

PRO TRAINER

NRHA 

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE FOR PROFESSIONAL REINING TRAINERS SPRING 2024

**MAKE THE MOST
OF YOUR TIME**
TIME MANAGEMENT
IS TOUGH—WE HAVE
YOUR SOLUTIONS

PLUS:

- 2023 NRHA Professionals of the Year
- Legalities of Hauling Horses
- Winter Meeting Updates

SPRING/24



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PRO TRAINER
NRHA  **SPRING 2024**

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ON THE COVER: Photo by Kiese & Co, Courtesy of Teton Ridge

PRO TRAINER NEWS

PEOPLE, REPORTS, EVENTS

Professionals Campaign Is Helping

BY LESLIE BAKER

As a group, NRHA Professionals initiated an effort to give to the Reining Horse Foundation (RHF) beginning in 2020. When you use ReinerSuite to purchase or renew your membership, you have the option to donate \$20 specifically to the Crisis Fund, or any amount of your choosing.

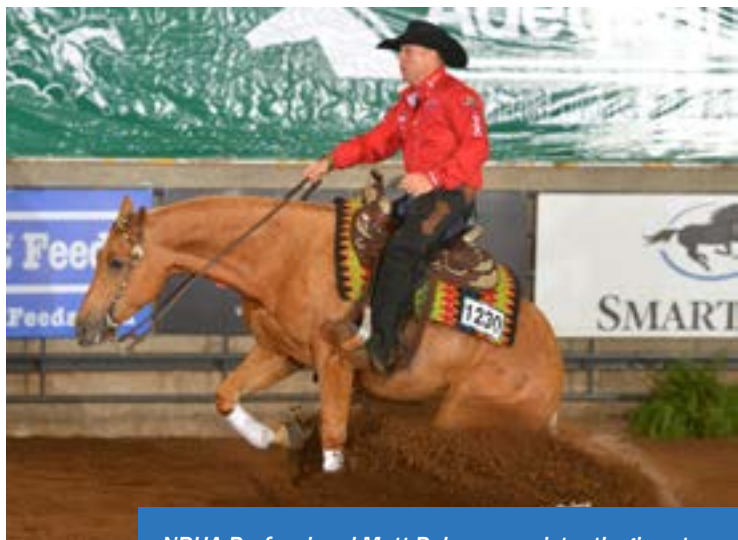
The results are adding up to significant support for the Dale Wilkinson Memorial Crisis Fund. During the first four years the campaign has been in existence, NRHA Professionals have contributed more than \$30,000 through the voluntary online giving option. This is an average of \$7,605 per year.

The idea of getting reining trainers involved in giving to the RHF Crisis Fund was an easy one according to NRHA Professional Patrick Flaherty. He was chairperson of the NRHA Professionals Committee when this campaign was recommended and approved.

“The RHF Crisis Fund can be an important safety net for any NRHA member; but for our NRHA Professionals, it can be even more vital,” Flaherty said. “These financial grants go to NRHA trainers more than 75% of the time, so it was natural for us to step up and support a program that’s helping our peers. As proud as I am of the amount that’s been raised to date, I want to encourage and challenge more professionals to get involved.”

According to RHF, donations to this campaign were received from 316 NRHA Professionals in 2023, representing just 20% of the total. There’s room to grow this support.

One NRHA Professional who gives consistently via the membership option is Matt Palmer. Why does the program matter to him?



NRHA Professional Matt Palmer consistently gives to the RHF Crisis Fund when renewing his membership. It's a voluntary option through NRHA's ReinerSuite.

“NRHA is one big family, and family takes care of one another,” Palmer shared. “Anytime you can support a cause like this, it’s one of the most important things we can do as one big team that loves our sport.”

“It’s no coincidence that as all types of giving have grown, RHF has greatly increased the amounts of these Crisis Fund grants,” said Jordan Larson, current NRHA Professionals Committee Chairperson. “I’d like to see more professionals supporting the Crisis Fund through the membership option. It’s a win for our reining community.”

Professionals making ReinerSuite unrestricted gifts of \$100 or more to RHF are recognized through the giving society known as the Reiners Club. Support at that level also has grown in recent years according to RHF Executive Director Leslie Baker. For any questions about supporting RHF, contact rhf@nrha.com, or call (405) 946-7400, ext. 106. ■

NRHA Winter Meeting Concludes

After three consecutive years in Texas, the meeting relocated to Oklahoma City, a refreshing change that was well-received by those in attendance. For members unable to attend, links for various presentations have been conveniently provided in this article.

The general theme throughout the NRHA Winter Meeting was the overall current strength of the association while simultaneously looking to the future to build on the momentum.

Election procedures were updated to include slight changes in affiliate reallocations, which were unanimously approved. You can read more about the opportunities to run for a 2025 leadership position [here](#).

An updated schedule for the 6666 NRHA Derby presented by Markel was approved, and it features a few member-friendly changes, which include moving the Para Reining Championship to take place following the NRHA Invitational Freestyle presented by OKC CVB as well as the addition of the Open Level 4 and Level 2 Maturity division to run concurrent with the second slate of Open ancillary classes on Monday, June 17. Find the full schedule [here](#).

A recommendation from the NRHA Bylaw Committee was unanimously approved to add an additional Director-at-Large seat to the executive committee, which rounds out the group to seven. The NRHA Nominating/Governance Committee will meet to put forward a candidate to fill the position, which will help alleviate issues with filling leadership positions, specifically the role of Vice President, which has been difficult to find candidates for in recent years. Additionally, this will avoid having an even-numbered committee and bring the number of seats closer to the original eight that served on the Executive Committee prior to 2017.

The board of directors also approved a new code of ethics, elevating their leadership by holding

themselves to a higher standard along the same lines expected of NRHA judges and stewards.

Chief Financial Officer John Foy delivered the association's financial report, highlighting that the association is in its strongest financial position in history, that purse trajectory continues upward with the largest total purses awarded last year, that worldwide membership totals remain stable, and that NRHA's media reach have grown exponentially. NRHA's annual audit was completed without issue and has been available to the members on ReinerSuite since January. He emphasized to members that the reining industry is extremely strong and is experiencing continued growth through membership numbers and purses. You can review the full presentation [here](#).

The Adequan® North American Affiliate Champions (NAAC) conditions were approved, with a small update from the last three years. Based on member feedback, to compete at an Affiliate Regional Championship (ARC), a rider must show proof of membership to an affiliate within the region they are qualifying in at the time of entering. Proof of affiliate membership is the responsibility of the exhibitor and will be verified by the show office. Riders who score higher than a zero at an ARC are qualified for the NAAC in that class, on that specific horse. Read more [here](#).

