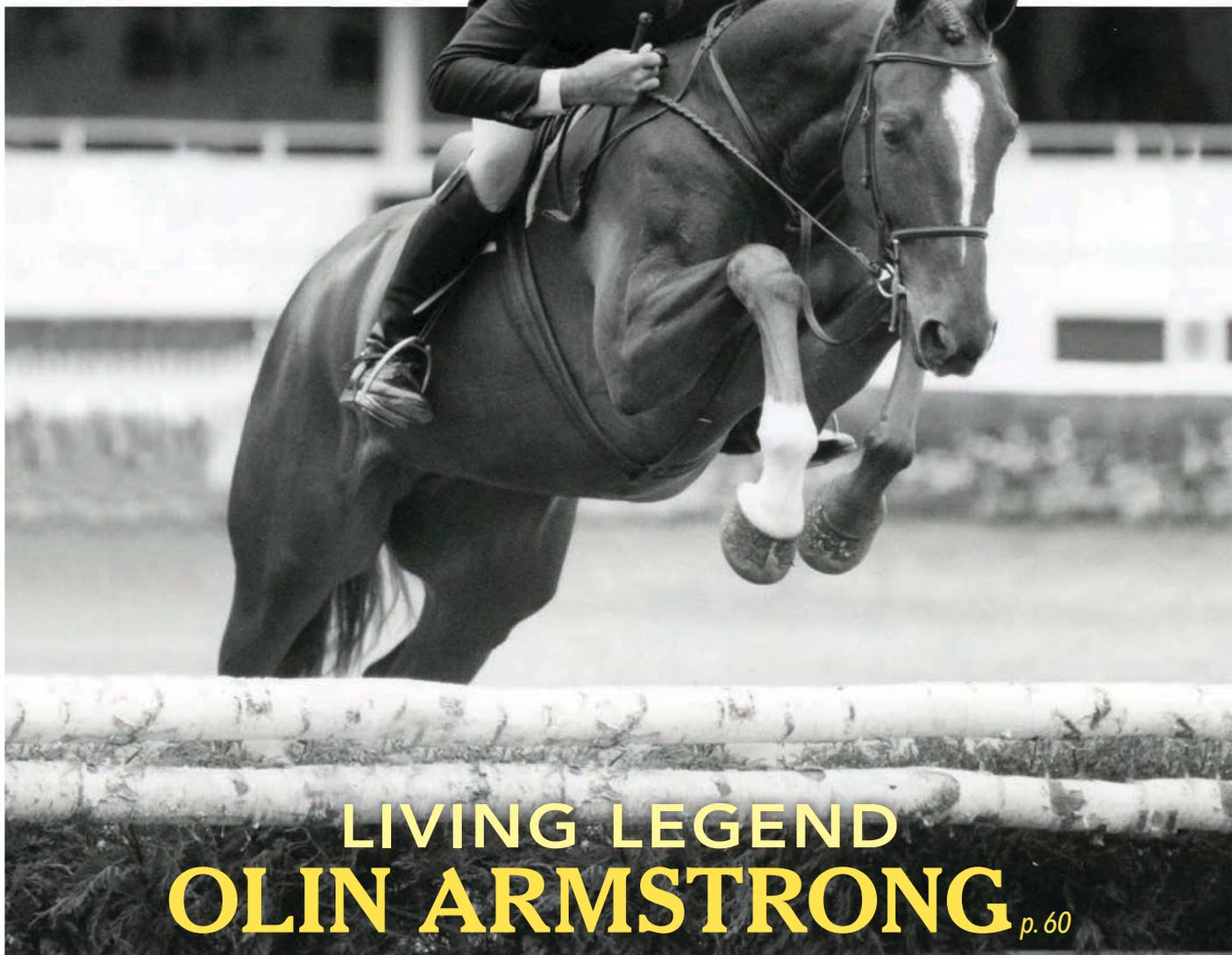


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HORSE
SHOW
ISSUE

The Chagrin Hunter Jumper Classic, Past, Present And Future

Whether enjoying historic milestones or surviving times of near extinction, this traditional show has continued to innovate over its nearly 70-year history.

BY BETTY WEIBEL

Of the thousands of horse shows in this country, the Chagrin Hunter Jumper Classic (as it is known today) is one of only 25 that have earned the U.S. Equestrian Federation designation of heritage competition.

