

Issue Three

THE

2024

# ICELANDIC HORSE

Q U A R T E R L Y



**Official Publication of the United States Icelandic Horse Congress**  
Member Association of FEIF (International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations)





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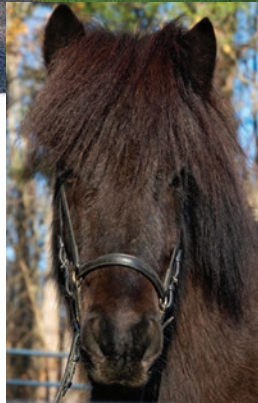
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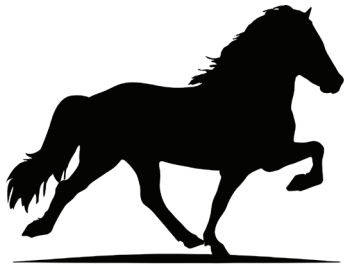


282 Main Street, Boxford, MA 01921



Contact us  
Tel: 781-521-0841  
email: [ebbameehan@me.com](mailto:ebbameehan@me.com)  
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# ICELANDIC HORSE

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**On the cover:** Katherine Forrest and her husband, Jia, riding Njola from Cornell and Gaukur frá Sveinsstöðum, respectively, at the Brookfield Bonanza Competitive Trail Ride (CTR), held in New Berlin, NY. Says Katherine, "We started last and finished first, passing all the big horses, while their riders looked on a bit stunned. Both horses vetted out with scores of 99." Katherine and her Icelandic also made their mark at the Green Mountain Horse Association's Spring CTR and Endurance rides in Vermont, with Njola earning Reserve Champion in the 25-mile CTR and Gaukur taking third in the 25-mile Endurance ride. Says Katherine, "50 miles for the jockey and 25 miles for each horse made for a successful weekend in Vermont." Finally, Katherine rode Gaukur in Taktur's Spring Gamankeppni in Kentucky, "showing that track and trail can be enjoyed in partnership with the same horse." Photo by Carien Schippers of imageequine.com.

## ABOUT THE MAGAZINE

*The Icelandic Horse Quarterly* is published by the United States Icelandic Horse Congress (USIHC), a member association of FEIF (International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations), as a benefit of membership. Renew online at [www.icelandics.org](http://www.icelandics.org). © 2024 All rights reserved. **Article Submissions:** USIHC members and non-members are invited to submit feature articles and photos for publication. Send them to co-editors Nancy Marie Brown and Nicki Esdorn at [quarterly@icelandics.org](mailto:quarterly@icelandics.org). All submissions are reviewed by members of the Quarterly Committee. We reserve the right to edit or reject any submission. **Affiliated Club News:** Contact your club to submit news items and photos for the Club Updates section. **Letters From Our Readers:** All readers are invited to submit letters commenting on articles previously published in the magazine or on topics of general interest. Send them to [quarterly@icelandics.org](mailto:quarterly@icelandics.org). All letters are reviewed by the committee. We reserve the right to edit or reject them. **Advertising:** See <https://icelandics.org/advertising-in-icelandic-quarterly-magazine> for ad rates and sizes. For page availability, contact ad rep Jean Ervasti (917-648-8824 or [jean.ervasti@gmail.com](mailto:jean.ervasti@gmail.com)). We reserve the right to reject any ad. **Deadlines:** January 1 (for Issue One, mailed in March), April 1 (Issue Two), July 1 (Issue Three), and October 1 (Issue Four). **Quarterly Committee:** All USIHC members are invited to join the Quarterly Committee to review submissions, vote on the cover, and help edit, illustrate, and distribute the magazine. Sign up at [quarterly@icelandics.org](mailto:quarterly@icelandics.org). **Committee Members:** Carol Andrew, Margot Apple, Andrea Brodie, Nancy Marie Brown, Leslie Chambers, Alys Culhane, Jean Ervasti, Nicki Esdorn, Amy Goddard, Em Jacobs, Kate Kalan, Constance Kollmann, Gabriele Meyer, Anne Owen, Alex Pregitzer, Emily Potts, Chris Romano, Sara Stewart, Judy Strehler, Lynn Wiese, and Nancy Wines-Dewan. **Graphic Design:** James Collins.

## DISCLAIMER

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# THE USIHC MISSION

- To promote the knowledge of the Icelandic horse within the United States and its correct use as a competition and riding horse.
- To keep a registry of purebred Icelandic horses in the United States.
- To facilitate communication among all USIHC members.
- To represent the United States in FEIF.

*The U.S. Icelandic Horse Congress is a member of FEIF ([www.feif.org](http://www.feif.org)), the International Federation of Icelandic Horse Associations, representing the national Icelandic horse associations of 21 countries. FEIF governs competition activities and regulates the breeding and registration of Icelandic horses throughout the world outside of Iceland.*

*The USIHC was formed in 1987 by representatives of the U.S. Icelandic Horse Federation and the International Icelandic Horse Association to meet the FEIF rule that only one association from each country is allowed to represent the breed.*



## WHY JOIN THE USIHC?

As the owner or rider of an Icelandic horse, you chose a very special breed with its own culture and history. It is important to learn about the breed's unique traits, capabilities, and needs, so that you and your Icelandic horse will have a happy relationship and it will live a healthy and long life. By joining the USIHC, you connect to a worldwide network of experts to help you care for, ride, train, breed, and learn more about your horse.

The USIHC is the umbrella organization for 12 regional clubs; activity clubs can also be formed.

Our Registry links to WorldFengur, the worldwide database of all registered Icelandic horses (USIHC members have free access to WorldFengur), and we publish *The Icelandic Horse Quarterly*, maintaining an online archive of all issues since 2008.

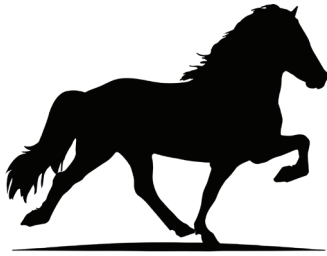
The USIHC sponsors scientific research on the Icelandic horse, helps promote the Icelandic horse at expos and through social media, supports educational seminars and events like the American Youth Cup, organizes leisure activities like the Sea 2 Shining Sea virtual ride, creates teaching tools like the Riding Badge Program, and offers practical and

monetary support to organizers of shows and clinics.

The Icelandic horse has international competition rules: You can compete in the same classes and receive comparable scores in any FEIF member country. Likewise, the Icelandic horse is one of few breeds with international evaluation standards, so that breeding horses from all over the world are judged on the same 8 points of conformation and 9 ridden abilities. The USIHC helps organize sport and breeding shows that conform to FEIF rules.

The USIHC is responsible for the U.S. teams at the FEIF Icelandic Horse World Championships, the FEIF Youth Cup, and the FEIF Youth Camp. Through FEIF, the USIHC votes on rules and policies that affect the welfare of the Icelandic horse worldwide.

As a member of the USIHC, your dues and registration fees make all this possible. Our board members and committee chairs are all volunteers. As a member-driven organization, the USIHC grows stronger the more active and involved our members become. Please join us so that the USIHC can, as FEIF's mission states, "bring people together in their passion for the Icelandic horse."