In addition to the meetings, the well-attended Futurity Judges Review provided an opportunity for members to discuss the NRHA judges program and to look back at runs from the 2023 6666 NRHA Derby presented by Markel and NRHA Futurity alongside members of the teaching pool. The pool shared video from additional camera angles to demonstrate how maneuvers can be viewed and marked differently from different vantage points.

The pool also showcased HorseIQ, the online equine learning platform that can be utilized whether you are an exhibitor tuning up your skills or a judge

who needs a refresher. Check out HorseIQ [here](#) and see page 8 for more details.

The Annual General Membership Meeting (AGM) was especially poignant as it marked President Mark Blake's last in his official role and Billy Smith's first as NRHA Commissioner.

Blake highlighted 2023 and the records broken, including over \$24 million awarded (up from \$23 million in 2023); over 9,046 non pro members; and a Nomination Program foal crop of 3,203, breaking the record set the year prior. A full statistical overview of 2023 can be downloaded [here](#).

Commissioner Smith spoke about the recently approved strategic plan (read more on page 9) and the importance of association alignment moving forward. He also stressed the need to focus on strategic plan-based decision-making and to celebrate the association's storied history. The association will refocus energy through this discipline to produce more creativity, simplicity, forward-thinking, accountability, and data-driven decision-making.

Various NRHA Advisory Committees then met to round out the Winter Meeting to tackle current projects and look ahead at ways to implement the new strategic plan. A full highlight of this approved plan will be announced in coming days at [news.nrha.com](#). ■

NRHA Pro Trainer

NRHA Event Calendar

Please visit [nrha.com](#) and ReinerSuite™ for the most updated information.

May 15

6666 NRHA Derby presented by Markel entries due

Entries are due in office by this date.

Late entries will incur a fee.

Visit [nrhaderby.com](#) or email [events@nrha.com](#) for more information.

May 22–26

NRHA European Futurity

Cremona, Italy

For more information, visit [nrhaeuropeanfuturity.com](#).

June 1

6666 NRHA Derby presented by Markel late entries due

To be included in the regular draw,

late entries must arrive in office by

this date. Visit [nrhaderby.com](#) or

email [events@nrha.com](#) for more information.

June 1

6666 NRHA Derby presented by Markel ancillary entries due

Visit [nrhaderby.com](#) or email [events@nrha.com](#) for more information.

June 1

Third NRHA Futurity payment due

June 1

NRHA Hall of Fame nomination deadline

Nominations for the NRHA Hall

of Fame Class of 2024 must be

postmarked by this date. More details

on criteria and forms are available at [nrha.com/forms](#).

June 1

Dale Wilkinson Lifetime Achievement Award nomination deadline

Nominations for the 2024 Dale

Wilkinson Lifetime Achievement

Award must be postmarked by this

date. More details on criteria and

forms are available at [nrha.com/forms](#).

June 1

Affiliate and write-in candidate deadline

Submissions are due for affiliate and

write-in nominations for 2025 regional

director and director-at-large elections.

Accepted if received in the NRHA office

Monday, June 3. For more information,

visit [nrha.com/elections](#).

June 11–23

6666 NRHA Derby presented by Markel Oklahoma City, OK

Forms and more information are

available at [nrhaderby.com](#). Email

questions to [events@nrha.com](#).

June 26–28

International Judges School Hosted by NRHA France

Anet, France

Contact Mariannick Domont-Perret

at [domontperret@gmail.com](#) for more

information.

July 1

First Sire & Dam Futurity payment due

July 15–21

NRHA European Affiliate Championships

Le Pin, France

For more information, visit

[nrhaeac.com](#).

LEGAL ACTION

INSIGHTS TO KEEP YOUR BUSINESS SAFE



Haul Without Worries

HAULING HORSES GENERALLY COMES WITH THE TERRITORY OF BEING A REINING TRAINER. MAKE SURE TO PROTECT YOURSELF, BOTH FINANCIALLY AND PHYSICALLY, BEFORE HITTING THE ROAD.

Whether you're hauling just a couple horses to a veterinary appointment or a full load of mounts to an event, you must be sure your vehicle and trailer are adequately insured to avoid potential financial devastation.

BY KRISTIN PITZER

As a horse trainer, chances are you'll find yourself on the road, hauling your clients' horses between events and home, to and from the vet, etc. Whether you've been in the business for years or are just starting, you might not have given much thought to what would happen in the event of an emergency on the road, especially one where the horses on your trailer are injured. Would their loss be covered by your insurance, for instance, or could you find yourself liable for their value?

Even outside of insurance, there are things to consider, such as towing with the proper vehicle and having a plan in case of an emergency. Jordan Willette, an attorney based in Phoenix and San Francisco, offered several tips to protect yourself when hauling horses.

Ensure That You're Covered

If you're operating your business under an LLC or a partnership, you likely already have commercial insurance. The first thing you'll need to do if you're going to haul horses for your clients is ensure that your vehicles and trailers are all listed under that policy. Some insurance companies require separate

vehicle insurance as well, so speak with your agent to confirm you're in compliance.

If you're operating as a sole proprietorship, you'll need to speak with your insurance carrier to determine whether your type of business is covered. Depending on the state you live in, there are different policies it could fall under.

"I'd recommend sitting down and having a conversation with your insurance carrier, explaining what types of driving and hauling you're doing," Willette said. "Some people use their vehicles for personal use; some have their assistants drive the vehicle; then there's the aspect of hauling. No matter what your personal situation is, talk to your insurance carrier and say, 'This is what I'm using the vehicle for. I want to be sure I have adequate insurance coverage for these issues.'"

If you don't have the proper insurance and end up in an accident where a horse that's insured by its owner ends up seriously injured or killed, the horse's insurer could hold you personally responsible for repaying its value. With the costs of today's horses, that could cause a huge loss for your

PHOTO BY ADOBE STOCK

business or personal finances. Having the correct coverage could literally save your business.

“Especially with the value of some of these horses now, if something happened, heaven forbid, and you lost the horses, do you have enough insurance to cover for the loss of each horse that you were hauling?” Willette asked. “That’s not something that I think would’ve been an issue a number of years ago, but it’s becoming increasingly so.”

Use the Correct Tow Vehicle for Your Trailer

When you’re towing a trailer, it’s your responsibility to make sure the vehicle you’re using is the correct size for the weight of the loaded trailer, or the gross trailer weight (GTW). The GTW is the trailer’s weight plus the weight of the horses, hay, feed, tack, and anything else it’s carrying. Failure to use the correct tow vehicle could not only get you a citation but is also dangerous, as it may not have the braking power needed to bring the trailer’s weight to a stop.

Your vehicle’s towing capacity can usually be found in its owner’s manual or on the inside door panel of the vehicle, and the trailer’s empty weight is often printed on a sticker at its front end. If you’re not sure how much your trailer weighs when loaded, you can take it to a public scale and have it weighed.