The birthplace of the first North

American grand prix, it is where riders like Michael Matz and Katie Monahan (Prudent) earned their wings and Rodney Jenkins honed his craft. It's where managers like Gene Mische got their start and developed ideas that impacted the sport forever.

But before all that, the Chagrin show

started as a local fundraiser. In 1949 the Chagrin Valley Trails and Riding Club launched an annual two-day, all-breed English and Western horse show as a

Mary Chapot and Tomboy won the 1965 Cleveland Grand Prix, the first event of its kind in North America. PHOTO COURTESY OF CVPHA



fundraiser for activities and clubhouse maintenance. The clubhouse and the show grounds were part of the public Cleveland Metroparks South Chagrin Reservation, a stunningly beautiful setting with the Chagrin River flowing alongside a public polo field on land in Hunting Valley and Moreland Hills.

Although the show offered classes for carriage driving, Western riders and gaited horses in the early years, the primary focus was hunters and jumpers. By the 1960s, it was one of the largest outdoor hunter/jumper shows in the nation, attracting exhibitors from around the country.

The show's growing popularity led members of the club to question how they could keep up. In 1964 CVTRC members Chuck Mapes and Leah Goetz (Stroud) helped the newly formed Chagrin Valley Professional Horsemen's Association take over management of the show under the new name the Chagrin Valley PHA Horse Show.

Not long after, Laddie Andahazy approached the show leaders about hosting a new kind of event. Andahazy, a Hungarian immigrant, was inspired by the high-level riding he saw at the 1936 Olympic Games in Germany. As director of the Lake Erie College (Ohio) riding program, he researched show jumping courses and jump construction in his European travels and presented the information on grand prix show jumping. His presentation captured the attention of D. Jerry Baker, a successful equestrian with the U.S. Army Team and stable manager/trainer for J. Basil Ward in Cleveland, who put up \$3,000 to finance the first grand prix in North America. The Cleveland Grand Prix, the culminating event of the Chagrin Valley PHA Horse Show, was born.

On July 25, 1965, 29 horses and 20 riders competed in the first North American show jumping grand prix. Flags from six countries flew, and the United States' Mary Chapot on her mare, Tomboy, was the winner. She received \$1,200.

Over the years the show has served as an Olympic selection trial for U.S. and Canadian teams. It ran the first American Gold Cup in 1970, which evolved to become the American Invitational and hosted an FEI World



Rain flooded the Chagrin River in 1969, wreaking havoc on the horse show.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CVPHA



Conrad Homfeld, shown here tackling a fence on the outside hunter course at the 1968 Chagrin show, went on to earn a team gold medal at the 1984 Olympic Games.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CVPHA

Cup qualifier.

According to the late five-time Olympian William Steinkraus, the Cleveland Grand Prix played a critical role in the development of U.S. show jumping and helped lead to the FEI World Cup Finals coming to Baltimore in 1980 and the U.S. team and individual gold-medal show jumping performances at the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles.

With more than 70 grand prix wins under his belt, retired world-class show jumper Rodney Jenkins dubbed the Cleveland Grand Prix the founding horse show of the grand prix circuit.

All About The People

Longtime chairman and ongoing supporter Karen Schneider said those early memories have helped keep the show alive today.

"The horse show is led by a very strong horse community," she says. "One thing that makes the Cleveland show special is memories by some very involved people that are now all over the country and connected through horse sports—from Rodney Jenkins and Michael Matz to Michael Morrissey and Susie Schoellkopf."

Current Chagrin manager Phil DeVita Jr. manages shows around the country, and a number of them have heritage status: Menlo Park (California), Pin Oak (Texas), Germantown (Tennessee) and of course, Cleveland.

"I think one of the greatest attributes is the people in the Midwest," DeVita says. "They are welcoming and friendly and want you to be there. They appreciate you coming to the shows and work year round on getting



Michael Matz and Jet Run, the 1979 Pan American Games winner who would go on to compete in the World Championships, win the FEI World Cup Final and be inducted into the Show Jumping Hall of Fame, won at Cleveland in 1981. PHOTO COURTESY OF CVPHA



Margie Goldstein-Engle, winner of the 1992 Cleveland Grand Prix aboard Daydream, has won the class more than any other rider. PHOTO COURTESY OF CVPHA

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TO MID-RANGE

the show ready. Not only is Chagrin a heritage show with historic value, it is also one of the few surviving boutique shows in the country, and there is an all-volunteer board.”

