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**In its 15th Year, DRESSAGE4KIDS
WEEKEND EQUESTRIAN PROGRAM continues its success**

Bedford, NY – February 6, 2017 – The 15th Annual Dressage4Kids Weekend Equestrian Program was, once again, a great success! Twenty-eight speakers and more than 150 participants each day gathered at Nonnewaug High School in Woodbury, CT in late January to learn and discuss all horse and rider-related topics in their quest to become better riders and more knowledgeable about horses.

Lendon Gray, Olympian and founder of Dressage4Kids, was the keynote speaker on the 15th anniversary of this annual event, which has grown in popularity each succeeding year. Ms.



Gray shared her journey from early beginnings riding her pony in local shows in Maine, to riding at two Olympics and the World Cup, and what it took to get there. She stressed the importance of commitment to reaching feasible goals, of riding as many horses as you can find for as many hours as you can manage, to making each ride a learning experience both for you and the horse. She asked, ‘How many of you take notes immediately after your lessons?’ explaining that she always did this, using her notes to work on between lessons. Ms. Gray stressed that education, both academic and equestrian, is vital and how helpful business courses are for those planning to work in this field. She gave thanks to all the mentors and trainers who helped her along the way, and to the owners whose

horses she trained and showed. She especially thanked the horses that helped her achieve her dream, particularly *Seldom Seen*, who patiently learned the Grand Prix movements with her, and went on to achieve great success both nationally and internationally - even though he was only 14.3 hands and competing against much larger horses! According to Ms. Gray, "It can be done, but it is not always easy and you have to be blessed with the right horse and the right time," she said. "But always remember, the consideration for the horses must come first!" Through Dressge4Kids, Lendon Gray has given many youth riders the opportunity to gain the knowledge they need to reach their goals and succeed from the lowest to the highest levels of competition.

Another Olympian told of her journey to the Rio Olympic games. Margaret (Gigi) McIntosh gave an inspiring presentation of what it took to go from a 4* Event rider to overcoming severe injury and making the USA Para-Dressage Team last summer. Again she credited the mentors and the eventing community who helped her, her family, and especially the horses. Gigi shared details of what it took both physically and emotionally to be riding again - and then be selected for Rio - and her experience at the games.



The Business Seminar conducted by Atty. Beth Clarke attracted 20 professionals in the equine industry. This covered many important aspects of running a successful business in



today's environment and was expressly focused on the equestrian industry. The other track was for Eventers with Sara Contois, who discussed the difference between fitness for dressage vs. eventing, and how dressage influences one's cross country and stadium jumping. Judge Margaret Freeman spoke on the what the judge sees and what the collective marks

mean. She also headed the USDF Region 8 Judge's Forum on Sunday when more than 30 judges or L candidates discussed various aspects of what a judge is looking for and what mark is appropriate.

The Weekend Equestrian Program is also notable for having experts in a variety of equine fields offering advice. Chiropractor Dr. Anna Crane spoke on the physiology of warm up and cool down and stressed that horses were designed to walk over 18 miles a day, grazing as they went. This is why it is so important to get the horses' systems warmed up before starting

work, and, equally, to cool down, so the body can adjust to going into the resting mode. She also explained how a horse 'ticks' so we can understand the way their bodies and minds work. Other subjects included saddle fitting, advice on trailer safety, tips on bio-security to keep your horses safe, the advantages of massage and accupuncture, and



'how to plan your day at the show'. Liz Webb, who has been teaching at Nonnewaug High



School for more than 20 years, explained the importance of keeping track of your horses' temperature, pulse and respiration, and Maureen Pach demonstrated correct bandaging. There were many sessions in the gym from vaulting to floor exercises, the BALIMO method for balancing riders correctly on their horse,

and some basic Centered Riding practical applications – all helpful and active learning for young and older riders alike.

Author of the book *Dressage Masters* and a Grand Prix rider and trainer, David Collins discussed how a rider's brain has to be 'in sync' with the horse's brain every time they ride, emphasizing that riders must be 'tuned in' mentally to the horse so that they can concentrate on what the horse's body is 'telling' them. If you are stressed, they will be stressed because a horse picks up on what the rider is thinking and will act accordingly. Mr. Collins suggests sitting for ten minutes doing deep breathing before mounting to clear the mind so you can really focus on your horse and its training.

The whole **Weekend Equestrian Program**, which aims to include everyone from the horse community, is of great value to riders of all ages and skill levels, parents and horse enthusiasts alike. Everyone who came was enthusiastic about the chance to learn so much from so many experts, and are already looking forward to next year's program. For information about the **Weekend Equestrian Program**, go to www.dressage4kids.org or contact Susan Sieber, Event Coordinator, at ssieber@interstatelumber.com or at (203) 223-4261.

Dressage4Kids, Inc. is a non-profit organization incorporated for the express purpose of providing educational and competitive opportunities for youth riders and the adults who support them