Trailer weight can also affect your classification on the road. Generally, a one-ton truck hauling a six-horse trailer isn’t going to need anything more than a standard driver’s license, but if you’re pulling a trailer with a semi, most states will require a CDL license.

“Depending on what type of driving you’re doing, you may need a different type of license,” Willette said. “You’re only required to have whatever license your state requires, which is often determined by how big the truck and trailer are. Always have the necessary documentation on hand for the type of hauling you’re doing. You may have to show this documentation when you cross state lines. It’s good to know the laws in each state in advance of your trip.”

Have a Plan in Case of an Accident

Before hitting the road, communicate your horse-care protocol while traveling to anyone else assisting you on the trip. This should cover watering and feeding horses, overnight stops, driver changes, etc. It’s a good idea to have someone along that can perform basic maintenance, such as tire changes, too.

“I always recommend having a safety plan,” Willette said. “A first-aid kit for the horses is necessary, too, such as having electrolytes on hand in case a horse gets dehydrated or bute if they get hurt. By having those things in place, you can be prepared in the event of minor emergencies.”

Look up your route in advance, and if you have to stop along the way, ensure that there will be a safe place you can pull off the road and rest. Above all, stay aware of other vehicles on the road, give yourself space, and remember that the general public has no idea how long it takes a large truck and loaded-down trailer to stop.

“People on the road don’t know how to drive around trucks and trailers, and they sure as heck don’t leave enough room for when there’s a horse trailer in front of them,” Willette said. “Practice defensive driving, because if something happens and you’re not at fault, it’s highly unlikely the other person will have enough insurance to cover whatever happens.” ■

Meet the Expert

Jordan Willette, an attorney at Gordon Rees Scully Mansukhani, LLP, focuses her practice in civil litigation, including equine law, products liability, and business disputes.

When she’s not in the court room, Willette enjoys riding and is the fundraising chairman for Horses Help, a therapeutic riding organization for children with disabilities. A reiner for 16 years, Willette still owns her youth horse, Whizin In The Dirt.



DOLLARS & SENSE

Introducing Horse IQ

With the increased visibility of reining comes new fans and customers for your business, and that means you might find yourself in need of help educating the newcomers to your barn and people who approach you at events. With its rules and scoring system, it's not always easy to explain exactly what you do and how the sport works.

NRHA's partnership with [Horse IQ](#) helps ease that process, allowing you to focus on what matters in your business. It's also a method for NRHA Professionals to hone their judging abilities. The site explains its role as follows.

"HorseIQ is an interactive equine learning platform that brings you quality content by collaborating with equine associations, organizations, and institutions. Our courses are designed to teach exhibitors, professionals, judges, and competitive horse judges what carded judges are looking for in a wide variety of disciplines, how to best care for your equine athlete, and how to run a successful horse show. HorseIQ also features hours of bonus content in the resource library. Content is added monthly so there is never a lack of fresh material!"

STEP 1: SUBSCRIBE

The site offers a free 30-day trial to give a taste of what it offers, and then you or your customers can sign up for a monthly or annual subscription—\$9.99 or \$199.88, respectively. Bonus: If you're an APHA member, you can request a 30% discount code by emailing admin@horseiq.com.

Additionally, if you coach a judging team or manage APHA horse shows, you can choose packages related to those areas of use.



Free your time by letting Horse IQ educate your new customers about the horse industry.

STEP 2: CHOOSE A CLASS

Each course offers an introduction to tell you what you'll learn from it. A graphic on the class page lets you know what your time commitment will be for the class, so you can plan sufficient time to engage with it.


Courses range from beginner-level information, which can be valuable to bring customers who are new to horses up to speed, to more advanced, including judging and scribing.

STEP 3: SUBMIT VIDEOS FOR EVALUATION

Outside opinions are almost always helpful. HorseIQ.com allows you/your customers to submit videos for evaluation by professionals from all corners of the industry, including NRHA-carded officials. By providing a video up to three minutes in length, a top-notch judge will offer feedback with a detailed critique and score sheet for \$25.

STEP 4: SPREAD THE WORD

Once you take a look around HorseIQ.com, tell your fans, followers, and customers about it. Using it as a tool to support your business makes lighter work for yourself when initiating new customers to your business and helping potential ones decide that reining in your barn is right for them. ■



A new strategic plan helps ensure that every move NRHA makes is on-target to serve the association.

NRHA Approves New Strategic Plan

During their first meeting of the year, the NRHA Board of Directors unanimously approved a new strategic plan to shape the association's direction effectively over the next three to five years. The last strategic plan, adopted in 2017, was highly successful and boasted years of all-time records for purses, entries, and nominations.

"We set a strategic goal of 125,000 [annual] worldwide entries within five years, and I am happy to share that not only did we meet that goal in 2022, but we have also now exceeded it with over 131,000 entries," said NRHA President Mark Blake. "Instead of sitting around spending a lot of time asking ourselves, 'What's next?' we already know. This plan helps us accomplish that."

The new plan, formulated with members of the board, staff, and committee members alongside facilitator Glenn Tecker of Tecker International, creates an envisioned future for the association, with clear goals and detailed objectives to help achieve those goals. Four major benchmarks include reaching 18,000 members, increasing youth membership by 10%, achieving 175,000 total worldwide entries, and reaching nearly 2,000 professional members.

Additionally, NRHA will focus on four core values that will serve as cornerstones of the

association: Leadership, Camaraderie, Integrity, and Respect.

A refined mission statement of "to promote the reining horse worldwide and advance the finest traditions of Western horsemanship" will continue to serve as the backbone of the association.

"There is a renewed sense of energy when you have an incredible team who have all come together to tackle something like this strategic plan," said Blake. "It's incredible to see everyone ready to get to work."

NRHA Commissioner Billy Smith highlighted the plan during his Annual General Membership address, stressing the importance of association alignment. "Nothing meaningful happens without a strategy that everyone can get behind. Hope is good, but it's not a strategy," he said.

The association alignment will allow the board to develop and accept committees' specific priorities tied directly to the strategic plan. Committees will present recommendations to the board to achieve these priorities.

"Our staff, committees, and board must all be pulling on the same rope, in the same direction," added Smith.

You can read more about the new strategic plan [here](#). ■

PRO TRAINER

NRHA

A New Pro Trainer

Since 2016, the *NRHA Pro Trainer* has worked hard to keep you up-to-date on the best business practices to keep your longstanding business humming, help grow your developing business, and get your feet on the ground when you first go out on your own. Its sole focus has always been helping you become the best NRHA Professional you could be in every aspect of your business. You've seen the magazine evolve from three times annually in a print magazine to quarterly print magazines to quarterly digital magazines. In each of its iterations, the *Pro Trainer* stayed consistent in its mission.

