

## Warrenton Horse Show — Labor of Love

By Lauren R. Giannini

Warrenton Horse Show, established in 1899, celebrates its 110th renewal next Labor Day weekend. This unique one-ring show owes its survival and continued success to the support of the local community. Many people, inspired by love and loyalty, work year after year as volunteers: they believe that this is one show that must go on.

For some, it's a matter of family as well as show tradition. For others, it's a celebration of knowing that their small town for many decades was considered the Mecca for hunter breeding and showing.

"Warrenton means a great deal to me—I've been going there 50 years or more," says Betty Oare, competitor, hunting enthusiast and board member. "We lived in North Carolina and started coming here in the mid-1950s. At that time it was one of the most important A-rated horse shows. It was the last of the Big Four [Staunton, Hot Springs at The Homestead, Deep Run, Warrenton] and to go to the Big Four and maybe even win an award at Warrenton was a great thing."

Those were the days of J. Arthur Reynolds handling young stock, producing hunters and jumpers, coaching son Bucky, daughter Betty, as well as other riders, with the matriarch of the family, Edna Reynolds, being her usual gracious southern self. Times changed, however, when the AHSA (now USEF) adopted an earlier date cut-off to qualify for the indoor shows that left Warrenton, even on Labor Day weekend, out in the cold.

"I had to get used to that idea 15 years or so ago," admits Betty. "Now, Warrenton is more of a showcase for young horses coming up, for breeding classes, and on Hunt Night—there's not a parking space to be had. It's the place to be on Labor Day weekend—bring friends and a picnic. Even though it's a C-rated show, we have the National Breeding Finals, East Coast Regional Hunter Futurity Finals. I don't know of any show that has more community involvement than Warrenton, and Tommy Lee runs it like a professional."

That's Tommy Lee Jones, Casanova Huntsman, not the actor (ask him sometime about "same name" perks), who grew up at New Hope Farm a few miles from the single oval and whose early aspirations focused on the jumpers. Jones loves everything to do with horses, hounds and hunting and his passion for horse shows, fueled by his commitment to excellence, puts him over the top as the quintessential show manager for Warrenton and its five-ringed cousin, Upperville. By the way, Jones gets all his family members involved: Diane, his wife, is secretary of Warrenton, his mother Doris hosts the charitable beer tent at Warrenton, etc.

"With one ring, it's very hard to make a profit, so everybody who works there, they're volunteers and that's what makes the thing go," says Jones. "Back when we were the last in the Virginia circuit—everybody came here. We were big before there was big. Times changed, and it became harder to have a one-ring show. With the closing of the qualifiers a week before Warrenton came the decision to do what we do best. We have great breeding divisions, we started Hunt Night, which is very popular, and we have the futurity. It's like having four one-day horse shows. People come in and stay overnight. Hunt night is SRO."

"We couldn't do it without the whole board," he adds. "Most of them have ties, they've shown there, or their parents showed there. It's rare, because the whole board participates—very hard working, hands on people, and they get in there doing all kinds of stuff. They clear up the grounds, paint the buildings. We all chip in because we have to in order to keep it going."

People like Jim McCauley rate special mention, according to Jones: "Jim isn't on the board, but every year he helps us. He's invaluable."

Board members include this year's president Helen Wiley, past president Sue Bopp, Allison Lee, Courtney Bowes, several MFHs, and a cast of dozens who live in and around that gem of a horse show complex with its Patsy Cline pavilion, grandstand, berm on the highway side, judges' and announcers' stands, as well as permanent stabling along the southernmost end of the property.

"It's such a jewel in the show world," says Snowden

Clarke, horseman and board member who treks back from California every year for Warrenton and to visit his mother. "It's the only place where everybody's on the same page—really unique. I've been going ever since I knew where to find it. My aunt [Dorothy Montgomery Rust] took me in 1965. It was night-time: people were 10 deep on the rail and filled the grandstand. I watched the jumpers—such a big-time deal, so exciting. I wanted to be part of that."

"I've been to shows all over the world, and there is no better show manager than Tommy Lee Jones anywhere," he adds. "He looks after every detail—courses, footing, ambience, flowers, everything. Everybody gets together and has a good time. It's so special because of the people involved in it."

Betty Oare loves Warrenton so much that she only accepts judging at the Hampton Classic every seven years or so, because their dates often coincide. That's loyalty. Patty Heuckeroth, another A-rated rider and trainer, loves the ambience of Warrenton. Her father Otto Heuckeroth managed the Ox Ridge Hunt Club and taught George Morris, Ronnie Mutch and Victor Hugo-Vidal, to name just a few of his greatest protégées.

"I've always loved Warrenton—it's an old-time show," says Heuckeroth. "Number one—it's a good ring, a good-sized ring, and the footing holds up well. They look out for the exhibitors, try to entertain you. They're cooperative. They provide wonderful lunches—free. It's nice to know when you can actually start to prepare your horse. I don't like running around from one ring to another."