DeVita’s memories of the show go back to the 1970s. “We would come here from Lake Placid [New York], and I was 13, working and grooming for my father [Philip DeVita],” he says. “We always had horses on the road, and my sisters were showing. I remember walking up to the concession stand, and Dad and Barney Ward were there—that is when I told them I wanted to start showing, and Barney sold us Terry Leibel’s hunter so I could do the 3’6” classes. To me Cleveland is a place of great memories, and it has a wonderful atmosphere.”

A Tough Team

Over its lifetime the Chagrin Hunter Jumper Classic has faced many challenges. Although competition and date conflicts contributed to its cancellation one year, the biggest battle has been with Mother Nature.

Photos from the 1960s show the grounds under water and jumps floating away after rain flooded the

Chagrin River. In the 1980s, show management tried to dry the flooded show ring with a helicopter one year and used gasoline to burn off the water another time.

The show was canceled in 1995 but made a comeback in 1996, with new leadership. Karen Schneider was co-chair and led a new, energized board of directors. They established nonprofit status, secured KeyBank as the title sponsor, and installed new all-weather hunter and warm-up rings.

In 2003 after the stable area and surrounding roads flooded and the grand prix was forced to move from the grass field to the all-weather rings, the board made major improvements to roads and drainage in the stable area. It also added “The All The Gold Field,” a state-of-art grand prix ring installed by Steffee Surfaces, in honor of the late board member Billie Steffee. All of the improvements were on the public property of the Cleveland Metroparks System, used only in July by the horse show.

“There are many challenges to running a top horse show, including the increasing costs from labor and material suppliers, especially for a

► This Year's Event

The 2018 renewal of the Chagrin Hunter Jumper Classic will be held July 5-15.

In addition to new support from the Lindsay Maxwell Charitable Fund, there are a number of returning long-time sponsors like the locally based Schneider Saddlery, which became involved in 1974. In late 2017 the Schneider Family purchased Chagrin Valley Farms, and they will team up to support Schneider Saddlery Opening Weekend, July 5-7.

special horse show like ours that sets up at a site we don't own," says Lori Proch, who chairs the all-volunteer board. "For independent shows like ours, competition from the 'Big box shows' is also difficult when they offer shows at the same venue for eight to 12 weeks.

"When you work with an all-volunteer board you have to remember that we all have other jobs and responsibilities that take our time," adds Proch who is executive vice president of insurance operations at Assured Partners. "We have lost some long-time board members in recent years like Chuck Kinney, Howard Lewis, Chuck Mapes and Billie Steffee. It's hard to attract new blood in the form of volunteers, leaders and sponsors, but we're working on that."

The board has created a junior committee, hosted a recruitment event at a local barn and is developing internships and mentorships for students to gain experience and college credit in such fields as hospitality, marketing and sport and event management.

Attracting new financial support continues to present challenges. In the 1980s the horse show was the darling of corporate sponsors when Mische worked with Cleveland-based International Management Group on the horse show as well as his American Grand Prix Association series. Financial



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Joe Fargis, the 1984 team and individual Olympic show jumping gold medalist, competed at Chagrin Valley in 2013, jumping in front of the Chagrin Valley Trails and Riding Club clubhouse on the Cleveland Metroparks South Chagrin Reservation. ANNE GITTINS PHOTO

services and banking firms lined up to purchase the title sponsorship packages then, but the banking industry and corporate spending have greatly changed in more recent years.

“It’s been 10 years since we had a

six-figure title sponsor, but our board has worked hard to recruit other support in small dollars to keep the show alive,” says Proch.