# USIHC NEWS

## USIHC CONTACTS

### Committees

Affiliated\_clubs@icelandics.org  
Leslie Chambers (860-334-8259)

Breeding@icelandics.org  
Virginia Lauridsen (515-556-3307)

Education@icelandics.org  
Caeli Cavanagh (802-299-5468)

Leisure@icelandics.org  
Janet Mulder (907-351-4473)

Promotion@icelandics.org  
Emily Potts (413-531-6336)

Quarterly@icelandics.org  
Nancy Brown (802-626-4220)  
Nicki Esdorn (914-826-5159)

Sport@icelandics.org  
Ásta Covert (805-688-1393)

Youth@icelandics.org  
Lucy Nold (831-332-5328)

### Directors

President@icelandics.org  
Virginia Lauridsen (515-556-3307)

Vice\_president@icelandics.org  
Jeff Rose (608-438-9435)

Secretary@icelandics.org  
Jeff Rose (608-438-9435)

Treasurer@icelandics.org  
Leslie Chambers (860-334-8259)

Caeli Cavanagh (802-299-5468)  
Ásta Covert (805-688-1393)  
Janet Mulder (907-351-4473)  
Lucy Nold (831-332-5328)  
Emily Potts (413-531-6336)  
Sara Stewart (541-603-3307)

### Registry

c/o Ásta Covert (805-688-1393)  
PO Box 1724  
Santa Ynez, CA 93460  
Toll free: 866-929-0009  
registry@icelandics.org

### Main Office

United States Icelandic Horse Congress  
c/o Sabrina Bateman  
156 Coon Club Road  
Bristol, VT 05443  
Toll free: 866-929-0009 [ext 1]  
info@icelandics.org

### Website

www.icelandics.org  
webhelp@icelandics.org



Brynja Meehan of Massachusetts, shown here on Amor frá Hjarðarfelli, was one of four young riders who represented the USIHC at the FEIF Youth Cup in Switzerland in July. Photo by Ona Kwiatkowski.

## YOUTH

Four talented USIHC youth riders represented the US at the 2024 FEIF Youth Cup, held July 13-21 in Münsingen, Switzerland. The team was comprised of Greta Alsaukas, Liesl Kolbe, Brynja Meehan, and Miette Jennings, who qualified through tryouts held in conjunction with the Fall Virtual Show. Team leader is Maria Octavo and country

leader is Greeley O'Connor.

After qualifying, the members of the US Youth Cup Team raised money to help cover costs such as leasing a horse, training, trailering, vet checks, and insurance through a GoFundMe campaign. Contributions to the USIHC Youth Fund also helped pay for participation fees, stipends for our team leader and country leader, and team clothing. See <https://usihc.wildapricot.org/donations> to donate to future Youth events.

The FEIF Youth Cup is a bi-annual event focused on uniting people through their love for the Icelandic horse. Riders aged 14-17 from approximately 23 countries undergo a week of training with international instructors, culminating in a competition featuring a range of youth classes both on and off the oval track.

Before the cup, the US team had the opportunity to train for a week at Hof Niederfeld near Zurich. Hof Niederfeld supported the US team by loaning them horses, providing a week of training, and transporting them and the horses to the Youth Cup.

To learn more about this and other opportunities for young riders, check out the new USIHC Youth Facebook page.



Greta Alsaukas of Kentucky represented the USIHC at the FEIF Youth Cup in Switzerland.



## SHOW SEASON

The National Ranking is based on scores from both virtual and live National Ranking shows from the past two years. See the rankings at <https://icelandics.org/national-rider-rank-listing>.

Nine National Ranking shows have been held so far in 2024. They are the Spring Gamankeppni, held April 20-21 at Locust Hill Farm in Prospect, KY; the Ice Championships Triple World Ranking Shows (three individual shows), held on May 24-26 at Léttleiki Icelandics in Shelbyville, KY; the Montaire National Ranking Show, held May 11-12 at Montaire Icelandics in Middleburg, VA; the Solheimar Pentathlon I (June 15-16) and II (July 13-14), held in Tunbridge, VT; the Toppur Sport Show, held June 15-16 at Harmony Icelandics in Truro, IA; and the USIHC Virtual Spring Show, which was judged in June. Scores for all shows can be found at <https://icelandics.org/national-ranking-show-results>.

Several National Ranking shows are still to come, including the Solheimar Pentathlon III (August 10-11), IV (September 28-29), and V (October 26-27) at Solheimar Icelandics in Tunbridge, VT; the Northwest Icelandic Horse Club's Fall Show (September 7-8) at Alfadans Equestrian Arts in Newberg, OR; the Svöluhagi Klassik National Ranking show at Léttleiki Icelandics in Shelbyville, KY; the Harmony Icelandics Triple World Ranking Show (October 4-5) in Truro, IA; and the



Miette Jennings of Vermont represented the USIHC at the FEIF Youth Cup. Photo by Ona Kwiatkowski.



Photo by Tammy Kolbe.

Vermont rider Liesl Kolbe represented the USIHC at the FEIF Youth Cup in Switzerland in July.

CIA Open Fall Show (November 9-10) at Flying C Ranch in Santa Ynez, CA. Check the USIHC Events calendar (<https://icelandics.org/events/>) for contact information for these and all future National Ranking shows.

## BREEDING SHOW

A FEIF breeding and young horse assessment was held at Harmony Icelandics in Truro, IA on June 12-13. Judges were Nina Bergholtz and Marlise Grimm. The four horses that were fully evaluated (conformation score, rideability score) were: Freyja frá Skör (8.14, 7.65), Katla from Meant To Be Farm (8.07, 6.75), Kvikur from Beat N' Branch (8.04, 7.22), and Lykill frá Stóra-Ási (8.46, 7.98). Velvakandi from Lough Arrow II was evaluated only for conformation (7.51). Results of official FEIF breeding assessments can be found in the WorldFengur database at <https://www.worldfengur.com>. All USIHC members have free access to WorldFengur, though you need to register each year.

As Carrie Lyons-Brandt wrote on the Taktur Facebook page, "As a team we showed four horses and all four received first prize (a score of over 8.0) for confor-

mation. Kvikur (a palomino) and Katla (black) are both American born and bred horses. Kvikur is owned and bred by Ron and Sherry Hoover and co-owned by Taktur. Katla is owned and trained by Stephanie and Gunnar Eggertson. Lykill and Freyja (both chestnut) are imported horses and both were shown by their owners Laura Benson and Mackenzie Durbin, respectively.

Conformation is an important component to consider when making breeding choices. A well built horse is better able to carry the rider in the show ring and on the trail and often lasts longer as a riding horse. All of these horses also did the ridden assessment, but there is always the option to assess your stock for conformation only. The measurement and information that goes on record is priceless to our breed as a whole and gives owners valuable feedback on their horses."

Notes organizer Virginia Lauridsen, "We also had a FEIF Young Horse Assessment with six horses. Nina and Marlise did this in my indoor arena and gave the owners and audience some wonderful educational comments." The assessments were followed on June 14 by a seminar by



Marlise on “How to Build Your Breeding Program.” Says Virginia, “She talked about conformation and movement, and we all had the opportunity to try out our knowledge with horses from my stable. There were about 12 attendees.” The lecture portion of the seminar was recorded. To watch it on Zoom, contact Virginia at [virginia@harmonyicelandics.com](mailto:virginia@harmonyicelandics.com).

### VIRTUAL SPRING SHOW

Registration for the 2024 Virtual Spring Show closed on May 10, with videos due by May 17. The show featured National Ranking classes, fun classes (which do not require an oval track), and novice horse classes. The five judges included three FEIF International Sport Judges—Nicolai Thye, Sophie Kovac, and Andre Bohme—along with USIHC Sport Judge A Freija Thye and USIHC Sport Judge B Coralie Denmeade; the back-up judge for Coralie was USIHC Sport Judge B Alex Pregitzer. For information on the virtual show format, see <https://icelandics.org/virtualshow/>

For this show, videos were submitted through the new TöltSense Online platform. Says organizer Leslie Chambers, “We were happy to work with Torben Rees, who developed TöltSense Online. The platform streamlined the process and saved a lot of hours of work on our end,” though she admits there was “a learning curve,” especially for parents of youth riders. “It was difficult for trainers to upload everything for all their students. Perhaps in the future this barrier can be lowered.” On the positive side, with the new platform, “riders had their scores and the judges’ comments the day after the judging deadline.”

