



Equestrians Institute

Celebrates 40 Years of Service 1974- 2014

An Open Letter to the Equestrian Community

July 2014

Equestrians Institute has been providing local equestrian events for 40 years. That kind of longevity is worth celebrating. In joyful service to the local horse community, year after year we have come together to cherish our horses, value each other, and pursue our favorite sports while creating lifetime memories. EI has always been a volunteer-run nonprofit organization, and that's not changing.

What has been changing is the time commitment from community members to sustain what EI does so well. Your help is needed to keep EI flourishing for years to come. There is a troubling trend of fewer volunteers stepping forward to help organize and run our events. Volunteers hold together a volunteer-run organization.

Here is one recent example. At the Chablis/Beaujolais dressage show at Donida Farm in June, a three-day horse show with four rings, we needed to staff many volunteer shifts of 4-5 hours each. We had only a handful of people to help when we needed dozens. Everyone there was juggling multiple jobs for long hours with no breaks. At times we just skirted the show being shut down on the spot by the USEF Technical Delegate because of an unstaffed but required position. Inevitably there were cascading domino effects of gaps in service. Tempers frayed. When judges notice balls getting dropped and start getting cranky, that's bad -- especially for competitors who benefit from the judge in a good mood. I was there the whole weekend, and a first-hand witness to this train wreck. And then what we all hear afterwards are detailed complaints about "that crappy show". The complaints are real; the blame is misplaced. The entire equestrian community shares the blame.

Key show organizers -- all with many years of experience running events -- are deeply puzzled and concerned by the declining-volunteer trend. We advertise the need for volunteers through email and Facebook and the website. We call people. We spread the word. Even with a lot of outreach, very few volunteers are materializing anymore. The lack of volunteer energy is a creeping malaise; I've heard reports from other regional show organizers that similar dynamics are happening everywhere. Is there a better way -- or a new way -- to find volunteers? We need people with good ideas who are willing to step forward and help.

The stalwart year-round core EI volunteers are stretched beyond endurance. When organizing an event becomes impossibly hard stressful work, people are wary of coming back for another round. Can you blame them? I can't, because I am one too. EI needs people willing to work on administrative tasks NOW and all year. Could that be you? Want to ensure that EI's traditions continue? Without your help they won't. Contact me.

At Equestrians Institute, our stellar reputation is well-deserved, because we really do know what we are doing. EI is known far and wide for treating volunteers like royalty, providing training and supplies and free food and lovely gifts. There is a deep pool of horse experience here, and many years of running hugely successful events. We are ethical and prudent financial stewards. Our organization operates transparently, and we strive to learn from our mistakes. I am proud to be associated with Equestrians Institute and all the good work creating a strong equestrian community. Now it is up to all of us to link arms together, in service, to move forward.

Rebecca

Rebecca H. Chatfield, PhD

President, Equestrians Institute

rebecca@einw.org