



Anne Liz

THE MARYLAND HORSE COUNCIL

ONE COMMON BOND - THE HORSE • ONE COMMON VOICE - MARYLAND HORSE COUNCIL

Letter from the President Neil Agate

When I first agreed, over four years ago, to serve as vice-president, knowing that it was then expected that I would be willing to serve as president, I never expected to be shepherding this robust, yet diverse, group during the final phase of the Maryland Horse Council's long range plan to transition from a primarily volunteer-run organization, with some professional help, to a sophisticated, professionally-run comprehensive umbrella organization. (See sidebar or website for MHC's long range plan, established in 2005.)

2005: The Strategic Plan

In 2005-2006, under the leadership of former president Dr. Mike Erskine, MHC laid out a fairly straightforward long-range plan to transition MHC from a loose grassroots and somewhat informal coalition, into a formal umbrella association, fully representing all equestrian interests in Maryland, being served by a professional staff, an executive director, and a full time lobbyist. The business plan included establishing passive revenue sources, expanding communication (via newsletters, websites and other digital opportunities), growing MHC's database in order to foster greater communication and networking across the industry, establish a PAC, and ultimately establish a central office. The MHC Board of Directors approved this plan, and the MHC Executive Committee (which meets monthly to conduct the business of the organization) was tasked with executing the plan.

2006 - 2016

Under the presidential leaderships of Dr. Erskine, and later Steuart Pittman and Jane Seigler, MHC made considerable strides towards its goals. Rather than immediately hiring full time staff, MHC started with part-time administrative support, so that the MHC Executive Committee could better learn exactly what its needs were and how to manage paid staff. Between 2006 and 2016, MHC contracted with three different part-time independent administrative managers, learning from each experience.

Over the same time period, MHC engaged the part-time services of different lobbyists; as a result, MHC enjoyed numerous successes in Annapolis, and the Executive Committee continued to learn more as it moved towards its long range goals.

By the end of 2016, the MHC Executive Committee determined that it was finally ready to "go pro" full time!

2017: The Go Pro Goal

With the new year came abundant new opportunities, enabling MHC to meet its 10 year plan (albeit it may have taken 13 years).

We did another bylaws revision (the third since 2005), which enabled the establishment of a more engaged board.

We entered negotiations with two highly respected professional organizations, Grow & Fortify (which represents ag-related trade organizations in Annapolis and at the county level, and provides consulting and other services to associations) and *The Equiery*.

Acquisition of *The Equiery* presented MHC with the opportunity for a turn-key, profitable publishing entity that could also provide adminis-

trative services and an office for our association, and be a springboard to achieving our long-term strategic goals.

Grow & Fortify is an exciting and progressive business that serves associations for agriculture-related businesses that need to have a presence in state and county legislative and regulatory issues. Initially, the Executive Committee's discussions with G&F centered around having G&F provide one-stop services for MHC, from association management to fundraising, from event planning to lobbying. However, as discussions progressed with *The Equiery*, it became clear that there would be many redundancies with having G&F take on the one-stop services and integrating *The Equiery*. We will continue to work with G&F on the creation of our new strategic plan, lobbying and events, such as Horse Industry Day in Annapolis, which G&F is organizing for us again this year.

Meanwhile, the Executive Committee and select Directors engaged in the process of a due diligence evaluation of *The Equiery* and the feasibility of its acquisition. During this hectic process (in which we were bound by legal non-disclosure agreements), I had the opportunity to get to know many of our Executive Committee and Directors better, to call on their diverse and unique professional skills and considerable knowledge to help evaluate the opportunities before us.

Meanwhile, we also have had the benefit of numerous professionals in the publishing industry who worked with us to gain insight on the process of purchasing, and then integrating, a publication into a membership organization. Many of these advisers were evaluating the publication in order to determine what needed to be "fixed" in order to make the publication viable – and were surprised to learn that nothing needed to be fixed! We are *so* fortunate that *The Equiery* is a flourishing publication with a great group of people running it. This means that not only do we not have to fix anything, but we will not be required to spend a lot of our volunteers' time to manage the publishing of the magazine going forward. Our main focus will be on growing both the publication and membership sides of the organization.