Fifty-four videos were submitted (about half the number of previous USIHC virtual shows). Division Champions for each class (with Reserve Champions in parentheses) were: Open Four Gait: Alex Dannenmann (Caeli Cavanagh). Open Five Gait: none. Intermediate Four Gait: none. Intermediate Five Gait: none. Novice Division: Madie Richenstein (Shelby Walker). Youth Division: Brynja Meehan (Anna Bella Covert). Green Horse Division: Virginia Lauridsen and



The May Leisure Rider of the Month was Alexandra Venable of Washington. Alex is also a member of the USIHC National Team. Photo by Katie Daly.

Gloría frá Fákshólum (Virginia Lauridsen and Léttlind frá Hallkelsstaðahlíð). Novice Horse Division: Caeli Cavanagh and Dimma frá Feti.

### NATIONAL TEAM

The USIHC National Team is designed to elevate the Icelandic horse sport within the US by nurturing our top Icelandic horse equestrians through community building, educational opportunities, financial support, and inspirational role modeling. This effort aims to enhance our presence on the international stage, particularly in World Championship competitions.

Riders have the opportunity to qualify every six months by meeting the listed rider requirements by January 1 or June 1 of the current calendar year. Once initially qualified, team members remain eligible for the team for a 12-month time span. After the 12-month time span, riders must meet the eligibility requirements for the USIHC National Team on the

January 1 or June 1 deadlines. For more information on the team’s mission and the qualification process, see <https://bit.ly/USIHCNationalTeam>.

The riders on the first USIHC National Team are: Alex Dannenmann, Alex Venable, Ásta Covert, Caeli Cavanagh, Carrie Lyons-Brandt, Heidi Benson, Jeff Rose, Laura (Lala) Benson, Lori Cretney, Lucy Nold, Sigrún Brynjarsdóttir, Terral Hill, and Virginia Lauridsen. In this and future issues of the *Quarterly*, we will feature a short interview with each of the team members.

### RIDERS OF THE MONTH

Each month the USIHC Leisure Committee randomly chooses one of the 100-plus riders taking part in the Sea 2 Shining Sea Virtual Ride (S2SS) to be the Rider of the Month. This quarter’s featured riders are Alexandra Venable, Shauna Flanigan, and Jana Strait.

Alex lives in Newberg, OR, where she is a professional horse trainer with Alfadans Equestrian Arts. She has ridden Icelandic horses since she was about five and, as a child, took part in the USIHC’s Pleasure Riding Program (the precursor to S2SS). She recently joined S2SS so she could ride as a group with her students. On her own time, she is training one of her horses for competition in loose rein tölt and five gait, and another for working equitation. “It’s a great sport that covers dressage, obstacles, riding at speed, and cattle work. The combination makes for a very well-rounded horse,” she writes. She and Sokkadís have qualified for the Working Equitation Zone Championships. Her goal there “is to show off the Icelandic breed and all that they can do.” What she enjoys most about trail riding, she adds, “is getting away from all the worries of life. I think it’s so good for the horses’ minds to go out and see different places as well, from riding out in the mountains and forests to riding on long flat beaches by the ocean.”

Shauna lives in Portland, OR with three Icelandic horses, one of which belongs to her husband. She joined S2SS, she says, “Because I like having a goal and being part of a team.” Shauna trains



with Alex Venable and Caeli Cavanagh at Alfadans. “Finding my trainers was my in-road to Icelandic horses,” she says. “They introduced me to the breed, gave me my first lessons, helped me find and transport my horses, and continue to board and help care for them. They support my equestrian journey through Knapamerki training and amazing clinics on things like working equitation, liberty, and dressage. They have created an Icelandic horse community here in Oregon that is thriving and for which I am eternally grateful. After 58 years of wanting one, I finally got my horse!”

Jana and her husband, Tony, live in Lenexa, KS with two Icelandic horses.



Jana Strait of Kansas was the June Leisure Rider of the Month. Photo by Hulda Geirsdóttir.

She joined S2SS because she was new to the USIHC and the Toppur Club and “thought it would be a good way to get to know everyone a little better. I also found it was a fun way to keep track of my riding, as I had not closely tracked it before and had no sense of how much time I actually spent riding. It was really interesting to see the time and miles add up!” Her goal is “to continue to learn to be a better rider, so I can be a more effective partner for Klammi. Klammi is such a joy. He is kind, intelligent, and independent. He also has a great sense of humor and constantly makes me laugh. Owning him is the culmination of a lifelong dream. I loved horses growing up and rode every chance I could, but never had any formal training. A few years ago, I was finally at a place in life where I could make my dream happen—with the help of Virginia Lauridsen at Harmony Icelandics in Iowa. I continue to take riding lessons to improve my skills and feel like every day is an education in horse ownership. I would not trade it for anything!”

#### TRAINER CERTIFIED

Maria Octavo qualified as a FEIF Level 1 trainer at the Fast Track trainer certification exam held at Harmony Icelandics in Truro, IA, in combination with the Toppur Sport Show in June. At the same event, Katie Livingood and Sydney Horas qualified as instructors.

#### BOOK CLUB

On July 15, the USIHC Education Book Club met virtually to discuss *Centered Riding 2: Further Exploration* by Sally Swift. The discipline of Centered Riding, which Sally developed, emphasizes the importance of body awareness, balance, and the harmony between rider and horse. This sequel expands on Sally’s innovative techniques, offering insights and exercises to enhance riding skills and improve the rider’s connection with their horse. The Book Club meets each quarter to give USIHC members a place to learn together with other members of the US Icelandic horse community, using books recommended by US horse trainers. To join, contact [education@icelandics.org](mailto:education@icelandics.org).



Shauna Flanigan is the May Leisure Rider of the Month. Photo by Kevin Flanigan.

#### BOARD MEETINGS

The USIHC Board of Directors met by Zoom call on April 9, May 14, and June 18. Complete minutes, including the monthly Treasurer’s and Secretary’s reports, committee reports, and the annual budget, can be found online at <https://icelandics.org/minutes>. USIHC members are encouraged to listen in on board meetings. The agenda and information on how to connect are posted on the USIHC website the weekend before.

In addition to the topics reported on above, the Board discussed how to promote inclusivity in sport shows through education, fun days, fun classes, increased access to judges, and other forms of encouragement.

Leslie Chambers reported that two new USIHC-Affiliated Clubs are in the works: a Regional Club based in South Carolina and an Activity Club focused on Icelandic Horse Rescue and Registration. Another topic under discussion was updating the promotional flyer and making it more widely available. Having flyers available for clubs to give out at expos and fairs would be more cost-effective than giving away copies of the *Quarterly*.

#### CORRECTION

The photo on page 41 in the previous issue of the *Quarterly* pictured Samantha Tuttlebee riding Röst, not Freyja. We regret the error.





## ICEFOAL PLATFORM

The new IceFoal platform is the official website for foal and young horse assessments in all FEIF member countries. The purpose of this website is to host foal and young horse assessments made using the official FEIF system, to make it easier for show organizers, judges, and horse owners to keep track of the results. Each country will nominate a person to register each show and the judge responsible for the results. The assigned judge will automatically have access to the website to publish the assessments for the show, with the results being available directly afterward.

