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Record Numbers Attend 2005 National Youth Horse Leaders Symposium at Penn State University

Record attendance marked this year's American Youth Horse Council National Youth Horse Leaders Symposium, held in State College, Pa. from February 18-20. The event, which drew volunteers, teens, and professionals who participate in the equine industry, was hosted by Penn State University's College of Agricultural Sciences. A record 503 conference attendees (of whom 150 were teens) made the trip to the Symposium from 30 states.

The Symposium featured demonstrations, lectures, and interactive programs delivered by nationally renowned equine clinicians, experts, and university faculty. Clinician Julie Goodnight led off the Symposium with a program entitled *A Tool Box to Develop Rhythm, Balance, and Communication with the Horse*. Held at Penn State's Agricultural Arena, Goodnight's clinic involved interactive exercises for both a group of eight participating riders and the 150 audience members.

A series of equally talented clinicians and instructors offered demonstrations and programs throughout the Symposium. Presenters included Terry Myers and Heidi Nyland (who involved riders and audience members in a dynamic demonstration of their Brain Gym® relaxation techniques and exercises for riders) and Nicole Carswell, who worked with a group of horses and riders to demonstrate riding skills unique to the gaited horse.

Susan Harris and Peggy Brown, inventors of the world-famous *Visible Horse and Rider* demonstration, gave Symposium participants a unique look at equine and human anatomy. Harris, a longtime artist and riding instructor, used water-based paints to turn a white horse into a moving anatomy lesson: On one side, she painted the horse's muscles, while she depicted the skeletal structure on the other. Brown, who wore a hand-painted "skeleton suit", saddled up the "visible horse" and showed the audience the ways in which the rider's posture can affect the horse's movement.

In addition to clinics and demonstrations, the Symposium also included a series of educational presentations by university equine specialists, veterinarians, industry professionals, and volunteer leaders who work with young people and horses. A highlight of the Symposium was the premier of the new Junior Master Horseman (JMH) curriculum soon to be offered by the American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA). The JMH materials are designed to provide young people with fun, interactive ways to learn about horses and horsemanship. Instructors and group leaders can put the curriculum to work in urban and suburban settings; and they can use it with young people regardless of whether or not the participants own horses. Despite its association with the AQHA, the

JMH materials do not direct participants toward involvement with American Quarter Horses. The series of books will be suitable for use with children who are interested in any breed of horse. Level One, a full color book filled with activities and information, is expected to be available by June 2005, with more advanced levels of curriculum to follow.

Teens attending the Symposium were treated to a series of workshops and events designed just for them. Part of their Symposium experience included an exercise in product development and marketing: Teens were asked to work together to identify a need within the horse industry, develop a product to fit that need, and create a detailed marketing plan for that product. The young participants presented their results to a hall filled with Symposium attendees on the final day of the event. Teens also participated in an equestrian safety judging contest offered by clinician Julie Goodnight.

Held at Penn State's Nittany Lion Inn, the annual Symposium banquet featured the presentation of two AYHC awards. The prestigious National Youth Horse Leader of the Year award nominees were Ethel Coleman, of Indiana, Pa.; Rich Hawthorne, of Lake View Terrace, Ca.; Kerith Lemon, of New York, N.Y., and Betsy Ulrich, of Pottstown, Pa. Coleman received the 2005 award.

Also awarded at the banquet was the AYHC Distinguished Service Award. Past AYHC board member Patricia M. Comerford was named the 2005 recipient. Comerford, an Extension Horse Specialist at Penn State University's College of Agricultural Sciences, received the award in honor of her years of involvement with AYHC. She had been very involved in past Symposiums, and played an instrumental role in planning and hosting the 2005 event.

A group of Penn State University and Cooperative Extension faculty and staff collaborated with Pennsylvania 4-H Horse Program volunteers to host the Symposium. The 2006 AYHC National Youth Horse Leaders Symposium is scheduled to be held in Florida, though a specific location has not yet been determined. For more information on next year's Symposium, or to learn more about AYHC and its mission, visit www.ayhc.com, or call 1-800-TRY-AYHC.

The 2005 American Youth Horse Council National Youth Horse Leaders Symposium was hosted by Penn State University's College of Agricultural Sciences. Event sponsors included: the American Paint Horse Association, the American Quarter Horse Association, Blaze Magazine, the Certified Horsemanship Association, HorseCity.com, the Pennsylvania 4-H Horse Program, the Pennsylvania Equine Council, Pfizer Animal Health, PRIMEDIA Equine Network, Stone Model Horses-The Peter Stone Company, Story Publishing, the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders and Exhibitors Association, and the University of Louisville's Equine Industry Program.

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