



World Percheron Congress. Photo by Troy D. Sours

The Virginia Horse Center

Lexington, Virginia

By
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Photos courtesy of The Virginia Horse Center

In 1987 the Virginia Horse Center opened to the public with its first horse show. This marked the culmination of nine years of public, private, and governmental study, as well as the efforts of all parties to create a state-of-the-art outlet for a large and important industry in the Commonwealth. The governing bodies of the Horse Center are both private and public. The Virginia Equine Center

Foundation is a public board appointed by the Governor, which oversees operations. Their counterpart is the Virginia Horse Center Foundation, a private board whose job it is to raise money, cover major maintenance costs, and supplement operations when needed. These entities have been successfully managing the Virginia Horse Center since its inception, raising approximately \$10 million in private donations

that have allowed the Horse Center to develop into an internationally acclaimed facility.

One might ask why the Commonwealth of Virginia needs such an expensive and large venture just for the horse. The Commonwealth has been actively involved in the horse industry on many levels for generations, and today its

participation in the economy is valued at \$1.46 billion. Virginia lays claim to the fifth largest equine industry in the United States. These are remarkable figures and certainly provide ample justification for the impressive physical plant known as the Virginia Horse Center. The Horse Center has proven to be a great economic boon to the Lexington area and the state as a whole in terms of tax revenues, jobs, tourist spending, and participation returns. In a 2001 study by the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, the Horse Center is estimated as responsible for over \$30 million, 60% out-of-state, in annual tourist spending. Additionally, the jobs created by the facility and the local commercial impact are immense. The success is so thriving that in recent years the center added an additional 300 acres; more barns; another covered arena; an Olympic caliber cross-country course; and an internationally rated combined driving course. This enables large-scale events as well as sever-



An aerial view of the Horse Center in Lexington, VA. Photo by John Scott

al smaller events to be run at the same time.

So, what actually goes on at the Horse Center? If there is a horse, pony, or

mule that has a talent or a job, it can find an outlet at the Virginia Horse Center. About 90 events are scheduled throughout the year. They will include clinics presented

Lexington Spring
Premiere



Photo by Kristin
Waters Wise



Eastern Mid-Winter Sale. Photo by John Scott

by David O'Connor, Olympic Gold Medalist in 3-Day, Pat Parelli of Natural Horsemanship, and Monty Roberts of Joining Up fame. The horse shows typically include Hunter, Jumper, Pony, divisions etc. The Arab Sport Horse Nationals attracted over 400 of the nation's top Arabian horses. The lovely new 3-Day course has hosted a number of world class events since its inception, attracting competitors from nine countries, including many internationally recognized riders. The East Coast Championship Quarter Horse Show, with over 800 horses, was the largest show ever held at the Horse Center. Of great interest was the Oak Hill Combined Driving Event, which was a selection trial for the World Pony Driving Championships and the World Pairs Driving Championships. It included teams

Arabian Horse Association Sport Horse National. Photo by Kristin Waters Wise



from two combined driving luminaries, Tucker Johnson and Chester Weber.

The Virginia Therapeutic Riding Association holds its fall show, and the State 4-H hold its annual show at the Horse Center. The finals of The United States Pony Club was held at the Horse Center this year with children from all over the US competing. And The Virginia Equine Artists Fall Exhibition is on display for a month, featuring more than 180 works by nearly 70 Virginia artists.

In 2005 the Virginia Horse Center will be the host to many diverse, exciting, and unique horse activities. Principal among them will be the Lone Star Championship Rodeo in February. This two-evening event will present the best of western family entertainment for all ages. It features such exciting classes as bronc riding, bull riding, barrel racing, calf roping, team roping, and many others that will thrill the horse enthusiast from any discipline. Additionally there will be many collateral activities for the attendees. Also in the quarter horse line will be the East Coast Quarter Horse Championship with approximately 1100 horses from all over the East Coast.

In the Hunter Jumper venue, the biggest event will be a two-week back-to-back show with upwards of 800 horses involved from all over the U.S. In January a fun event will be the Winter Eastern National Draft Horse Pull, which will showcase the real workhorses of the equine world. Further into 2005 will be another CCI 3-Day Event, many Arabian shows, Paint Horse shows, Paso Fino shows, Combined Driving, Pony Club finals, and the prestigious Young Riders Show. There are many more events, too numerous to mention, but with over 90 shows throughout the year, there is something to attract participants and audiences in most weeks.

The Virginia Horse Center is home to some of the finest horse shows and related events in the United States. All of the information needed to attend these events can be found at www.horsecenter.org. Plan now for the various events, and take the entire family for fun and an unforgettable experience in the horse world. As with all facilities of this nature, the program is in constant need of support from the community they represent, so if you would like to help out the Horse Center, go to the website and make a donation.

I am sure the most famous horse from the area is beaming over the Virginia Horse Center—wouldn't Traveler be proud!

UPCOMING EVENTS

November

- 1-7 Virginia Equine Artists Fall Exhibition
- 5-7 The Virginia Horse Trials
- 12-14 Southwest Virginia Hunter-Jumper Association Finals
- 19-21 Virginia Horse Shows Association Championships
- 20 Turnbull Pumpkin Harvest Fall Sale

December

- 4-5 Mid-Eastern Team Roping Association Team Roping Finals & Jackpot Roping
- 10-11 PBR US Smokeless Tobacco Challenger Tour - Bull Riding



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