The FEIF foal and young horse evaluation system is based on a system first developed by the former FEIF Breeding judge Barbara Frische. It has been further developed based on genetic analyses by Þorvaldur Árnason, as well as on updates in the judges' guidelines for breeding assessments. For more information, see <https://icefoal.com/en/>

## WARNINGS

All riders, judges, organizers, other officials, and associations involved in Icelandic horse events are committed to fair, comradely, and sportsmanlike behavior to one another, and correct behavior toward the horse. All persons are bound to the Code of Ethics and the Code of Conduct regarding the Welfare of the Horse

and Fair Play and Equestrian Sport, as described in the FEIF General Rules and Regulations. FEIF maintains a register of warnings given to persons for breaching these rules during events in the various member countries. FEIF also maintains a list of persons banned or suspended for a specific period from participating in any event in any country. All FEIF member countries have agreed to follow this procedure. For more, see <https://www.feif.org/feif/warnings-bans/>

## YOUNG LEADERS

The Sixth FEIF Young Leaders' Event (FYLE) will return to Sweden, with an exciting weekend focusing on developing skills in social interaction, decision-making, and motivation. FYLE offers a fantastic opportunity to network, gain inspiration, and delve deep into the human aspects of the world of Icelandic horses. In Stockholm, participants will get a taste of Swedish culture, make new friends, and have plenty of fun. FYLE is open for young adults aged 18-26. See <https://www.feif.org/2024/06/19/save-the-date-feif-young-leaders-event-2024/>

## SPEAKERS CHECKLIST

FEIF's checklist for announcers provides a comprehensive set of guidelines for speakers officiating at Icelandic horse competitions. It emphasizes the importance of calm, clear, and concise communication; knowledge of the rules of each

test being announced; and overall professionalism. Given that the announcers are responsible for ensuring the smooth flow of the competition, by managing the timetable effectively, following these guidelines can contribute significantly to the success of a competition and its enjoyment by both participants and spectators. See <https://www.feif.org/?s=speakers+checklist>

## EQUINE SCIENCE

The focus of the 2024 International Society for Equine Science (ISES) conference, held in New Zealand, was on the fundamentals of providing a good life for horses. Jennie Boerema, chair of Icelandic Horses New Zealand Inc. (IceHNZ), reports: "It was a great experience and heartwarming to see how much research is going on to help us provide a good life for our horses. For two days, researchers presented their scientific results at the conference center. During the field day, we visited a range of equestrian facilities in the area, from the Cambridge Thoroughbred Stud to a barn of Riding for the Disabled, to help us develop a collective understanding of the assessment of a good life, in relation to the different life experiences of horses.

"Overall, I can say we are not doing too bad in the way the Icelandic horse is raised traditionally in Iceland and kept in herds or open boxes where social contact is possible. We have to stay vigilant,



however, and stay updated with the latest knowledge on keeping and training, to make sure we are providing the best possible life for our equine friends.

These days, with social media, having a Social License to Operate (SLO) is very important. FEIF has recently published a statement on the welfare of the Icelandic horse and is working closely with scientific researchers for the best of our Icelandic horses. The first speaker even referred to the SLO presentation of FEIF.

“It is too much to give a full report on all the presentations, but they included, among many other topics, the following:

- consequences of too tight nosebands
- stress/conflict behavior as indicator of lesions due to inappropriate training
- effects of bitless bridles on the facial bone and the nerve system
- development of AI (artificial intelligence) to recognize/analyze facial expressions regarding the behavioral state of the horse, also during training
- positive emotional state with ad-lib feeding, compared to restricted feeding
- handling of foals, the influence of the mares on the foals, and the consequences of weaning early
- importance of allowing horses a choice when interacting with humans
- recognition of the expressions of the handler by the horse and the positive reaction of the horse when using the kind “kids” tone
- raising of horses in mixed-age herds
- how social contact and sleep affects horses’ learning ability.

“There is still much research needed on all these topics. To improve the life of horses, we need to work together with scientists. As one of the speakers said, “The standard you walk past is the standard you accept”—a strong reminder of the importance to keep speaking up for our horses!

“You can help by taking part in a

worldwide survey called E-BARQ: Equine Behavior Assessment and Research Questionnaire. This University of Sydney study investigates how horse training and management interact with behavior. Over time, the project will provide researchers with invaluable information on how our training and management affects horse behavior and how, in turn, behavior affects horse welfare. See <https://e-barq.com/>

### ETHICAL TRAINING

The president of the European Equestrian Federation (EEF), Theo Ploegmakers, has issued a statement regarding unethical training methods.

“Behind closed doors, away from the watchful eyes of national federations and authorities,” he begins, “methods are being employed to push the boundaries of performance. These concealed practices not only compromise the integrity of the sport, but also endanger the welfare of the horses involved.”

When the EEF conducted a survey to explore this issue, “the response was vast.” Ninety percent of the respondents, most of whom were riders and horse owners from Europe, “said they had witnessed behaviors they believed compromised the horses’ welfare at home, and almost half of these happened in the last six months. This is an epidemic.”

How can our organizations respond? “Many of these cases are not ‘severe’ enough to warrant the involvement of criminal or other authorities,” he notes, “yet we understand they are inappropriate and cause harm to the animal and should not be employed. It is time for a paradigm shift; a call to end the impunity of those who tarnish the sport’s reputation.”

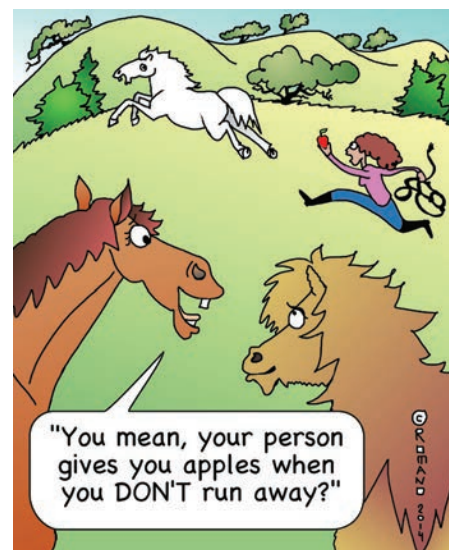
Education and awareness are the key. We must spearhead initiatives to educate trainers, riders, officials, and others about ethical training practices. Then we—everyone involved with horses—must become “active bystanders.” Writes Theo, “If you see behaviors you don’t agree with and you ignore them, you are in effect accepting them. This does not mean to cultivate a movement of aggression and conflict, but to cultivate discussions and conversations within our industry and to

say, ‘Hey, do we really think this is good for the horse?’”

He adds, “The stakes are high, for every horse deserves to be trained with dignity and respect. Their well-being should never be compromised in the pursuit of victory.” At its essence, any equestrian sport is “a celebration of harmony, grace, and partnership between horse and rider,” Theo writes. “Let us rise to the occasion, united in our resolve to safeguard the sanctity of the sport we hold dear.”

He concludes: “A fair equestrian sport embodies principles of integrity, respect, and welfare for both the horse and the rider. It involves a level playing field characterized by honesty and horsemanship, which prioritize the well-being of the horse above all else. The true essence of the sport lies not just in winning, but in the pursuit of excellence with integrity and compassion.”

With these words, Theo Ploegmakers sets a new tone in the equestrian world as a whole. His statement very much resonates with the current mission of FEIF to keep horse welfare on the top of the agenda. Read the whole statement at <https://www.feif.org/.../eea-message-on-unauthorized-training-methods/>





# CLUB UPDATES

There are 12 Regional Clubs affiliated with the U.S. Icelandic Horse Congress. To find the one nearest you, see the USIHC website at [www.icelandics.org](http://www.icelandics.org). The following clubs filed updates on their activities this quarter.

## ALASKA

by Cirrus Bunn

When you think of Alaska, you probably think of the cold, the snow, and the pretty mountains. Well you would be partially right, but that's only half of our year. Our summers usually provide us with green grass, 50°F (maybe higher), and a few days of sunshine. Fortunately enough, 2024 has been one of our warmer summers with a steady high of 75°. (I can hear some of y'all saying, "That's not warm!" Trust me, for us, it is.)

