



THE AMAZING HORSE WOMAN...

Where Arabian Horse Passion Meets Action

by COLLEEN SCOTT

Dr. Nancy O'Reilly, The Amazing Horse Woman LLC, is enthusiastic – about her horses, her farm, her trainers, her new Friesian stallion, and the Arabian horse. And she believes we all have that enthusiasm; we're just not necessarily good at sharing it. And should we share that enthusiasm with each other and potential new people, the industry could not only overcome recent attrition, but actually grow.

"We all are involved in this industry because of our love for Arabian horse, and we all need to make a concerted effort to invite new people to meet our horses," she says. "I got involved through a friend who personally invited me and introduced me to my first very special horses. I fell in love instantly and my community of Arabian horses and Arabian horse people have been the best thing that has ever happened to me. Sharing our community with others will only grow our breed and industry."

Additionally, Dr. O'Reilly says, "We need a seat at the table within the association structure itself that belongs to us; and we need to understand, contribute and help evaluate the decisions that are being made for us as a whole."

With that investment of time and energy, Dr. O'Reilly thinks, comes ownership. And with ownership comes passion, dedication and commitment to moving the breed forward. "People that complain aren't helpful, but I've been in this industry a while now and I've seen a lot of people that are very capable and smart – and are able to make a positive contribution."



Besides engaging in our own Arabian Horse Association membership at a higher level, Dr. O'Reilly believes personal outreach and involvement will help fill the stands again. "Remember those days? When our stands were full and people actually paid to get in to watch our bigger shows?"

While the horses can sell themselves with their beauty, athleticism, versatility and dispositions, the horses can't expose new people to the breed if those people aren't invited, mentored and welcomed – that part takes their owners to execute. "When I go to some of these smaller shows across the country, I make a point to see what else is happening on the grounds – maybe it's a car show, an antique show, a dog show. And I engage with those people and invite them to come over to the show to see our classes, walk through the barns, pet some horses. Many times, other people on the grounds don't even know anything else is going on. And most every time, they've never seen an Arabian up close and personal," she says. The Keystone Arabian Event last November was a great example of what can happen when we introduce the Arabian horse to the public.

"We need to bring more new people into our community," she says. Her concerns are shared by many (see related article, State of the Industry, on page ____). "Not only are we losing existing people, but we aren't doing a good job of bringing in new ones."

She also cites a challenge in the range of horses available and the caliber of horses at Class A shows. "If you're relatively new and can't afford a national caliber horse, you might be a little intimidated at some of the Class A shows because we seem to have national-caliber horses in almost every class. You can look at that one of two ways though. You can think, 'Wow, I get to see these national caliber horses at my Class A show,' or, you can feel intimidated by them. In my opinion, seeing these incredible horses is a motivation."

Expounding on her point, Dr. O'Reilly acknowledges, that because riding is an often unpredictable sport, it offers up many possibilities for everyone. "When I ride into an arena, I view it as a learning opportunity. Each venue is different, the judges are different, the horse may feel different; I feel different. It's hard to get the same result every time with all those factors, but it's also about the enjoyment of the sport and your personal goals, not necessarily about winning. And even if I don't have the ride I'm trying to achieve, I still have my barn family to encourage me and point out the 'good moments'."

As she poses these thought-provoking questions: What about the next generation of exhibitors? What are we going to do to bring them in? Dr. O'Reilly recommends for the new year: seek out people to introduce to your horses, be kind to new people, welcome them; and be supportive of one another. That's how we can grow.

Above: Putting action to words, Dr. Nancy O'Reilly sponsors the Keystone Arabian Horse Experience in Ocala, FL. Facing page, from top: Dr. O'Reilly's passions, the present – Life In the Fast Lane with Cynthia Burkman; and the future – 2023 colt AHW Omega, the next generation of Arabian horse enthusiasts, and what effort looks like to promote the Arabian horse.