Another evolution lies ahead for this brand, as the magazine morphs into a full-service website, with a complete history of articles from past issues, now broken down into easy-to-read sections. Beginning this summer, you'll be able to search the NRHA Pro Trainer site for topics that are hot in your business, research answers to problems you face in real time, and share links to articles with your peers in horse training.

The main goal remains the same: To be of service to NRHA Professionals. But by opening the gates on this valuable information, NRHA positions its professionals as the best business people in the entire horse industry—not just in reining or Western performance events. People from all facets of the equine world who make

their living training and breeding horses will learn alongside you and from you through a regular schedule of new content and updated legacy content from past magazines.

We're incredibly excited to embark on this new journey with you all—and with professionals from everywhere in the industry. Please share any feedback you have with jenpaulsoncreative@gmail.com, and look for the new site to launch this summer. ■

Key Facts From AHC Survey

In 2023, the American Horse Council (AHC) completed an industry-wide survey of horse owners. Here are just a few of the key points. You can purchase all the results at horsecouncil.org. They last completed this survey in 2017

- \$177 Billion: Total Economic Added Value (up from \$122 billion in 2017)
- \$2.2 Million: Jobs Linked to the Horse Industry
- 6.6 Million: Horses in the United States (down from 7.2 million in 2017).

Spring Business Tips

The time for setting goals and intentions for the year has passed, and you're firmly in the uphill climb of working your way toward them. Don't forget to capitalize on these opportunities.

Find a Lesson Horse...or Two.

If lesson horses aren't part of your program, consider if they might be a missing link between your current customer base and bringing additional horses and riders into your barn. This time of year, parents focus on finding activities for their kids to do all summer, so by marketing your lessons and lesson horses, you could bring in extra income to bolster your business. Yes, lesson horses come with overhead; however, the benefits they can bring your business can be game-changing.

Communicate With Your Employees.

As the spring and summer riding seasons ramp up, be sure to check in with your employees to ensure that they're happy in what they're doing. Openness to feedback and nurturing their goals helps keep them on your team, meaning you don't have to look for more help.

Check in With Your Sponsors.

Keep conversations open with your sponsors year-round, but make extra reminders for yourself to reach out when you get busy and can forget them. Sponsorships are two-way streets, with both sides giving and getting. Simply staying in touch and seeing what you can do to help goes a long way in maintaining your relationships. ■

Stay Connected

Are you connected with your NRHA Professionals peers and the association? Be sure you stay in touch with the following communication outlets so you don't miss any news, discussions, requests for input, and opportunities to volunteer.

JOIN THE FACEBOOK GROUP. It's super-easy to join. Get on Facebook, and search "NRHA Professionals" or click this [link](#). Request to join the group, and Sara Honegger will approve your entry if you have a current Professional membership. This group can be a terrific resource for many things. Post when you're looking to find shared lodging for help at a show, hiring new help, have questions for the group, and even to get access to the digital *NRHA Pro Trainer* each quarter.

JOIN THE TEXT LINE. Join the NRHA Professionals text line by clicking this [link](#). Here you'll get notifications of important meetings, information from the association, and receive a link to the digital *NRHA Pro Trainer* each quarter.

UPDATE YOUR PROFILE. Go to ReinerSuite™ and click on "Trainer Profile" to update your phone number, address, focus of your business, photo, accolades, and more to help new customers find you when they use the Find A Pro button to locate a professional. ■



There are three easy ways you can stay in communication with your association and your professionals' group.

PHOTO BY MIKE MEYERS ON UNSPLASH

USE TECH *to Streamline Operations*

EC PRO WAS BUILT BY HORSE PEOPLE,
FOR HORSE PEOPLE.

*Training horses is a full-time job. Running your own business is, too.
So how can you possibly do it all on your own?
Software for horse professionals can help.*

The vast majority of horse professionals didn't get into the business to make a lot of money; you did it for your love of horses—training, preparing, showing, and coaching. While owning a horse business is amazing, it's also exceptionally busy. The business side of your career can encroach upon all aspects of your life, from missed saddle hours to losing out on client facetime to missing experiences with family. Between booking lessons for riders and managing the barn, staff, and horses—there just aren't enough hours in the day...until now. EC Pro is a software platform built by an equestrian for equestrians that streamlines operations, increases revenue, and frees up your valuable time so you can run the business you love.

What Is EC Pro?

Jamie Arnold founded EC Pro in 2017 after he noticed how much time administrative activities took at his child's lesson barn. It occurred to him that scheduling riding lessons shouldn't be that hard. It should be as easy as booking a flight, hotel, vacation, workout session, or food delivery right from your phone. He designed EC Pro with a mission to provide trainers with complete

control over their business operations while giving customers the digital experience and modern convenience they expect.

How can EC Pro Help You?

EC Pro serves as an example of how switching to a cloud-based software can help not only your business, but your life as a whole.

A customer-favorite feature of EC Pro is the electronic recordkeeping. No more need for filing cabinets taking up office space nor spending hours manually going through each file to find records. Storing all your paperwork securely and electronically, this feature not only clears up the workplace but also your schedule with the time it saves. It also brings peace of mind knowing all records are backed up a minimum of five times per day. Not only do these features lighten your workload, but they are all available in the palm of your hand. The EC Pro app allows you to stay on-the-go while staying up-to-date with everything going on with your business. With the extensive features EC Pro offers, it's essentially like having another staff member on your team!

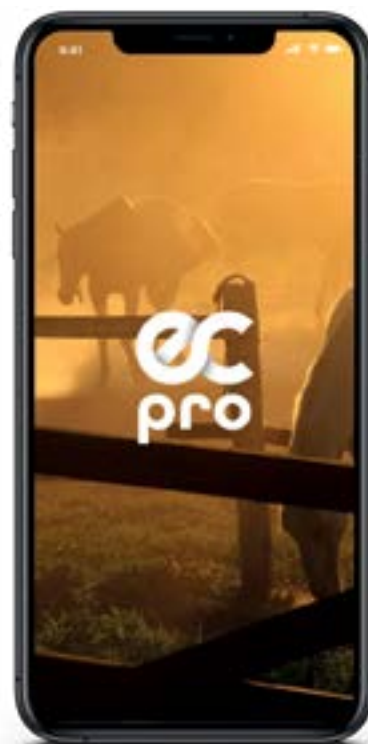
Another way the product can help grow revenue

is with its intelligent online booking feature, which takes everything into account and only allows riders to book lessons that are appropriate based on factors like rider size, ability, horse temperament, arena availability, and daily horse exercise so you can rest assured you're not putting your riders or horses at risk. Riders can also book lessons any time of the day or night, which is not only convenient to both owners and riders, and that can increase the number of clients coming to your barn because they can choose a lesson slot at any point in their day. With riders scheduling lessons at all hours of the day and night, you might think that only means more last-minute cancellations. EC Pro thought of that, too, and allows you to create your own cancellation policy. So even if a rider misses a scheduled lesson, you don't have to miss out on their payment.