Our little Icelandic community has been taking full advantage of the warm weather. Long trail rides, more hours at the barn, and lots of learning activities hosted by Arctic Arrow Farm in Wasilla. We had our first clinic with Freya Sturm in early June, and our second clinic with Janet Mulder in late June. Both clinics had great learning outcomes and



Alaska Icelandic Horse Association member Cirrus Bunn riding Gjölf from Vindsdalur. Photo by Janet Mulder.

successes. As I write this, there are many more clinics to come this summer that I know we are all excited for.

We Alaskans will continue to soak up the sun here while we can. Before the darkness takes over again, it gets cold, and the horses get fluffy once more. Enjoy your summer, because the Alaska Icelandic Horse Association certainly will!

## CASCADE

by Lisa Roland

After a slow spring, we are fortunate to embrace some fun summer activities here in the Pacific Northwest, as well as in Iceland. Cascade Club member Diana Harris enjoyed an exciting four-day riding tour in Iceland with a friend. Averaging about 13 miles a day, they had breathtaking views through rugged terrain. Switching horses two to three times a day, she got to explore several different horses, with Gnótt being her favorite of the trip. A 14-hand five-gaited blue dun mare, Gnótt surprisingly did not make it into Diana's carry-on bag. Another great horse, Skúmur, was specifically brought on the trip for her and her friend to ride, due to his being good with a little more advanced rider. He did not disappoint! Both horses were incredibly smooth, sure-footed, dependable, and forward. Diana's group rode with a loose herd of horses, through beautiful fields of blooming lupine. Travelling through the valley of Þórsmörk, with river crossings along the way, they rode along the base of Eyjafjallajökull volcano. An unforgettable experience, for sure, with great guides, people, and horses. She is already planning the next trip!

Another club member, Lori Birge, participated in a gaited horse show put on by the Northwest Gaited Horse Associa-



Cascade club member Diana Harris on Skúmur, during a trek in Iceland.





Cascade club member Lori Birge took Snillingur to an all-breed gaited horse show.

tion in Vancouver, WA in June. A total of five Icelandics participated in Icelandic classes, as well as in other gaited breed classes. Club member Alex Venable won every class she entered and impressed the judge with her excellent riding skills.

This year, member Lisa Roland took in an Icelandic gelding that was surrendered to a local horse rescue. After some bad experiences, he now gets to hang out with other Icelandics, be a horse, and hopefully learn to trust again.

With our annual beach ride coming up, and multiple clinics on the schedule, this summer is sure to be a busy time!

At right, Hestafolk Club members pose after a ride on Mount Adams. Below left, members celebrate Stjarni vom Weisenhoff's 33rd birthday. Below right, Lauren Murphy on Andi from Evans Farm and Lisa Roland on Krakatindur frá Hæli at the spring fair. Photo by Pam Hill.



## HESTAFOLK

by Lisa McKeen

In April, Hestafolk Club member Lauren Murphy represented the Icelandic horse at the Parade of Breeds at the Washington State Fair in Puyallup. She puts up a very informative booth, and thousands of people are charmed by her gelding, Andi from Evans Farm. We always get new members as a result of the fair display.

Many Hestafolk club members attended clinics in spring, as the riding season ramped up. We are also excited to share the work we did at the first club horse camp at Vinur Farm in Trout Lake, WA: We did crafts, such as carving, making more bear bells, and weaving pine needles. It was fun to have a bit of time to sit and visit and learn. The horses were fantastic. We practiced Centered Riding, soft hands, flexible bodies, longline training, drill team work, and beer tölt (though we used water). What fun!

We have some new foals in the club and are enjoying one another's "baby" pictures. We are really looking forward to a trail ride on the grounds of Joint Base Lewis-McChord, near Tacoma, WA, and a trail obstacle competition later in the summer.



## KLETTAFJALLA

by Ellen Lichtenstein

Klettafjalla Icelandic Horse Club members have been enjoying the warm spring weather with day rides and camping trips this year—and many more to come! Two major events happened for members of our region over Memorial Day week-



At Vibeke Thorsesen's clinic in Wyoming, Klettafjalla Club member Colleen Cannon and Fonix paired off with a big horse.







Klettafjalla Club president Ellen Lichtenstein and secretary Jessica Stock, along with four of their Colorado friends, near Reykjadalur thermal river in Iceland.

end in May: Gyetorp II in Cheyenne, WY hosted a clinic with Vibeke Thoresen; meanwhile, KIHC President Ellen Lichtenstein and Secretary Jessica Stock took four other friends on a short trip to ride in Iceland.

The club is excited to announce our new T-shirt and sweatshirt designs, along with a photo contest for members to win one of the new shirts. We're also proud to be hosting several more events and clinics in the region during 2024, including a Centered Riding clinic and Philippe Karl's Légèreté, at Gyetorp II, and the Tamangur Fall Event, which includes a clinic and a show.

## NEIHC

by Jennifer Bergantino

Sigrún Brynjarsdóttir's Sólheimar Farm in Tunbridge, VT opened the season with a sold-out Centered Riding clinic in April and



Left to right, NEIHC member Rachael Broadhurst and Elsa were paired with a Tennessee Walker at a gaited horse clinic. Sigrún Brynjarsdóttir on Markús and her daughter, Kamilla, on Erpur, competed in the Pairs Fourgait class at the June Sólheimar show in Vermont. Brynja Meehan also competed at the Sólheimar show; here she shows Ófeigur in canter. Show photos by Ona Kwiatkowski.

a wildly successful National Ranking show in June, at which FEIF international judge Ann Winter evaluated the skills of over 60 horse/rider entries. Sigrún's daughter, Kamilla Brickner, won both Youth Tölt on Bylgja and Youth Fourgait on Erpur. Well done, Kami! Sigrún and her horse Markús received an impressive 7.2 in Open Tölt. Hringur, Sigrún's newest stallion, scored a 7 in Green Horse Tölt. Sigrún and Kamilla also competed in the Pairs Fourgait, along with mother-daughter pairs Jana and Finja Meyer and Ebba and Brynja Meehan.

Nine riders and nine horses from Ebba Meehan's Merrimack Valley Icelandics (MVI) in Boxford, MA joined the competition. Notably, MVI's Scott Smith scored out of Novice Tölt, so we will see him soon competing in Intermediate. "Horses and



humans did their best. We are so lucky to have the opportunity to compete on the oval track at Sólheimar, with a FEIF international judge to give us feedback," remarked Ebba.

Other spring activities at Sólheimar included a large shipment of horses from Iceland, spreading joy both close to home and as far away as California, Texas, Illinois, Maryland, and many states in between.

Ebba's MVI riders competed both in-person and virtually this spring. MVI hosted three indoor schooling shows in early 2024. These shows were open to all Icelandic sport riders and attracted many entrants. The schooling show series took place at the Springtide Farm indoor arena, also in Boxford, MA, with USIHC Sport Judge (B) Jana Meyer scoring and providing thoughtful guidance to the participants. Virtual Spring Show recordings, which began in April, culminated in a weekend at Thor Icelandics in early May. Rachel Broadhurst, Debra Benanti, Greeley O'Connor, Scott Smith, Shelby Walker, Lexi Mitchell, Ebba Meehan, and Brynja Meehan all trailered their horses to Claverack, NY. Ebba reports, "We are grateful for the hospitality of Thor Icelandics. The setting was spectacular!"

Later in May, the MVI group traveled to Léttleiki Icelandics in Kentucky to participate in the Ice Championships Triple







World Ranking Three Day Event. Each day was an individual show; riders had the opportunity to ride three shows in a row. Congratulations to Shelby Walker for scoring out of Novice Tölt, to Brynja Meehan for being Champion of V6-Fourgait, and to Scott Smith and Greeley O'Connor on earning gold medals. "Hours and hours of preparation, hauling, packing, and planning paid off with this incredible opportunity and experience," notes Ebba. "Everyone did their best, the horses were phenomenal, and I could not be more proud of our MVI team. We are grateful for the hospitality of Léttleiki and for all their support—not to mention the opportunity to meet all the riders, judges, and families in this amazing community built around horses. On the way back, we were lucky enough to be hosted overnight at Beat N' Branch Icelandics in Ohio. Ron and Sherry Hoover, we thank you again!"