"I've been coming to Warrenton since 1969," she adds. "Of all the shows I show at, the one thing we know we'll do is Upperville and Warrenton, as far as looking at calendars. Both shows are very enjoyable. People go to Warrenton because they want to have a good time. More shows ought to make themselves like Warrenton. It's so refreshing, and there's a lot more sportsmanship there. Because there's one ring, I even get to watch some classes."

Hunter futurities, local divisions, breeding classes, the Toyota-sponsored Warrenton Hunter Classic, leadline, pleasure, adult, juniors—everybody loves the horses. Well, almost everyone.

"My mother was from here, I grew up in Chicago, and after a terrible divorce, she wanted to come home," recalls Courtney Bowes. "I worked for an accounting firm and Karen Eastham wanted me to be treasurer of Warrenton. I did that for seven years. I've been on the board since 1989. I'm their worst member, because I'm afraid of horses when they move."

"Helen Wiley's father Alex Calvert tried to teach me to ride, but I said 'This horse smells' and got off," she adds. "I'm related to half the state of Virginia, my grandfather owned Alwington Farm. Every summer I came to my grandmother's, and at the end of vacation we watched the Warrenton Horse Show. It was sad, because I knew I had to go home. Now, I'm with a lot of wonderful people, some I've known all my life. Warrenton is a beautiful tradition and I hope they continue it."

Zan Martin-Dillon's mother Evelyn Martin has a long history with Warrenton, so it's only fitting that succeeding generations catch the bug, too. Both mother and daughter showed this year, of course. Evelyn picked up a couple ribbons in Pleasure. Zan and her Just Sam took home the Special Hunter championship, along with ribbons in Adult Amateurs (35+), and her Saratoga won an over fences class in Young Hunters with Elizabeth Solter.

"I took a 15 year break from competing, but I've been a spectator since I could walk," recalls Zan. "I've been involved with the horse show all my life. Warrenton has a history and a flavor that you don't get at a show with eight rings. A lot of older horsemen, like Bobbie Burke and Kenny Wheeler, go there because they don't want to do eight rings. We like the flavor of the old days. Warrenton's about everybody having a good time."

Back in 1986, Warrenton wanted to honor Gene Cunningham who passed away that year: they held a gentleman's hack class in his memory. There were so many men, they had to divide the class so half would canter while the other half



Hunt Staff Class.



Ladies Sidesaddle Hack.

lined up in the center of the ring. Bucky Reynolds won the class and the trophy, while the Warrenton Horse Show presented a charity of his choice with a check.

"On Sunday evening we already had the National Horse Show qualifier classes for Ladies Side Saddle on the flat, hunter hack and over fences, so that's sort of when 'hunt night' all got started," recalls Helen Wiley, whose most famous poster pose takes place in the John Barton Payne trophy. "In 1988 Hunt Night at Warrenton started at 4 pm with field hunters over fences, ladies hunter hack, sidesaddle, gentleman's hunter hack and the hunt teams."

"Tommy Lee has the skills and understanding about shows and he goes one step further to make it special," she adds. "He's very easy to work with—he's just a jewel. The community really cares about the Warrenton Horse Show. We're the oldest corporation in the state of Virginia—so old that they didn't even keep records before 1900. We have over 100 shareholders, but rarely does a share come available. It's a family thing for me. All my life I've been involved with Warrenton. My mom was secretary, my dad was president, my step-dad was president. All my friends come here. I love Warrenton."

Even when it rains, everyone still raves about Warrenton. No one likes inclement weather, yet when it happens everyone soldiers on.

"We all work really hard to put on this show and it's neat to see it all come together," says Diane Jones. "It's neat to see everybody having fun. We work hard doing the show, but it's like being on vacation at a horse show. You get to see a lot of your friends, you can walk around the ring and visit—people have their spaces. It's hard work on breeding day and hunt night, but it's great when you see all the people who come to spectate. You can't get a spot—they're reserved year after year. Some people have been waiting forever. The rail spots get handed down from family to family."

Sue Bopp knows about family, community and the annual Labor Days dedicated to working on and showing at Warrenton. She was there when the local one-ring show ceased to be the last place where you could qualify for Washington International, Harrisburg, and the National when it reigned at Madison Square Garden.

"A lot of people definitely thought if you take away the A-rating Warrenton wouldn't survive, but we did," says Bopp. "We call it the 'Young Horse' Show. We have the east coast regional hunter futurity. It's the end of the year for the young horses and the community. We're doing what we do best."

"Judges, year after year, are amazed that so many people come out to watch the show and they compliment us," she adds. "That's why it's so community-spirited. People come to watch Warrenton."

Warrenton Horse Show's C-rating stands for Community and Class. Everybody needs an annual labor of love. So volunteer or just come out and get in on the fun. Experience Warrenton's welcome.

For more info., visit [www.warrentonhorseshow.com](http://www.warrentonhorseshow.com).