How Can Tech Streamline Your Operations?

Streamlining your business is key to having your day-to-day operations run smoothly. No matter how big or small your business may be, the daily tasks can become overwhelming. EC Pro helps ease operations and simplifies your work. For example, one feature makes it easy to centralize all health and maintenance records, reducing administrative duties and freeing up essential time. The system also alleviates the tedious and time-consuming aspects of staff management. As helpful as whiteboards and colorful markers can be, you no longer need to write out staff tasks and schedules! By acting as a virtual staff member, EC Pro helps with scheduling your staff, along with all the daily tasks barn owners face. It even offers event management to assist with bookings and payments for upcoming events such as clinics or schooling shows and publish results and scores for customers to view online.

You know a website plays an essential role in



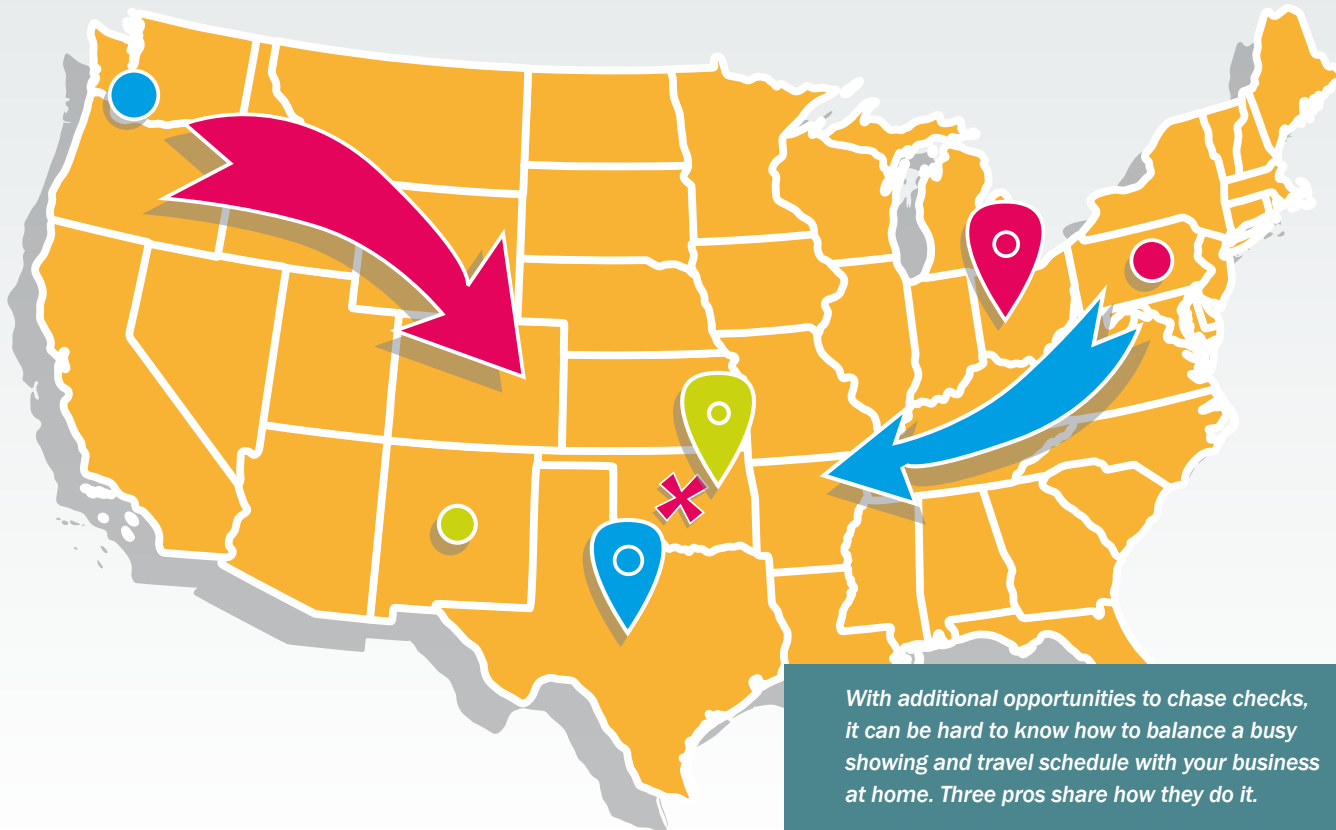
Imagine being able to manage core business functions from the palm of your hand. EC Pro has tools that can help.

your business, and EC Pro helps assist in making a fresh-faced website for your business that's designed with your clients in mind. With your logo and brand colors, your customers will recognize your business, trust it, and be pleased to find the ease of navigating the site.

Final Thoughts

EC Pro believes you shouldn't have to decide between success in your business or success in the arena. EC Pro, your digital workhorse, is here to help you with the heavy load of running your business and getting you back in the saddle. Straight from the horse's mouth, one of EC Pro's U.S. customers said, "The thing I love about EC Pro is how many different things that it can do. It has streamlined my business and made things a lot easier for me."

Take control of your business today! Book a demo to learn more and start your free trial today by visiting [ECPRO.US](https://ecpro.us). ■



With additional opportunities to chase checks, it can be hard to know how to balance a busy showing and travel schedule with your business at home. Three pros share how they do it.

THE *Balancing* ACT

NRHA PROFESSIONALS FIND THEMSELVES ON THE ROAD MORE THAN EVER. HOW CAN YOU MANAGE YOUR BUSINESS, STRING OF HORSES, AND CUSTOMERS WHEN YOU'RE CONSTANTLY AWAY FROM HOME? THREE PROS OFFER THEIR TIPS.

BY JENNIFER PAULSON

With opportunity comes new puzzles to solve. As more and more high-money events pop up on the reining calendar, you probably feel like every single one of them is a can't-miss chance to win a big check, demonstrate the success of your program, and promote yourself to gain new customers. While it's time to make hay while the sun shines, that can leave your business at home—from your accounting and marketing to your billing to your string of horses—in the shadows and your customers wondering where they fit into the puzzle.

But it doesn't have to be that way. We consulted with three NRHA Professionals situated in

different corners of the U.S. to get their insights into how to manage your time more efficiently—since we haven't yet figured out a way to create more time to do everything required in a day. Here, Matt Palmer, Andrea Fappani, and Jordan McBurney share what they've learned as they've built—and expanded—their businesses during reining's boom.

The Constant Distance Traveler: Matt Palmer

Growing up in the business in the northeast, Pennsylvania's Matt Palmer has long known the extra effort required to chase titles—even

before the explosion of new reining events hit the scene. Here's his best advice, acquired in his own business as the past head trainer for Santa Hill Ranch and now at his own facility.