Also at MVI, the drill team met twice a week throughout the spring, preparing a new routine, 15-plus lessons took place each week at the farm, and MVI promoted the Icelandic horse at the well-attended annual Essex County Trail Association Expo at the Topsfield Fairgrounds in Topsfield, MA, with a breed demo and



At left, NEIHC member Meredith DeGuglielmo on Kartin leads a ride across the Ipswich River. Above, Phebe Kiryk and Gríma ride with the Myopia Hunt Club.

live display. Thank you to Kate Kalan, Val Moore, Erika Tighe, Brynja Meehan, Lexi Mitchell, and Jake Burt!

Like many Icelandic riders in New England and the Northeast, the MVI crew could also be seen in traditionally "big horse events." On Mother's Day, two teams from MVI participated in the Myopia Hunter Pace, with one team placing third in a large field of competitors. Congratulations to Kate Kalan, Valeri Moore, Shelby Walker, Scott Smith, Lexi Mitchell, Ebba, and Brynja Meehan.

The riders at Cedar Tree Stables in Ipswich, MA also had an active spring. Phebe Kiryk and her mare, Gríma frá Fákshólum, became full members of the Myopia Hunt, located in Hamilton, MA, as the single Icelandic horse representative in the membership. Gríma and Phebe hold the rear of the "first field," so as to adeptly skirt cross-country jumps without losing time, nor encouraging refusals from the "big horses." Myopia is a distinguished club, with one of the very few female "huntmen" in the US, and the club won a 2024 National Conservation Award for their significant contribution to successful preservation of open bridle trails, private land cooperation with equestrians, and securing permanently protected hab-

itat in northeastern Massachusetts. Phebe and Gríma thrive riding these miles and miles of excellent tölt roads and paths. Icelandics, with their stamina and agility when in top shape, are uniquely suited to the hunt. Phebe welcomes reach-outs from anyone interested in the sport! Cedar Tree also hosted Jana Meyer for a clinic in April and participated in MVI's schooling show.

NEIHC members Deb Benanti and Rachael Broadhurst took their Icelandics to a Gaited Horse Spring Tune Up, which was a fundraiser for the Gaited Horse of New England club. The two Icelandics were joined by many other "big-horse" gaited breeds. The event was held at the breathtaking Mason Quarry Conservation Area in Mason, NH, a tract of land that spans over 232 acres. Deb remarks, "We can't wait to go back there. It was beautiful, and our Icelandics were exceptional."

In other club news, NEIHC is pleased to announce a new website. Many thanks to Amy Goddard for championing the effort and to designer, Hanne Ghijsen, for her creativity, technical expertise, and many, many hours of work to make the project a reality. Check it out at <https://www.neihc.com>.





**NORTHWEST**

*by Lucy Nold*

The Northwest Icelandic Horse Club had a fun spring, with monthly trail rides, a working equitation clinic, and many members attending two all-breed gaited shows. Members gathered in April at Milo McIver Park in Estacada, OR for a lovely group ride. In May, members rode at Willamette Mission State Park outside of Salem, OR. There will be several more club trailrides this summer, including Silver Falls State Park and a beach ride.

Several club members attended a Working Equitation Clinic at Alfadans Equestrian Arts, with trainer Alexandra Venable. Alexandra, the NWIHC vice president, was third place nationally and first place regionally in her division in Working Equitation in 2023 and has enjoyed sharing her knowledge about the sport with other Icelandic horse owners. The sport involves speed, grace, maneuverability, and communication between horse and rider. The clinic was great fun and club members were inspired to try this sport with their Icelandics!

The Northwest Gaited Horse Association hosted two spring shows, and members of the NWIHC attended both. Their Spring Celebration was held in April at the Oregon Horse Center in Eugene. Several NWIHC members from the Eugene area attended the show and had lots of fun competing in a variety of classes, including an exciting ribbon race and musical circles. The Summer Spectacular was held in June at the Clark County Event Center in Ridgefield, WA. Quite a few of our members attended this



At top, members of the Northwest Icelandic Horse Club met for a trail ride in Oregon. From left to right are Brenda Lafavor, Madie Richenstein, Rachel Clark, Linda Eddy, Amy Clifton, Jennifer Quinn, Sammy Harrigan, Laura Harrigan, Grace Dillingham, Sydney Harrigan, and Shauna Flanigan. Above, Alex Venable rides Tigull frá Hrólfstaðahelli in an obstacle course contest. At right, Laura Shalhoub on Aradís from Five-Gait Farm (left) and Evelyn Kaufman on Talía from Five-Gait Farm compete in a ribbon race. Below, a water break on an NWIHC trail ride; from back to front are Madie, Alex Melonuk, Linda, Renny Christopher, and Katie Daly.



show and had fun showing off the breed in some Icelandic-specific classes, in addition to the all-breed classes.

The NWIHC will be hosting a National Ranking Show at Alfadans Equestrian Arts on September 8 and 9. We are excited for a weekend of fun and learning and invite you all to come join us!





## SIRIUS

by Janet Kuykendall

Sirius Icelandic Club members have been at it again! They've taken their Icelandics on the road to showcase a variety of skills.

On April 27, Sirius members Laura Glaza, Cindy Gray, and Nancy Radebaugh attended an Introduction to Cattle Sorting Clinic at CRC Ranch in Marengo, OH. At the three-hour clinic, they learned how to track and rate cows, how to cut a specific cow out from the herd, how to predict the instinctual flight path the cow might take, and how to move and stop a cow anywhere in the arena. They worked alone and in pairs. The clinic culminated with a timed mock competition.

Laura's horse, Dagmar, thought she was born to herd cattle! Laura says, "My horse's small stature didn't matter at all. She immediately showed all the confidence in the world for herding. Dagmar was more naturally motivated, positive, and forward-thinking under saddle than I've ever seen her. It's complicated work, but incredibly fun. I felt like we could have continued all day. It was a wonderful bonding experience with my horse, and I'd absolutely do it again. I hope we can get more Icelandics from our club to try it in the future."

Nancy said, "If I had my own farm, I think I would have to invest in some cows. It amazes me how comfortable Gunnar is pushing around cows that are just as big as he is!"

Nancy also recently completed training to be a Licking Park (Ohio) district volunteer and trail monitor. She applied online, passed her background check, and followed up with a training session. "Now," Nancy says, "when I yell at people for having loose dogs come after my horse, I'm all 'official-like.'"

To top off their spring, Nancy and Gunnar once again participated in the Utica Memorial Day parade. Gunnar was the star of the show, especially with the kids. One little girl's face lit up when she saw Gunnar, her eyes sparkling like she was meeting a magical creature. Nancy invited her to sit on Gunnar for a picture, and the joy on her face was priceless!

Also in the parade realm, member Christine Stewart Marks took on the granddaddy of all parades! Chris describes the event by saying, "Does anyone need an endorsement of Icelandic



temperament? I didn't think so, but just in case you do..." Chris and her husband, Jeff, took their 22-year-old mare, Roxie, to the kickoff parade in downtown Louisville for the Kentucky Derby. The Pegasus Parade is a massively chaotic event, with thousands and thousands of people attending. In Chris's words, "Saying it's loud is like saying King Kong was a large ape. It's very, very difficult, psychologically, for any horse. People have noisemakers. They wave stuff. Trash is blowing everywhere. We followed a marching band with extremely loud drums, and a giant inflatable frog. We went under two huge underpasses (with the marching band) and I nearly lost my hearing for a couple of minutes. Sirens blaring. Low-flying drones from TV stations hovering. Cops on bicycles gliding by like silent Nazgul. 'Cacophonous' doesn't quite describe it—I would need to print it in all caps. And yet, if you could see the side-eye on the mare? If she could have managed an eye-roll, she

Sirius Club member Laura Glaza and Dagmar attended an Introduction to Cattle Sorting clinic in Ohio. "It's complicated work, but incredibly fun. I felt like we could have continued all day."

would have. Like, 'Really? Make with the hay and cookies!'"

