

## ***Wisconsin State Report – by Ken Carpenter, Alternate Delegate***

Wisconsin Horse Council (WHC) continues to promote, serve, and protect our state equine industry and those involved in it. Our horse expo, Midwest Horse Fair, had an attendance of 53,000 people this year. This is a really good attendance record for a weekend that gave us some very challenging weather. Proceeds from our horse expo support the many programs we offer as well as the efforts of other equine-focused organizations. We invest a large portion of our funds back into our industry through scholarships for high school seniors and adults pursuing equine-related careers and grants for: building/improving trails; equine therapy programs; clinics in equine management, nutrition/health, training, riding/driving; and various equine events.

We also employ the services of a professional lobbyist to assist us with legislative issues that could affect horse owners and horses as livestock. Her knowledge of our legislature and its members and her presence at the capital are of great value to our Council in “selling” our organization as representing the equine industry in Wisconsin.

In 2012, we added a new expo titled “Taking the Reins.” This second event was held in August, had a different focus than our Midwest Horse Fair, and was smaller in scale. This new event provided opportunities to work hands-on with trainers and clinicians on a more personal level while still providing a level of entertainment with evening shows. Feedback was very positive from people who took advantage of the opportunities and participated. However, attendance was not as expected, revenue did not match the enthusiasm, and we took a big loss.

We are presenting “Taking the Reins” again this August. This year’s results will be the deciding factor in continuing this event or not. We are really focusing on the trainers and clinicians and have eliminated the lightly attended evening performances. People can still try things, like riding a reining horse, barrel horse, or driving a carriage – all part of the “I Wish I Could Try That” opportunities. In addition, we have moved our end-of-season Championship Challenge Horse Show to this event, which will give us a great base of show riders and their horses.

This past year, we initiated a feeding assistance program for equine owners experiencing short term financial difficulties in taking care of their horses. We consulted with our state agricultural agency in writing the guidelines for this program. They were very happy to learn that as a state organization representing the equine industry, our Council was willing to address the issue of helping owners take care of their horses.

In March, our Judges Seminar was held in southeast Wisconsin. This program began in 1979 with the intent to improve judging in Open, All-Breed, and 4-H shows. It has grown to be one of the strongest programs we offer. Each year, the seminar focuses on a specific show ring discipline, presented by a recognized expert on the topic, and using volunteer horses and riders for demonstration. To maintain a WHC-certified judge’s card, a show judge must attend one of our seminars at least once in a 3-year period. Many judges choose to attend the seminar every year, if they can.

In August, we are holding our 7<sup>th</sup> end-of-year award program for riders who compete in open shows. We call it Championship Challenge; only the best of the best compete in the championship show held at the end of the season. Most breed organizations have award programs for people who compete all year long, earning points to be recognized as the best in their chosen class. Our program gives this type of recognition to people who compete in open shows. The program grows a little each year as more competitors become aware of it and show committees see how their shows are enhanced by becoming sanctioned.

This is the 8th year our Council is providing training in non-urban horse trail design and construction by bringing Mike Riter of Trail Design Specialists to Wisconsin to present his Trail Master Certification Course. This 4-day school is held in partnership with the Wisconsin DNR Parks, who increased their funding level this year to make this course available to all involved as recreational trail volunteers or land management staff.

These types of programs show the dedication WHC has to the Wisconsin equine industry. Those of us that are more involved on national issues with the AHC, CSHC, American Trails International Trails Symposium, and National Equestrian Trails Conference have been successful at introducing national interests into the Council. We find that by using our newsletter and Facebook, we have sparked more interest in what is going on outside of our state.

Using Facebook for timely issues on disease reporting, disasters and personal tragedies from around the county are of interest to our residents. We are finding more horse people are looking to our Council first for information. Here's a good example. The horrible effects of the tornados in Oklahoma gripped the entire nation. About the time I started seeing a discussion among saddle clubs on how can they help the horses and horse owners in Oklahoma, the AHC posted on twitter that the AAEP has a foundation in place and available to accept donations for victims of this disaster. We re-sent this out on our FB page and sent a copy of what the AHC sent directly to those saddle clubs that were looking for this kind of info. This was a great use of Facebook and even better that Wisconsin horse people looked to us for information. We are working very hard to be the go-to source for our industry.

Our council partners with other organizations to support our industry like the Aliant Energy Center (AEC). This is the venue where we hold our expo, the Midwest Horse Fair which is owned by Dane County. Madison is a Dane County city. The AEC has committed to agriculture by developing a plan to replace all of the animal barns on the AEC grounds with an \$18 million upgrade. Two barns will replace the current 8 barns. Building 1 will be 90,000 square feet and will be climate controlled allowing use year round. Building 2 will be 200,000 square feet. This will allow the World Dairy Expo to be completely held at the AEC and will present more opportunities for the MHF. The buildings will be designed specifically for the comfort of livestock and provide the tools needed to support the livestock. Half of the width of both building will be free span which will allow performance rings the entire length of the building. The span will be high enough to allow for stadium jumping. We have made a financial commitment to this update.

A planned development of Agricultural Education Center by private investors is another example of our outreach within the industry. This is an interesting concept and we are looking forward to planning on the equine section of this project.

The flow of information that happens at the CSHC meeting is very important to us in Wisconsin. The ideas we gain help us to consider other projects and directions that our Council can take.