Know Your Calendar. Planning your show season, from major events to affiliate shows, plays a big role in your planning process. In December of each year, I look at the next year to identify those big shows that I'll have to haul a great distance to, as well as those that are closer and even our affiliate shows. Once I have that calendar set, I share it with my customers so we're all on the same page with where we'll be going when.

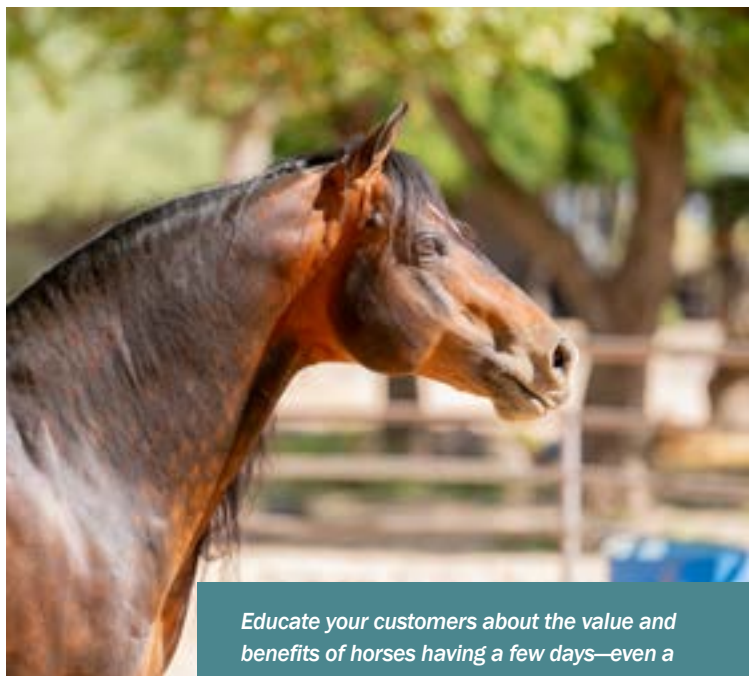
Be Up Front. Anytime I get a new customer, I explain our riding schedule, show calendar, and what happens when I'm away. I explain that the horses that are at home aren't just being ignored—they're actually on a strategically timed break, especially for the young horses. We work toward riding goals before we leave for a show, so they're ready for a mental break by the time we head out. Explain that you can't ride these horses 365 days a year and get the results you're looking for, and that when you get back, their horse is ready to go while the show string gets a break.

Consider Your Costs. Starting out as a young trainer, if you plan to take your younger horses with you to the shows, carefully think about what you can charge and if it makes sense for your business. You might not yet have the caliber of clientele that can afford to send a young horse down the road with your show string. Communicate with your customers to see what's feasible for them, their goals, and your program.

Keep Up With the Business. For many of us, our partners run the business side of our

operation. My wife handles our books and billing, on top of her full-time job. We have systems in place and use programs that allow us to work on billing and other business needs remotely. Find accounting and billing programs that suit your needs and abilities, and use them during your downtime at shows.

Know When to Say No. Understanding your limits means you won't put yourself in a situation where more is expected of you than you can serve. As you grow in your career, more people will approach you about putting horses in your program—and some will be impossible to turn away. But knowing your limits and the limits of your help, from assistant trainers to barn managers, keeps your business manageable. Then you can plan for sustainable growth that sets up your future. →



Educate your customers about the value and benefits of horses having a few days—even a week—off when you're at a show. Helping them understand that strategic time off helps their horse, no matter his phase of life.

PHOTO BY JENNIFER PAULSON



Balancing time away at shows with a string of 2-year-olds at home can be challenging. But with communication and planning, you can make it work.

Live Within Your Means. When you're starting out on your own, it might not be financially feasible to go to all the big shows, and that's OK. You and your customers might not be financially positioned to be everywhere all the time. Instead, live within your means, whether that's within your training program or your personal life. When you earn a big check, think about if you really need that fancy, brand-new rig or if a nice used one will suffice for now. If you don't over-extend yourself, and don't expect your customers to invest beyond their means, it removes some of the pressure that can lead to burnout and letting people down.

The Centrally Located Veteran: Andrea Fappani

In his time as an NRHA Professional, Andrea Fappani's business has kept roots in the West.

With many major events happening in the Scottsdale, Arizona, hotbed, he's fortunate to have shows close to home, but he finds himself on the road to Oklahoma, Texas, and Ohio, to name a few, in a chase for checks that keep him at the top, admitting it's hard to stay home and not run at all that money. Here's his advice.

Consider Your Customers. There are shows that pay the lower levels pretty well, and it's tempting to go no matter what. But you first need to consider if your customers can invest in sending their young horses with you, if that's what you plan to do. Two weeks of paying for a horse to be at a show can be a big expenditure for someone who's not playing at the higher levels.

Trust Your Business Manager. In my case, my wife, Tish, runs the business side. This is the case for many professionals. The biggest thing is to

trust the person who's handling that side of your operation so that it's not something you have to worry about in the present or in the future. A trustworthy business manager means you can focus on what you need to do to prepare horses and riders without spending as much time on accounting, billing, and other business functions.

Stay in a Successful Apprenticeship Longer.

It's exciting to think about starting your own business, and with the influx of people, it might be easier than it used to be. However, staying under a successful pro as an assistant—or a few different pros—for a longer duration can lead to greater success down the line. You'll have more time to learn the business side of things while you're learning training philosophies and techniques. Plus, you might have a Level 1 or Level 2 string of horses to show that build your name recognition without you having to focus on anything other than training horses.

**The Working Parent:
Jordan McBurney**

Jordan McBurney and her husband, Sean, are integrating a new phase of life: parenthood. Their business has always been based in the Pacific Northwest, currently at Rhodes River Ranch, so hauling long distances to shows is familiar territory. She shares her advice.

Get Picky. With our location and family, we have to be very smart about which shows we go to and which ones we skip. We base these decisions on what we have available to show.

Hire Good Help. They're hard to find, but when you hire good help, it can ease your workload, especially when you have to be away for long periods of time. When we're on the road, we have trustworthy help to turn out the 2-year-olds,

longe the studs, and keep the horses happy and safe. We have good office help, too. She knows her job, and we can rely on her. Our relationship with mutual respect for everyone keeps things running smoothly, even when we're at a show.

Be Open With Your Customers. Talk about your plans, be clear and consistent, and be open to what works best for your customers. We have some who might take their horses home for a few weeks if we're away, and we do our best to accommodate that.

Choose Quality Over Quantity. We're a smaller operation, and we only take on as many horses as we can handle. I see a lot of young trainers taking on more horses than they can manage. It can seem like the only way to make money, but if you have 25 in training and can only ride 12 a day, you'll have disappointed clients who might go to a different barn.