Meanwhile, while the phrase "synergies that will expand both organizations beyond where each would have been able to go alone" may be overused in the world of mergers and acquisitions, there is truth to that, as we will see as we combine the Maryland Horse Council and *The Equiery* into one entity. For *The Equiery*, we will be able to leverage the talents and knowledge of the MHC Directors and its other advisors to expand its coverage and products and overall reach.

For MHC, with *The Equiery* we will be able to increase our reach to many more potential members throughout the state and give us a greatly expanded communications vehicle to keep our membership up to date on everything we are doing around the state.

As we transition management of *The Equiery* to MHC, the Executive Committee will be creating several advisory committees, drawing from the Board of Directors as well as others in Maryland with editorial and publishing experience. The first committee will be a Management Advisory Committee which will focus on the business side of integrating the two organizations. This will most likely be a short-term, temporary group that will be disbanded once the integration of the two organiza-

continued...

Letter from the MHC President, continued

tions is complete.

The second committee will act as a sounding board for issues that arise and may need that little bit of extra insight to make sure that we, as a membership organization representing a wide range of equestrian pursuits and breeds, do so in an informative, fair and impartial way. A component of this committee will be Editorial Advisory Committee that will be available to *The Equiery* staff to help determine editorial content and focus.

Moving forward, in 2018 we will embark on the development of a new strategic plan for the combined entity of MHC and *The Equiery*, a plan that will optimize both the revenue and distribution for *The Equiery*, and membership and messaging for MHC. Our goal is that the new strategic plan will lead us in new directions that will enhance both the MHC and *Equiery's* reach, such as enhanced member services, increased activities in Annapolis and an expanded schedule of events.

We are looking forward to hearing more from you, about what you want, see and need from MHC and *The Equiery*.

Happy New Year! - Neil Agate, MHC President

MHC IMPORTANT DATES

In January, come talk with MHC!

Fri. Jan. 19 at 4 p.m. during the EQUUS Film Festival

Sat. Jan. 20

10 a.m. at the MHC Quarterly Meeting at 10 a.m.
Noon – 5 p.m. during part 2 of the EQUUS Film Festival
6:30 p.m. at the 50/20 Gala

All of the above activities will be located at the Maryland State Fair Grounds; more details elsewhere in this issue.

And most important, come with us to meet our State legislators for **Maryland Horse Industry Day in Annapolis**

Tuesday, January 30, 2018

ONGOING MISSION from the 2005 MHC Strategic Plan

One common interest: the horse

One common voice: the Maryland Horse Council

Continue to create and expand mechanisms to bridge the disconnects across horse groups in order to continue or increase the association's ability to represent the industry and community on legislative and regulatory issues at the state, and eventually, county level.

6 Months – 2 Years

- Hire an executive director or an association manager to handle administration so members and officers can further organizational goals
- Hire a full time lobbyist to reach local government and counties as well as the state legislature and state government on such policy issues
- Have horses recognized as agriculture nationally by the USDA, as well as at the county and local levels
- Create passive revenue sources for MHC
- Increase outreach to media outlets, members, and the industry on important issues
- Increase educational opportunities for horse owners, and promote career opportunities in the horse field
- Continue to build a database to reach everyone with newsletters and increase readership
- Develop a comprehensive web-based industry directory
- Continue to foster networking across horse groups

2-5 Years

- Hire a development director to raise funds
- Have staff develop an annual media plan
- Handle and expand communications (manage website, newsletters, etc.)
- Close the gap between MHC and members – information going out, and opinions and ideas coming in (issue and crisis specific)
- Increase visibility to make horse people aware of MHC and encourage participation
- Make MHC the “go to” place for information about horses and the horse industry
- Have a PAC to support legislators who favor the horse industry, increase presence nationally to lobby at the federal level

5-10 years

- Have a permanent office

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