This year the Lindsay Maxwell Charitable Fund stepped in as the

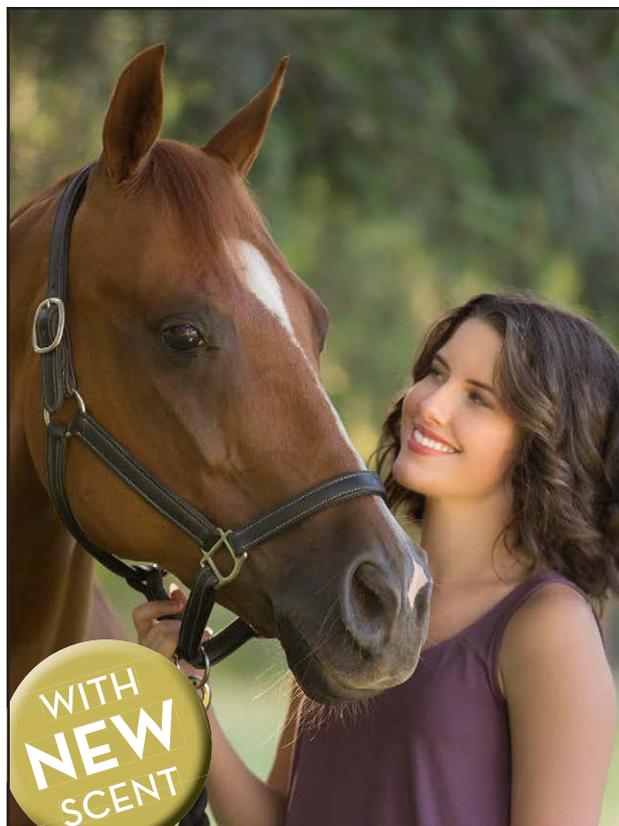
grand prix title sponsor. The \$50,000 Lindsay Maxwell Charitable Fund Cleveland Grand Prix will be held on July 15, the final day of the Chagrin Hunter Jumper Classic.

Continuing Tradition With Innovation

The show attained nonprofit status in 1996 and established its mission: Run a first-class competition, raise money for charity, and educate the public.

In addition to attracting top jumper riders from around the country, Chagrin has been a World Championship Hunter Rider site and hosted U.S. Hunter Jumper Association National and International Hunter Derbies. It promotes the sport to up-and-coming riders by offering novice levels on its opening weekend.

The latest innovation begins this summer. Joining forces with Chagrin Valley Farms in Bainbridge, Ohio, and Brave Horse Show Park outside



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Columbus, Ohio, they are introducing the inaugural Ohio Derby Cup series. The series will offer mini derby classes at 2', 2'6" and 3' to 3'5" at the three venues for hunters and jumpers.

"At one time Ohio had a large selection of horse show venues including venues like Ridgewood Stables and the Andrews School offering rated shows," says Proch. "However that has dwindled over the years with the cost of running shows and competition from conglomerate shows. We're putting the spotlight back on unique, homegrown shows and encouraging exhibitor support."

Charity And Community

The Chagrin Hunter Jumper Classic attracts more than 600 horses from 30 states and multiple countries as well as thousands of spectators during the 10 days of competition. The economic impact on the community ranges from \$3 to \$4 million adding to Northeast Ohio tourism dollars.

The show features locally built jumping obstacles that commemorate historic elements of the Cleveland landscape—for example, the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, Chagrin Falls Popcorn Shop, Cleveland Terminal Tower and a Cleveland Cavaliers trophy.

The charitable tradition of the show also continues every year, supporting organizations such as the Fieldstone Farm Therapeutic Riding Center, Geauga Humane Society/Rescue Village, Cleveland Metroparks, Chagrin Falls Volunteer Fire Department, Chagrin Valley Chamber of Commerce, Hershey Montessori School, Cleveland Police Foundation, Lymphoma & Leukemia Society, Cleveland APL, Ronald McDonald House, St. Paul's Church, Diabetes Association of Cleveland and Providence House Crisis Nursery. The horse show's cash and in-kind contributions over the years have exceeded a million dollars. 🐾

▶ Markers, Museums And More

The Cleveland Grand Prix has earned several marks of distinction:

▶ In 2010, Ohio honored the significance of the Cleveland Grand Prix with a bronze historical marker at the Cleveland Metroparks Polo Field.

▶ To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Cleveland Grand Prix, the USHJA Wheeler Museum at the Kentucky Horse Park installed a museum exhibit in 2015.

▶ "The Cleveland Grand Prix: An American Show Jumping First" was written by Betty Weibel and published in 2014 by The History Press.

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