Chris continued, "Roxie is the type of Icelandic I like to call the 'farmer's friend.' She will do anything you ask of her. She is stout, willing, and very sensible. She did not turn a hair, even when other horses in front of her were so terrified their riders had to dismount and lead them through the entire 1.7-mile route. Such a good girl! We ask a lot of our horses, don't we?"

Last but not least, over Memorial Day weekend, many Sirius Club members participated in the Triple Ice World Ranking Shows at Léttleiki Icelandics in Shelbyville, KY, in one way or another. Four of the five official scribes were our club members: Laura Glaza, Chris Marks, Frances Rospotinski, and Betsy Williams. They did a great job, and everyone benefitted from the feedback they captured. I also participated in the show as a gatekeeper, as well as a competitor. I was able to cross something off my bucket list that I didn't know would ever be possible when I (surprisingly) won a big fluffy "Champion" ribbon in Pleasure Tölt! Still basking in the glory of an unexpected win, I'm saying, "Until next time, happy trails!"



## ST. SKUTLA

by Katherine Forrest

St. Skutla members have been busy this spring, demonstrating the incredible adaptability of our Icelandic horses in a wide array of activities. Pure Country Campground (PCC) in New Berlin, NY, was host to four Icelandics in the past month, with Kitty and John Hall-Thurnheer attending a clinic with clinician Gary Lane, with their geldings Cody and Jupiter, both from Cornell, and Katherine and Jia Forrest competing in the Brookfield Bonanza Competitive Trail Ride (CTR) with Njóla from Cornell and Gaukur frá Sveinsstöðum. PCC is a wonderful location for clinics, distance rides, and camping with your horse to explore the Brookfield Trail System at a leisurely pace: highly recommended!

John and Kitty also joined the Virtual Tevis ride this year for the first time: 100 miles in 100 days. As of this writeup, they are at mile marker 81 and looking to finish and receive their big belt buckles! For those not familiar with the Tevis, it is the oldest single-day 100-mile ride, held annually since 1955. The trail, also known as the Western States Trail, goes from Tahoe to Auburn in California, and is shared by ultra runners for a 100-mile race called “Western States” (on a different day from the endurance ride), which is the world’s oldest 100-mile run.

Distance riding was also a focus for St. Skutla members Quentin Bartholomew and Katherine Forrest, who attended Painted Bar Stables’ Distance Riding Camp in Burdett, NY in May. Katherine wanted to give back to the camp that had been so instrumental in launching her own distance



Sóley from Sand Meadow, a 2024 foal bred by St. Skutla Club members Andrea and Steve Barber. Photo by Andrea Barber.

riding adventures, and marked trail for the camp’s mock ride in exchange for giving her rookie horse, Gaukur frá Sveinsstöðum, some ride-camp experience. Gaukur won the 20-mile ride in lock step with a 17-plus-hand draft cross and showed what a little horse with a big heart (and lots of speed) can do. Quentin participated in the Crew Camp division, learning about the essential details of a distance ride when you are not riding yourself. Quentin was instrumental in helping riders at the hold, as well as vetting in and out, and learned a myriad of tips and tricks for crewing at rides. They now know a lot more than most people do when starting out in distance riding, and will be able to pass on some additional confidence to their gelding Ómur from Cornell at his

first distance events.

Icelandics also made their mark at the Green Mountain Horse Association’s Spring CTR and Endurance rides, with Njóla from Cornell earning Reserve Champion in the 25-mile CTR and Gaukur frá Sveinsstöðum taking third place in the 25-mile Endurance, both with Katherine Forrest aboard: 50 miles for the jockey and 25 miles for each horse made for a successful weekend in Vermont. Gaukur and Katherine also participated in Taktur’s Spring Gamankeppni show at Locust Hill, showing that track and trail can be enjoyed in partnership with the same horse.

Although their planned summer clinic needed to be cancelled, Sand Meadow Farm in Honeoye Falls, NY, found a bright spot with the birth of a beautiful bay filly with a blaze, Sóley from Sand Meadow. Sóley is the daughter of Herborg frá Oddhóli (sired by Grunur frá Oddhóli and out of Hekla frá Oddhóli) and Strákur frá Vatsnsleysu (sired by Glampí frá Vatsnsleysu and out of Sonata frá Vatsnsleysu). Breeders Andrea and Steve Barber are thrilled to watch her grow and develop!

## TOPPUR

by Brandie Gear

The recent Toppur National Ranking and Breeding Show was a wonderful experience. Held June 12-16, this event not only marked my return to the show ring after decades, but also served as a poignant reminder of the power and beauty of the Icelandic horse community. Hosted at the breathtaking Icelandic paradise of Harmony Icelandics in Truro, IA, the event was a harmonious blend of passion, skill, and camaraderie. What truly set this show apart was the peaceful and supportive environment that welcomed participants of all ages and stages. Whether seasoned riders or first-time exhibitors, everyone found a place of belonging and encouragement within the community. The Toppur Icelandic Horse Club’s commitment to creating a welcoming space for all resonated throughout the week.

Among the highlights for me was the opportunity to ride the esteemed stallion, Gosi frá Lambastöðum, graciously offered by Virginia Lauridsen. Gosi proved to be a true rockstar in the arena, and together I learned more about showing an Icelandic—and even earned a few medals. Thank you for your kind heart and patience as I



St. Skutla Club member John Hall-Thurnheer took a clinic with horseman Gary Lane in New York.





The Team Four Gait competition at the Toppur Show at Harmony Icelandics in Iowa. “Each team had a different horse and rider combo do the individual gaits—it was a blast!” said show organizer Virginia Lauridsen.

experienced my first Icelandic show, Gosi.

In addition to competing, I also brought along my young filly, Títanía, for her first breed assessment. Watching her showcase her potential and grace filled me with pride and hope for the future. As I plan to eventually breed her, I am grateful for the platform provided by events like these to celebrate the next generation of Icelandic horses.

As I reflect on the whirlwind of emotions, triumphs, and connections forged during those magical days at Harmony Icelandics, I am filled with gratitude for the opportunity to be a part of such a vibrant and passionate community. The memories created, the lessons learned, and the bonds formed will forever remain etched in my heart, serving as a testament to the enduring spirit of the Icelandic horse world. I invite you to join us for future events and celebrations, to experience firsthand the magic that defines the Icelandic horse community. The next opportunity at Harmony Icelandics will be the “Week in Paradise” on September 30 through October 6.



The awards ceremony at the FEIF Breed Assessment, held at Harmony Icelandics. Left to right, Mackenzie Durbin and Freyja frá Skör, who scored 8.14 for conformation and 7.65 for rideability; judge Marlise Grimm; organizer Virginia Lauridsen; and Laura Benson on Lykill frá Stóra-Ási, who scored 8.46 for conformation and 7.98 for rideability. Photo by Cameron Durbin.



At left, Mackenzie Durbin on Freyja frá Skör. Right, Greta Alsaukus on Geysir frá Kvistum, Laura Benson on Lykill frá Stóra-Ási, and Mackenzie on Freyja.



