



Santa Ynez Valley Star

2016

The Santa Ynez Valley Equestrian Center

Mark of a Strong & Growing Equine Community

by Jessica Schley

Where else in the world than in the Santa Ynez Valley would an ailing old woman donate her coveted equestrian estate to become a nonprofit riding center for all disciplines, and for the entire equine community?

The Santa Ynez Valley Equestrian Center was once the home to renowned breeder and trainer Jody Carsello. Jody raised and showed cutting horses in the early 1950s, and she helped to popularize the sport in California. She was one of the top women cutting horse trainers to compete against all men. She owned Hollywood Rush, a son of Hollywood Gold, and Martin's Jessie by Jessie James, another famous cutting stallion. She also owned a direct daughter of Doc Bar, and many other brood mares of incredible lineage. Her breeding program was renowned across the country.

I knew Jody when I was very young and she was both regal and terrifying. She did have a reputation for a temper, you see. But she gave me horse books to read and taught me about breeds and bloodlines, and I asked lots of questions, so we became pals.

Carsello was a true multi-cultural equestrienne, being a follower of the Spanish Riding School methods of dressage and haute e'cole later in life. She transitioned from breeding and raising prized cutting horse bloodlines to becoming well known for her exceptional Andalusian horses, with royal pedigrees and impeccable training; she even had piaffe posts installed, and trained horses to work in-hand the classical way.

In 1993, Jody recognized a huge need in our growing horse community. There was no consistently available place for horse shows, clinics, 4-H Horsemastership Program meetings, and the like to be held. The staunch libertarian she was, there was also an ulterior motive: keep my money away from the government and within the community. So she proposed an idea to several community members, including now (and Founding) Board President David Hunsicker, that her property be made into an equestrian center. The Santa Ynez Valley Equestrian Association was formed as a nonprofit group to receive the gift and to oversee the management of the facility and it's membership.

Fast forward 23 years to 2016 and the facility boasts an impressive cadre of amenities for it's members: 6 arenas for a variety of disciplines, several barns, a "party barn" available to rent, a PA system, offices, a trail course, and room for much, much more. In 2015 there were more than 420 members, up 100 from the previous year. 2016 expects even more.

As would make Jody incredibly happy, her former property has become quite multidiscipline. The Santa Ynez Valley Therapeutic Riding group calls the Center home. Buck Brannaman hosts a Roping event once a year. Volunteers organize Hunter Jumper play days, carriage events, Western & Ranch Trail shows, and the High School Rodeo and Valley Penners hold events as well. There are hopes that were will soon to be Cowboy Action Shooting and Extreme Trail events. There is action on starting a series of Poker Penning events, which is one of the fastest growing Western sports in the country right now.

continued on page 2

“It’s been a long road and there were many times we were upside down or on the brink of not making it. But that’s in the past; we are doing extremely well now, things are happening, it’s an exciting time,” says David Hunsicker. “We have amazing volunteers who work incredibly hard to make things happen. We have had generous donors to help us build infrastructure. So many people deserve recognition.”

Jody’s only daughter Stephanie Carsello still owns the last of Jody’s Andalusian bloodlines, a Champion mare named Vida de Arte. Stephanie was a prima ballerina in her time and was also a ballet instructor at the Fossemalle Dance Studio in Santa Ynez. She taught many many students over the years, including myself and this paper’s owner/editor, Raiza Giorgi. She recently had a memorial display installed in honor of Jody in the party barn. It stands as an indelible mark of tribute from all of the Center’s members to Jody’s memory and legacy.

We are truly blessed to have such a jewel in our community. It’s something Jody would be quite happy to see. She wasn’t easy to please, as anyone who knew her would attest, so saying that is, well, really saying something.