Educate Your Owners. As professionals, we know that not every horse needs to be ridden every day, and that strategic breaks are necessary for development of young horses and to keep more experienced horses happy. Take the time to educate your owners so they understand that when you're away, their horses are still being cared for, but are on a necessary break to get the most out of their training.

Communicate. Some trainers communicate only via text message to keep things quick. I prefer a phone call so we can have real conversations about how horses are doing. Your customers invest a lot into these horses—financially and emotionally—and they like to hear how their horses are doing and what you see for them in the future. Don't be afraid to talk about problems and how you'll resolve them. ■

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2023

NRHA Professionals of the Year

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE RECIPIENTS OF THESE AWARDS—CHOSEN BY THEIR PEERS—AND HOW THEY'VE BUILT THEIR CAREERS TO THIS LEVEL.



2023 Horseman of the Year: Brian Bell

Every year, NRHA offers the opportunity for NRHA Professionals to recognize their peers in various categories that demonstrate their commitment to the industry they help make a thriving sport. Affiliates nominate individuals, the Professionals Committee vets them, and then you, the NRHA Professionals, vote for those who'll receive the esteemed honor.

Horseman of the Year: Brian Bell

Hometown: Valley View, Texas

What does it mean to receive this award: I think it's pretty cool because the pros vote on it; my own people who I compete against thought I should receive it. When I was a kid starting out in reining, I thought I'd train horses and have a good time. I didn't understand that I'd have to be a businessman and talk to people and do clinics and all that. I was riding and showing as a non pro and went to Congress

and won the non pro futurity. Brett Stone was a judge and called me a week later to offer me a job. I knew how to train my own horses, but I hadn't thought about doing it professionally. I knew I could show, and he could teach me the rest. I was with Brett for six years, when John Slack and Todd Bergen were at his place. I got to ride with three guys who had three different programs. A lot of what I do is a piece of each one of them. I started learning about the business from them, too. I didn't know how to talk to customers and all that. Brett had me go with him to show people yearlings. By the time I did that a few times, Brett would just send me. I knew their pedigrees and all that as good as he did. He made me learn to talk to people about buying and selling horses, which is a big part of our business, and then I went on my own.

Where do you find fulfillment in your career: I love to show. I love it as much as I have ever loved it; I'm not tired of it at all. I also love to

help these non pros go show and win. If you took the showing away, I'd be less interested in this as a business. When it all comes together and works with a horse—it's so hard to do and so fulfilling when you get there. I love the anticipation and the crowd—the bigger the crowd or more pressure, the better. It's funny that I do because I was a very shy kid. The horses taught me to be confident. I had to learn to speak in front of clinics and show in front of 12,000 fans. Some of my high school teachers would be surprised at how well it's gone for me.

What's the hardest lesson you've learned: I think I left Brett's place too soon. It was one of the dumbest things I did. At the time there was only Open, Intermediate Open, and Limited Open. I had won enough to just be Open. I thought I had to hurry to get out on my own. Their "leftover" horses were so much better than what I got when I was first on my own.

What's your best advice for the next generation: Live within your means. All these young trainers go and get started and buy a new fancy rig. That's a \$175,000 investment and you might have four horses in training. You have to figure out how to make money to make those payments. Take your time; wait until you have horses to fill the trailer every time. Learn the business and costs of board and managing help. If you're paying all this interest on trucks, trailers, properties—you're not making any money. Drive your truck until you can buy a new one outright. Those payments add up. Admit that you're just getting started. Don't get ahead of yourself.

Becky Hanson Horsewoman of the Year: Josiane Gauthier

Hometown: Lucama, North Carolina

What does it mean to you to receive this award: Becky Hanson was an amazing woman. I knew her a little—I followed her story, and that makes this award extra special. She was such



*2023 Becky Hanson Horsewoman of the Year
Josiane Gauthier*

a wonderful woman and so strong. Her story spoke to me and is inspiring. Additionally, I feel like awards like these help validate all the time and effort we put into our careers. Training and showing horses have been my lifestyle forever, and it's all we do. We work so hard. Getting this award makes me feel like that work is being recognized. The outpour of love and messages is overwhelming. You work so hard, and the highs and lows are so hard. To be appreciated like that is so helpful.

Where do you find fulfillment in your career: I find it different places. One is helping people. Finding people who've always dreamed of riding and competing, and they get to know me and decide to step forward and take lessons or make a call to come watch—that's a special thing. Helping them achieve their dreams that they might've tabled is great. Helping them find a horse and success—I get a lot of fulfillment

from that. When I help someone ride, that helps me stay motivated. I'm also really motivated by horses that I connect with. Finding the specific horse and developing him to the best of his ability and then letting him be the best he can be, bringing it out, is fulfilling. That's my goal: happy healthy horses that are the best they can be.

What's the hardest lesson you've learned:

When things end, you have to learn to let it go. People come and go in our business, and so do their horses. We put so much heart into each horse and have goals and dreams for them. It's all wrapped around emotions. We're competitors but do it for the love of the horse. When people come and go, it can be hard for me to be OK with it. I know I can't understand why it happened, just that it will happen. You still have to be professional and do your best. We put so much heart into it and take it very personally when a horse leaves. When it's close to your heart, it's hard. We have to remember that when a door closes, another opens. I know it's always for the best, but maybe it doesn't feel that way in the moment. It's so hard to replace and bond with another horse, but we find a way.

What's your best advice for the next

generation: Find mentors who you look up to. Build a good reputation by working hard and having a good work ethic. Be a good horseman first and foremost. Stick to a program for many years to where you get to learn all aspects of the business before going on your own too early. As a young trainer, it might look so great to own your own business, but it's so much work. A good mentor with a good business can teach you a lot before you go out on your own.

Non Pro Coach of the Year: Martin Muehlstaetter

Hometown: Scottsdale, Arizona

What does it mean to you to receive this award: I feel honored and thankful for all my



2023 Non Pro Coach of the Year: Martin Muehlstaetter

non pro clients. Without them I wouldn't get the award. Non pros make up 1/3 or so of my program, so it's a big part of what we do.

Where do you find fulfillment in your career:

I always enjoy trying to get the most done with the horse/rider combination. I want to find the right horse for each rider. With the right combination, you get to see them make the finals and experience the joy of feeling that success and accomplishment. It's their hobby and they do this for fun, so the emotional roller coaster can be a lot. But when they're a good pair, it comes together easier. I feel like training the horses is the easier part of my job. Getting the right combination of horse and rider is challenging and fulfilling.

What's the hardest lesson you've learned:

It can be hard to make the call when a horse doesn't fit the rider, but it's a necessary

conversation. No one goes to the big events to be in second place.

