



# conversations with EQUESTRIANS

## The Equestrian Aid Foundation: At the Heart of Horse Sport

BY ERNA L. ADELSON

With a membership made up of some of the world's best known equestrian athletes and a mission dedicated to supporting the needs of those in the equestrian industry suffering from life-threatening medical conditions or injuries, the Equestrian Aid Foundation (EAF) is certainly at the heart of horse sport.

The EAF was borne out of a casual dinner conversation among friends driven by the desire to help fellow equestrians in need. The collaboration of friends soon became the Equestrian AIDS Foundation, providing direct support to equestrians living with HIV/AIDS. These friends, who became EAF's first board of directors, are also established influential equestrians: R. Scot Evans, six-time Olympic Dressage rider Robert Dover, Gene Mische, Mason Phelps Jr., Robert Ross and Kim Tudor.

"When we started the foundation 15 years ago, we wanted to support our fellow horsemen," said R. Scot Evans, president of the EAF and well known judge, clinician and consultant to the equine industry. "At that point, HIV/AIDS was considered the most threatening because the symptoms are so debilitating and the medical insurance is so expensive."

Over time, the purpose of the EAF evolved to also include basic medical needs assistance for those suffering from catastrophic illness and injury. "Everyone who works with horses is taking a risk for their passion," Evans noted. "So the idea is to help equestrians in their time of need so that they are once again able to return to their passion."

One such recipient, world-class eventer Ralph Hill, testified that the EAF was very important to his peace of mind as he underwent a long recovery. "The EAF [took] a lot of pressure off

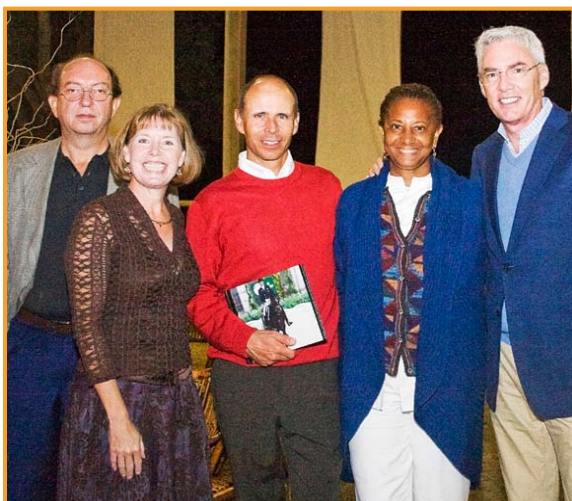
me," he said. "Getting hurt and losing my way to make an income was quite a financial burden... I am starting to be able to teach again now and hopefully I can get my body back enough so I can train again."

"Our EAF recipients are strong, independent people who possess a strong work ethic," Evans added. "Many don't want to ask for assistance. These are people who have made sacrifices to be a part of the horse community, it can be extremely difficult for them to come to us and ask for help."

Not all EAF recipients are riders. They have few similarities, other than a need for assistance and their love of horses. Recipients come from all walks of life – riders (professional and amateur), farriers, show organizers, breeders, trainers and managers; diverse disciplines – both Western and English; well-known competitors and pleasure riders; ages ranging from 14 to 56; and living in all parts of the country – both urban and rural.

The EAF's youngest recipient is Gary Johnson, a teenager from East Orange N.J., who is a competitive mini driver. Living with cancer and cerebral palsy, Johnson's involvement in the horse sport has both brightened and broadened his horizons. "Driving my mini [horse] has proven to me that I can do anything. My dream is to be a professional driver. The EAF is helping me make my dream come true," Johnson said.

Evans notes that throughout the years, learning the extraordinary stories of passionate equestrians has been a cherished part of his profession. Through the EAF and these days, as an equestrian consultant, TV personality for the Hampton Classic and producer for Equestrianlife.com; he has the voice to share these stories with the equestrian community and beyond.



(Pictured l-r) Philippe Collard, President of Cavalor, Sheryl Kursar, Steffen Peters, Janise Gray, and R. Scot Evans. Photo © Julie Blair.

Recently, Evans visited the west coast to celebrate a once in a lifetime horse story. In the first event of its kind, the EAF honored the contributions of Steffen Peters' fabulously successful mount Ravel. The fundraiser was held at the home of Peters and Ravel in Del Mar. The evening was generously hosted by numerous sponsors, including Cavalor, Back on Track and Elegant Events Catering.

Others are encouraged to engage in a similar manner through the EAF's event outreach program. "As we expand, we are taking steps to build presence with events such as this and with strategic partners," said Evans. Other west coast partners representing multiple disciplines, include Larry Langer (hunter/jumper), Robert Kellerhouse (eventing) and Mandi Brumley (reining), each manages shows held at The Horse Park at Woodside.

Additionally, the EAF's Young Riders Committee plays a significant role in creating awareness and engaging others in fundraising and educational events. Brianne Goutal, Stephanie Riggio and Caitlin Ziegler are active members of the team. Ziegler generously hosts and manages

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## At the Heart of Horse Sport... continued

a carnival for young riders and their families as a break from the busy Winter Equestrian Festival shows in Wellington, Fla. Individual efforts like that of junior dressage competitor Jessica Deimler have also made an incredible impact. In honor of her competing at the NAJYRC, the 17-year-old wanted to signify the moment by giving back to the equestrian community. Jess, with support from her mom Dian and trainer Karen Lipp, sent letters asking family, friends and fellow riders to support her commitment to the EAF. "We were blown away by the efforts of Jess Deimler," said Evans. "She really spread the word and she raised more than \$1,500 just to give back to the equestrian industry." Young Riders are encouraged to donate services and time to EAF through event outreach, content generation, and social networking.

Whether a seasoned competitor

or simply an equestrian enthusiast, membership is the first step to involvement with the EAF. "Our organization is membership-based. All of the information necessary is available on our website, so the first step to helping fellow equestrians in need is to become a member," Evans suggested. "Having dedicated members helps create more awareness and funds, which helps more people who are struggling. We send a monthly newsletter that keeps all of our members informed of events and contribution opportunities and stories like Jessica's."

With a low overhead and minimal operating costs, the EAF is able to provide support directly to the petitioning equestrian or their representative. Funds donated to the EAF are used to provide various essentials that may include medical needs, health insurance, food and housing, transportation, physical

therapy and more. Evans anticipates that in the upcoming years as finances are reevaluated for many, the EAF will be called upon more often and for more assistance than ever before, so the staff is gearing up for expansion and increased efforts.

"Our members, donors and sponsors understand the passion that drives us all and they understand the responsibility and need for caring for those who share that passion," Evans concluded.

The horse is at the heart of a large community of people who do truly care about one another. It is good to know that the heart of this sport is beating strong, and when equestrians come together in aid, fellow souls and bodies gain strength and heal, too.

For more information and to become a member, go to: [www.equestrianaidfoundation.org](http://www.equestrianaidfoundation.org)

## The Equestrian Aid Foundation Celebrates Ravel

Snapshots from the unforgettable evening honoring the success of Steffen Peters and Ravel, champions at the 2009 Rolex FEI World Cup Final and the 2009 World Equestrian Festival, CHIO Aachen.



Photos © Julie Blair