



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

American Endurance Ride Conference Celebrates Achievements

RENO, Nevada – February 29, 2016 – Keeping endurance riders away from their equines for a weekend isn't easy, but the annual gathering of the American Endurance Ride Conference gives them an opportunity to celebrate their riding accomplishments, learn more about the sport, and share input for the future of endurance riding.

The 2016 AERC convention held in mid-February in Reno, Nevada —“the best convention I have been to,” according to one board member, culminated in the national awards banquet, where longtime ride manager Ann Nicholson was named as the 2015 Hall of Fame person. The newest Hall of Fame horse is LV Integrity, a 22-year-old Arabian gelding (AHR*498744) owned by Joyce Sousa of Hydesville, Calif.).

Nicholson, along with her husband David, a veterinarian who is also in AERC's Hall of Fame, puts on a great number of multi-day endurance and limited distance rides throughout the Western United States, and has put on several AERC-sanctioned XP rides that followed the Pony Express trail across the West. Pacific Southwest Regional Director John Parke said Ann “hauls water, makes lunches and dinners, but it's not just what she does, it's how she does it.” He added, “She is always smiling, always polite, never says a bad word about anyone.”

Endurance riding is often a family affair, and Ann's mother, Lavonne Booth, was inducted into the nonprofit organization's Hall of Fame exactly 20 years before.

The newest Hall of Fame horse, nicknamed Ritz, has completed more than 9,000 miles of endurance competition, including 35 one-day 100s, and has completed the prestigious Tevis Cup ride four times. Ritz has competed overseas and in two national championship rides. Upon accepting the honor presented by her daughter, Jennifer Niehaus, Sousa simply said, “We take such pride in what we do.”

The Pard'ners award, which honors a rider/equine partnership that exemplifies friendship, enthusiasm and sportsmanship, went to local rider Gina Hall and Fire Mt. Destiny, an 18-year-old Arabian cross gelding

(AHR*3A325818). They have competed together since 2002, racking up 7,300 endurance miles—124 rides with only two non-completions. Their partnership was rocky at first—“he was really scary,” said Hall—but now Destiny is a trusty companion and an “awesome babysitter” for horses new to endurance.

Also honored were Buck and Donna Shrader of Pennsylvania who have volunteered at Northeast Region rides for decades and recently announced their “retirement” from pulse-taking, timing and other assorted volunteer duties. Riders will no longer anticipate Buck’s call at the start of rides: “Good luck, have fun and be careful!” The volunteer award gives them a great send-off and thank you for their dedication.

Dot Wiggins, who has been involved with endurance riding and trails building and maintenance since the 1970s, is the recipient of the 2015 Ann Parr Trails Preservation Award. In Idaho, Wiggins has worked with the Forest Service, BLM and private land owners to preserve equestrian trails, most notably working from start to finish on the 84-mile Weiser River Trail, one of the few rail trails owned and managed by a nonprofit organization, the Friends of the Weiser River Trail, Inc.

Convention-goers had two full days of seminars ranging from horse health to rider health to online equine myths presented by nationally-renowned speakers, as well as a lively trade show with more than 40 exhibitors.

Special guests at the convention included FEI Endurance Director Manuel Bandeira de Mello of Portugal and Australian veterinarian Brian Sheahan, chair of FEI’s Endurance Technical Committee. The two, along with other United States Equestrian Federation President Chrystine Tauber and USEF Endurance Director Kristen Brett, were there to explain progress made in Region VII countries with regard to horse welfare. Despite setbacks in national, non-FEI competitions, overall there are major gains made with regard to horse welfare, lowering the number of vehicles and grooms on the course, and other requirements stipulated by the FEI.

The AERC Board of Directors confirmed the continuation of AERC’s executive positions, with President Michael Campbell, Vice President Lisa Schneider, Treasurer Mollie Krumlaw-Smith and Secretary Susan Garlinghouse, DVM, re-elected to serve another term.

With membership gains for the first time since the recession began, the conference is seeing a host of new and younger members taking to the trails for 25- to 100-mile AERC-sanctioned rides across the U.S. and Canada. More information on endurance riding is available by visiting www.aerc.org or by calling the AERC office at 866-271-2372. By request, the office will send out a free information packet to prospective

members.

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Contact:
Troy Smith
American Endurance Ride Conference
edurancenews@foothill.net
866-271-2372, 530-823-2260

Photos available by request