse Council is an independent group -- not a quasi-government entity -- we can lobby and get out there with a strong and solid voice.

Many horse people have a hard time differentiating between the Maryland Horse Council (MHC) and the Maryland Horse Industry Board (MHIB). **The Maryland Horse Council is an independent umbrella organization for all associations in Maryland, plus businesses, stables, and individual horse people.** We have a democratic voting system, and because we are independent, we can be active on legislation. We can lobby. In fact, the mission of the Maryland Horse Council is to protect the interests of the industry in the state legislature, representing the interests of state horse people to the federal level via the American Horse Council. It is also part of our mission to help support education efforts and develop awareness of the industry, but first and foremost it is to build relationships in Annapolis -- not only with the legislature, but with agency officials as well.

The Maryland Horse Council tackles lots of tough issues, including:

- insurance coverage for all horse people
- preserving favorable liability laws in Maryland
- legal classification of horses as agriculture
- Maryland equine health issues
- land use, zoning, land preservation and related issues
- taxes, slots & other economic issues

What is on our agenda for 2007? **Slots! Sunday Hunting! Liability!**

The most critical piece of 2007 legislation is one that is not about the horse industry in particular, but would nevertheless have a devastating effect on our ability to run riding stables, horse shows, and other events. HB 110 and SB 267 would overturn Maryland's current standard of negligence (contributory) and change it to a standard that makes it easier for plaintiffs in negligence lawsuits to be awarded large jury settlements (comparative). Were this bill to pass, Maryland would have a more "sue-happy" legal climate.

Maryland's current standard of contributory negligence was established over 300 years ago and provides a wonderful level of protection to horse owners, landowners and business owners. Contributory negligence requires that if the plaintiff played any role whatsoever in his injury (for instance, misrepresenting his level of riding ability, switching lesson or rental horses without the stable owner's or manager's permission, "yahooing" on the back of the horse, or not following stable instructions or protocols), then the plaintiff is awarded nothing. Maryland is one of only a handful of states with this very unique legal standard. Were Maryland to switch to the standard of comparative negligence, then the jury would not be able to dismiss based on the plaintiff's contributions to his accident; the jury would have to decide

who bears the bigger burden of responsibility. Generally, the businesses are considered to be "more responsible."

Thus, if these bills succeed and Maryland's standard of negligence is changed, you can be sure that we will be seeing a lot more frivolous lawsuits, a lot more "I spilled hot coffee in my lap and now I am going to sue you for selling me hot coffee" types of cases.

Those supporting passage of HB 110 and SB 267 lobby under the banner of "liability reform." This is not a positive reform, but a step backwards. This legislation will not only affect the horse industry, but every business or event that interacts with the general public, from retail stores to fairs to any sporting activity. We urge you to make sure your delegate and senator knows that you are opposed to bills HB110 and SB 267.

Regulation

Of critical interest to our horse owners is the effectiveness of Maryland's animal health monitoring system and our system for dealing with infectious, contagious equine diseases. Not only is this important to the owners of horses, it is of critical importance to the owners of stables and the organizers of shows and events, because one quarantine can bring equine commerce to a screeching halt. MHC spearheaded the establishment two years ago of the Maryland Department of Agriculture's Equine Health Advisory Committee. Comprised of members of the general equestrian community, the committee advises the Maryland Horse Industry Board and the Maryland State Vet on health issues of importance to you, the horse owner, the stable owner. As a direct result of the Equine Health Advisory Committee, we have seen vast improvements in how the Department of Agriculture has handled the last two outbreaks of equine herpes.

Additionally, in this session, MHC was supporting expanding the stable licensing regulation to include rescue stables. The purpose of the stable licensing program is to provide a base level of assurance to the general public that the horses in a public facility are receiving the basic standards required for good health. Currently, there is no such oversight of rescue facilities, and consequently there have been, unfortunately, purported rescue facilities unable to offer their rescues even a minimal level of care. It is critical that the equestrian community take the lead in ensuring that horses in rescue facilities are indeed receiving a certain level of care, and the most effective way to do this is via the Maryland stable licensing program.

Trails & Greenways

Our Trails and Greenways Committee each year increases the efficiency and benefits of its statewide network, and will continue to host meetings so that equestrians can share and learn from each other's successes and challenges with their local trails.

Education

Part of the original vision for MHC included educational efforts, and the revised long-range plan includes an increased level of educational activities. Beginning in 2007, the Maryland Horse Council will offer two annual seminars, one for business and one for health issues. The seminars will be open to all, but MHC members will receive substantial discounted seminar rates as a benefit of membership.

Additionally, we are looking forward to renewing our sponsorship of the University Seminars at Horse World Expo, and will continue to support the *Ag in the Classroom* Trailer by the Maryland Ag Foundation as well as other educational efforts within the equestrian community.

This column is sponsored by the Maryland Horse Council. The views expressed herein are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of The Equiery's publisher or staff.



