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### **DRESSAGE4KIDS, INC. WEEKEND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM A GREAT SUCCESS!**

*Bedford, NY – February 17, 2015* – The 13th Annual Dressage4Kids’ Weekend Educational Program was a huge success! Forty speakers and 300 participants gathered at Nonnewaug High School in Woodbury, CT over two days to discuss all things horse and rider related in their quest to become better overall horsemen. As certified mental skills trainer and nationally ranked tennis player, Brian Lomax, said, “No one rolls out of bed #1 in the world. It is a journey to get to the top, and you have to work hard all along the way.” And here were more than 300 people braving the cold and the snow to further their education in their journey to the top.

The keynote speaker on Saturday was Laura Graves, currently ranked 20<sup>th</sup> in the world. Laura shared her experiences competing in Europe – culminating with her success at the World Equestrian Games.



**Photo: Young admirer with  
Laura Graves, courtesy of  
Mia Giuliano-Zimmerman**

She certainly had plenty of excitement since she had only 36 hours from the time she was selected to the U.S. Dressage Team to get herself and ‘Verdades’ on a plane flying to Europe! While showing there, she had to come up with music for her new Freestyle and work on the choreography - but the effort all worked out well because she came in 5<sup>th</sup> with a score of 82.036% in this strongly contested class at WEG. This was certainly quite an achievement since this was her first time competing on the the team. Laura’s advice to aspiring competitors is, “Know your horse, know how your horse reacts to change, know what they like and don’t like. Then at a competition, give them all their favorite things so they look forward to competing!” She also stressed that you must be an advocate for your horse with regard to his best possible care. Later she shared some of the training ideas she used to bring ‘Diddy’ to Grand Prix. Laura is adamant that you should never ‘drill’ your horse, but instead she uses a variety of methods to keep her horses mentally involved, such as cavaletti work, galloping on a track, trail riding, and schooling in the arena probably two or three days a week – this way horses stay happier and enjoy their work. Certainly advice that is well worth listening to!



Photo: Donna Decker signing autographs, courtesy of Carole Baker

The keynote speaker on Sunday was Donna Decker, Olympic level swimmer, mountaineer, and exercise physiologist who reminded those in the audience to find the best of themselves. “Live a life true to yourself, not the life others expect of you,” she said. “You don’t have to do it alone, but you DO have to believe in yourself. If you have a dream and a passion, and someone tells you that you can’t do it, get away from them!” Everyone was impressed with her passion to succeed, first as a swimmer and then to climb mountains on every continent - finally making it to the top of Mount Everest in her 50s when most people are slowing down a bit. What it took for her to succeed – both mentally and physically – was certainly inspirational and especially helpful to the younger people listening to her story.

Another competitor at the World Equestrian Games in Normandy, France, was Sydney Collier who competed in the Para-Dressage. Certainly it was inspirational to hear her journey to becoming a member of the U.S. team. We were impressed by her efforts and those of her family, including her now famous service dog who accompanies her everywhere!



Photo: Sydney Collier with her service dog Journey, courtesy of Carole Baker

The Weekend Educational Program also included a special forum for professional trainers’ and those who attended got excellent advice offered by Brian Lomax. As he explained, “Students tend to adopt their trainer’s attitudes, so as a trainer, make character and morals part of your mission.” He also stressed the four areas of training – *Motivational, Mental, Emotional, Physical*. “While we tend to focus on the physical, remember it is only one aspect”. Well-known trainer and author David Collins offered his insights on the classical basis of training garnered from his experiences studying in Sweden, and working with renowned trainers in Germany and in the US. He continues to use and develop these concepts in his current training and teaching. Beth Clarke had everyone thinking about Ethics in Teaching; Vicki Hammers-O’Neil held an interactive session on how to explain new concepts to students; then Lendon Gray headed the Trainers’ Roundtable discussion to round out the day. Margaret Freeman worked hard all weekend as she not only headed the USDF Region 8 Judges’ Forum on Sunday, but also covered the details of the new dressage tests from Intro to Fourth Level all day on Saturday!



Photo: Brian Stuart, courtesy of Carole Baker

The weekend certainly lived up to its ideal of bringing top speakers to share their expertise with riders of all ages and skill levels, not only about riding and training, but also the theory behind it. In addition, aspects of horse care not always readily available were presented, as was information on many other equestrian activities. Everyone left with lots to think about and excited about how much they had learned.

Anyone interested in more information regarding the **Weekend Educational Program**, please go to [www.dressage4kids.org](http://www.dressage4kids.org) or contact Susan Sieber, Event Coordinator, at [ssieber@interstatelumber.com](mailto:ssieber@interstatelumber.com).

*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.*

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