What's your best advice for the next

generation: Spend as much time as you can as an apprentice. I was an apprentice in Europe for three years. I did another seven years in the U.S. before I went out on my own. The time you invest will pay off if you stay in one program or go to a few different ones and will help you learn all aspects of the business. A lot of people head out on their own too early. It's hard to take them seriously because they don't understand all aspects of the business. They don't have the experience to deal with customers. They might be able to train horses, but they must also run a business. It's something young trainers must understand to be successful.

Up-and-Coming Trainer of the Year: Luca Fappani

Hometown: Weatherford, Texas

What does it mean to you to receive this

award: Going into the year, there were many unknowns: what horses I'd show, how I'd do in a new program, moving from my dad's [Andrea Fappani] program to Casey Deary's operation; people weren't sure of it. I'm so thankful it's worked out the way it has. Casey was so generous, giving me great horses to ride and show last year; I'm so thankful for that. Without what I learned from Casey—and what I continue to learn—I couldn't have that success that I did. Looking back, I'm very thankful for God's plan.

Where do you find fulfillment in your career:

I find the joy in going through the struggle. In horse training, it's up and down all the time, no matter who you are. When your horses aren't riding their best, and you're in a valley in your training, and then you go to a show and work through it and achieve success—that's huge for me. The rewards help you feel accomplished, and knowing that you'll make it through it all and get closer to the peak is worth it. Without



2023 Up-and-Coming Trainer of the Year: Luca Fappani

the valleys, you don't appreciate the success. Obviously, with my dad I could watch what he goes through; but going through a year of showing with another top trainer and seeing that everyone has this same situation was helpful to me. The best trainers keep their heads on straight and get through it.

What's the hardest lesson you've learned:

The hardest principle of this business is that you see those great trainers and all the victories and the money and the glory. What you don't see is all the horses that they had blocks with. The horses they couldn't figure out or that don't fit your program and have to move on. Learning that's inevitable has given me a lot of peace and more confidence in what I'm doing. In watching Casey, his favorite 3-year-old [for the 2023 NRHA Futurity] didn't make the semifinals. To watch the trainer who's been at the top of our sport for the last few years have his best horse run into tough luck and work through that is

admirable. That's the lesson I've taken away from this year. Those scenarios come no matter how hard you try.

What's your best advice for the next

generation: Really dive in on training the young horses. I started showing when I was 11. Until I was 16 or 17, I hadn't started a 2-year-old. Once you have those skills and understand the older horses and can show, dive into those 2-year-olds as soon as possible. I had a huge learning curve the first time I did it. I thought it would be easier, and I messed up a lot. I learned a lot from that horse and found my feel. Riding young horses tells you what kind of horse trainer you are. Showing is important, but growing as a horseman and horse trainer is the most important thing. Hold yourself accountable because it's a whole different game.

Youth Coach of the Year: Matt Florida

Hometown: Purcell, Oklahoma

What does it mean to you to receive this

award: It's humbling because it's voted on by my peers. For me, it's getting recognized not only for me but also the kids I coach who've made a commitment their horses, and I've made a commitment to them. I've been hauling two youth kids the last few years. It's been a learning curve for me and for them. We don't have kids, so I'm learning that they're different generationally and in their mindset. I only keep 10–12 horses in training, so I try to be very well balanced as far as having a little bit of everything around me, from 3-year-olds to non pros to youth riders. It keeps me more grounded. I do a little of everything. I try to give back. I do a lot of lessons. I want to give back to the industry.

Where do you find fulfillment in your career:

I'm very competitive by nature, so to go to the barn every morning and strive for perfection—whether it's maneuvers or giving top-notch care to my horses or hanging a bridle correctly. I tell



2023 Youth Coach of the Year: Matt Florida

the kids all the time: How you do anything is how you do everything. The small things lead to the big things. Trying to be better and closer to perfection every day and getting better and communicating with horses better is fulfilling.

What's the hardest lesson you've learned:

The most important thing in business is knowing who you are. Working with your strengths and not focusing on weaknesses. In the past, I focused on weakness, and it got me off the path I wanted to be on. I've learned not to do that. Focus on your strengths and stay on your path. Don't get off track.

What's your best advice for the next

generation: Give everybody an opportunity. You never know what the future holds. I've had so many people that started out as lesson clients who ended up buying themselves a horse and then buying me a horse, too. You never know. Give everyone an opportunity. ■

NRHA Professional Code of Ethics

We, the members of the National Reining Horse Association Professionals, in carrying out our role of providing service to the reining horse industry, recognize the need to do so in a professional manner, and to represent the sport of reining in a professional manner with the highest degree of integrity.

Therefore, we have set forth the following code of ethics, which shall govern our endeavors in the industry. By signing this application, I agree to be bound by the rules of the NRHA Professional Code of Ethics. To participate in this program, I concede to maintaining a continuous individual membership with NRHA.

As a member of the NRHA Professionals, I will:

- Adhere to the professional standards of the NRHA and work to further its goals and objectives.
- Ensure that the welfare of the reining horse is paramount and that every horse shall always be treated humanely and with dignity, respect, and compassion, regardless if the horse does not reside under my direct supervision.
- Positively influence all members to refrain from any perceived misconduct or inappropriate actions towards either horses or other members.
- Conduct my affairs in the sport of reining with integrity, sincerity, and accuracy in an honest, transparent, and forthright manner.
- Act with integrity in my dealings with reining clients, other NRHA members, and the public when representing the sport of reining. In this regard, any horse shown by my spouse, client, or child will be economically owned as prescribed by applicable NRHA rules.
- Handle my reining horse business, operations, and communications (including those through social media) in a manner, which promotes a positive image of the reining horse industry.

- To fully disclose to customers the actual sales price and commissions involved in the sale or purchase of a horse.
- To not charge or receive a monetary commission, or other remuneration constituting a commission, from both buyer and seller of a horse.
- Model the proper ideals of positive sportsmanship and fair competition, and show cordial courtesy to fellow competitors, members, and Judges.

The Professional Code of Ethics is intended as a general guideline for reining professionals' behavior and is not intended to be an exhaustive list of conduct for NRHA Professionals. NRHA Professionals' conduct is also governed by NRHA Rules. This Code is intended, however, to state basic standards, which should govern the conduct of all professionals and to provide guidance to assist professionals in establishing and maintaining high standards of conduct within the reining horse industry.

This Code of Ethics generally identifies the ethical obligations of NRHA Professionals and does not substitute for, nor is it intended to substitute for, or in any way alter or modify the NRHA rules.

The members of the NRHA Professionals Committee created the NRHA Professional Code of Ethics to further promote the humane treatment of reining horses and ethical business practices. If you have questions regarding this code, please reach out to Patti Carter at pcarter@nrha.com.