Maryland Horse Council Meeting of the Board of Directors

Thursday, Jan. 18, 2007
Vista Room • Maryland State Fair
Grounds • Timonium

Directors Present

Terry Christenson for the Maryland State Quarter Horse Association
Patty Scasser for Marlborough Hunt
Gail Varnedoe for the Pasadena Horse & Pony Association.
Christine Bricker for the Maryland Thoroughbred Horsemen's Association Inc.
Amy Burk, director at large for Individual
Darryll Ann Buschling, director at large for Youth
Charlie Colgan, executive director of Fair Hill International Inc.
Kathy Dobson for The League of Maryland Horsemen
Michael D. Erskine, DVM, president
Michael D. Erskine, DVM, for the Maryland Association of Equine Practitioners
Cricketer Goodall for the Maryland Horse Breeders Association
Royce Herman for the Tuckahoe Equestrian Center
J.B. or Michelle Jennings for the Maryland Feed Company
Crystal Kimball, Secretary of the Maryland Steeplechase Association
Gretchen Moberley, director at large for Farm/Summer Hill Farm
Vicki O'Hara, director at large for Individual
Steuart Pittman, director at large for Farm
Beverly A. Raymond, director at large for Individual
Mardee Rochelle for the Potomac Valley Dressage Association
Debbie Rollins Frank for Equine Rescue and Rehabilitation Inc.
Mary Anne Steele for the Howard County Horse Shows Association
Dorothy Troutman for the Maryland Equestrian Foundation/ Rosaryville Conservancy
Guillermo Warley for New Market-Middletown Valley Hounds
Keith Wills, treasurer and director at large for Business
Elizabeth Yewell, director at large for Business
Sandy McCann for the Plantation Walking Horses of Maryland

Directors Absent

Monica Breland for Potomac Hunt
Tim Capps for the Maryland Stallion Station
Ann Corcoran for The Ranger Foundation Inc.
TBD Howard County-Iron Bridge Hounds
Carrie Everly, VP of marketing for the Maryland Jockey Club
Holly Hamilton, MFH of Goshen Hounds
Jacqueline Harrington for the Maryland 4-H Foundation
Felicia Hilleary for the Maryland Standardbred Breeders Association
Priscilla Huffman, president of TROT (Trail Riders of Today)
Alan Lohman for the Maryland Horse Shows Association
Jim McDonald for the Graham Equestrian Center Inc.
Deloise Noble-Strong for the Maryland Horse Shows Association (Rep)
Nicky Ratliff for the Humane Society of Carroll County
Sharon Roberts for the Cloverleaf Standardbred Owners Association
Kathleen Schwartz for Days End Farm Horse Rescue Inc.
Jane Seigler, president of Reddemeade Farm Inc. and vice president
Tim Streaker for the Maryland Farriers Association
Judy Strohmaier for the Maryland Combined Training Association
David Turner for the Mid-Atlantic Saddlebred Association
Susie Webb, executive director of the Washington International Horse Show
Margaret Wilterdink for the Maryland Dressage Association
Cindy Wood for Wicomico Hunt
Albert J.A. (Jay) Young for Elkridge-Harford Hunt
Joseph Zentgraf, president of the Carroll County Equestrian Council

Quarterly Meeting of the Board of Directors

Tuesday, May 15, 2007 • Show Place Arena
Prince George's Equestrian Center • Meet & Greet Reception 6 p.m.
Great for networking! • Business 7 p.m.

Trails & Greenways Meetings & Invitational Rides

ALL ARE INVITED
Attend the meeting and/or attend the trail ride!

Wednesday, April 18 at 7 p.m. – Tuckahoe Equestrian Center

Saturday, April 21-22 Spring Invitational Ride
Tuckahoe Equestrian Center

Wednesday, Oct 3 at 7:30 p.m. – League of Maryland Horsemen

Oct. 12-14 Fall Invitational Trail Ride
League of Maryland Horsemen

For more information, please contact peg1212@gmail.com



Maryland Horse Council 2007

- Association—\$100/year
- Farm—\$75/year
- Business—\$100/year
- Individual—\$40/year
- Youth Club—\$10/year

Serving the
Industry
Serving You

Benefits for individual, business and farm members have increased.
Every member receives a copy of the quarterly MHC newsletter as well as a complimentary subscription to *The Equiery*. Individual members of the Horse Council will receive one discounted registration to each MHC seminar; business and farm members will receive two discounted registrations to each MHC seminar. We will soon be unveiling even more membership benefits.

INSTITUTIONAL MEMBERSHIP—\$1,000 one-time fee

Open to any private entity, corporation, or for a state, county or other municipal agency, department, service or office that wishes to support the Maryland equestrian industry. Membership shall be a one time fee of \$1,000. Payment shall entitle the institution to designate one or more individuals to serve in an advisory (non-voting) capacity to the Council.

Name _____

(Assoc./Business/Farm/Youth Club/Individual) _____

Phone _____

If Assoc., Representative to Serve as MHC Board Member _____

Phone _____

Alternate Phone _____ Fax _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Email _____

Website _____

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