# MAKING SENSE

by Nicki Esdorn

I recently attended a very interesting webinar about our horses' five senses by Jule Liebelt, a horse trainer from Germany. She encouraged looking at our equine partners through this lens—and finding out which sense could make our horse rather nervous, and which might calm him down. I then checked out the book *Horse Brain/Human Brain* by Janet L. Jones, which I highly recommend. Here was an even more in-depth explanation of how our horses' senses work, and how they are different from ours.

This article is not meant to be a scientific explanation, but rather, like Jule's webinar, an encouragement to think about how our horses perceive the world. It will make us much smarter and more empathetic in our day-to-day handling and riding!

## SIGHT

Vision is our humans' most developed sense, so we often think about sensory input in mostly visual terms. We, as predators, have our eyes placed facing forward: We basically see what is in front of us. We have good depth perception, and we see a full spectrum of colors.

Horses have their eyes placed for excellent vision around themselves. They have a blind spot close up directly in front of them, and one directly behind them. They see objects much less clearly than we do, and they only see the colors yellow and turquoise-blue; everything else is shades of grey. However, they spot movement really well.

If you want your horse to see a thing clearly, without using another sense, hold the thing up several feet away from one eye, and then the other eye. Seeing things from each eye helps the horse's brain "connect" the image. For example, if your horse shies from a brightly lit funny-shaped rock on the trail, approach it not directly but in bendy lines, letting him look from each eye in turn.

Something we should really think about is how a horse's eyesight adjusts from light to dark environments. While we humans need only a few seconds to adjust from a sunlit trail to going into the woods, it will take the horse about five minutes. To completely adjust to dark-



Smell has a strong emotional side. Photo of Alfrún frá Hrafnstöðum by Martina Gates.

ness can take a horse up to 30 minutes. A horse simply can't see when walking into a dark trailer, a dark barn aisle, or a dimly lit indoor arena! Doing so without hesitation shows great trust in their human handler. It is a good idea to give the horse plenty of time to adjust.

In her webinar, Jule said some horses just love looking into the far distance and it calms them down. However, there are

other horses who react nervously when they come out of the woods and can suddenly see far along a field. With the first horse, an observant rider could take a little break, let him look, take a nice big breath, relax, and then continue on. The second horse will need to be asked to go on right away, before he gets nervous; he may also need a distraction, for example being asked for a turn or shoulder-in.



## HEARING

We are so focused on our own prevalent sense of vision, that we humans tend to disregard the senses of hearing and smell. Horses hear extremely well! They have nice big ears that can swivel around separately. They can tell from a short whinny who the horse is and what he or she wants to convey: fear, a question, a hello.

When using voice communication, then, we don't need to shout: A quiet word is perfectly heard by the horse. Also remember that, as we get older, we often lose the high frequencies and can no longer hear sounds like crunching or birds tweeting. If your young horse suddenly reacts, he may have heard something you can't!

How do you feel about your own sense of hearing? Does a noisy environment make you uncomfortable? Or is it fun? What kind of music do you like and dislike? Horses hate loud unexpected noises, as well as persistent noises, like a nearby construction site or tree work. They do like music, but they prefer lyrical tunes and sweet melodies. It is perfectly fine to sing and hum to your horse, especially if it makes you yourself feel happy and relaxed!

## SMELL

Horses have an excellent sense of smell, comparable to that of dogs. We usually underestimate this—a lot! Horses can follow a scent trail, determine from one sniff of a road apple who left it and when, and recognize familiar humans and horses from long ago, among other things! If you can see “nothing” your horse just spooked at, maybe it is an invisible animal in the high grass that your horse can smell, but you can't.

Since horses can't see well close up, hold an object up to your horse's nostrils to be sniffed for reassurance. Jule tells about a horse with strong anxieties that she could calm down by asking him to sniff dried herbal tea bags, which she carried with her whenever she handled him. Smell, like hearing, has a strong emotional side. We love a certain smell, like cookies baking, while we hate another, like a hospital.

Do you think your horse likes how you smell? Some really dislike the smell of smokers. A man who works with wild mustangs said that he uses only oatmeal

soap and shampoo, because the horses seem to really like the smell of it. Food for thought!

## TASTE

The sense of taste is strongly connected to the sense of smell, so we can assume that horses have a refined sense of taste. Horses love sweet and salty flavors. Many have a strong preference for their favorite treat. Good to know what that is! They can certainly find that one tiny little pill in their grain and leave it aside.

Jule recommends watching your horses grazing in a pasture. How do they eat? She describes the gourmets using soft round movements of their head and neck, nibbling here and there, really taking their time chewing. These horses are relaxed and enjoying their food. However, there are also stress eaters, who just stand in one spot and bite off chunks in front of them, gobbling them down. Seems familiar, right? Do you just “grab” lunch, or do you take time to savor your food?



Horses see objects much less clearly than we do, but they spot movement really well. Photo of Jenný from Thor Icelandics by Martina Gates.

## TOUCH

Horses have an incredible sense of touch, the huge surface area of their sensitive skin being extended by the long feeler hairs around their face and muzzle. Similar to touch is the sense called proprioception, which means feeling where your body is in space (no actual touching necessary). Going into detail about proprioception would take us outside the scope of this article, but there is excellent information in the book I mentioned, *Horse Brain/Human Brain* by Janet L. Jones.

Let's just look at how our horses feel about touch. Much can be learned by watching them. Do they touch and groom each other? Do they roll and scratch? How do they react when going through brush or down overgrown trails, where bushes touch their legs and sides? Some horses simply march through an obstacle course with curtains and “car wash brushes,” while others think it is a horror trip.

Much can be learned when we interact with our horses at liberty, not in a halter or other tack. One of my horses adores being groomed with nobby grooming gloves. He literally shows me where to apply extra pressure. When I approach my mare, showing her my gloved hands, she moves away. But she happily accepts a soft brush. Jule tells of a horse who likes to get “tickled” on his feeler hairs by an electric fence. Who knew?

What kind of praise does your horse like? If you give verbal praise and a pat on the neck, do they cancel each other out? Some horses are stressed by being touched, others are calmed down. The kind of touch, and the intention behind it, matters. Horses who like to be touched are easy to train.

We can understand our horses and their way of experiencing the world better when we consider their individual sensitivities within the five senses. We can avoid overwhelming them and create a safe and interesting training and riding environment.

## SOURCES

“Sinnvolle Verbindungen,” free webinar in German with Jule Liebelt, [www.herzessachepferd.ch](http://www.herzessachepferd.ch)

*Horse Brain/Human Brain* by Janet L. Jones (reviewed by Alys Culhane in Issue Four 2020 of the *Quarterly*)



# MEET BEAT N' BRANCH

by Carol Andrew

**E**ldrotning from Beat N' Branch Icelandics (FEIF-ID Number US2016205158) won the 2023 Caryn Cantella Breeding Award, given by the USIHC to the breeder of the highest evaluated ridden mare bred in the US. Her owners, Ron and Sherry Hoover of Litchfield, OH, also own the 2018 Cantella Award winner, Kvika from Four Winds Farm.

Eldrotning's dam is the first-prize mare Glóð frá Brimilsvöllum (IS1999237400), whom Sherry and Ron bought in 2015 from Susan Peters of Silver Maple Icelandics in Vermont. They had heard Glóð was for sale from Carrie Lyons-Brandt at Taktur Icelandics in Kentucky, Sherry says. "I fell in love with that mare! Ron wanted to breed Glóð. I agreed, and Glóð has given us four wonderful foals. I also realized that it might be a long time till I would ride Glóð again."

Before Glóð went to Ohio, she was bred to Hjörtur frá Holtsmúla 1 (IS1998186693), and the result was Eldrotning, who was assessed in 2023 at age seven and won the Cantella Award. Sherry says, "We agreed that, after Eldrotning's breed assessment, she would be my riding horse. What I love about her is her willingness and speed. She can tölt at slow speed and at fast speed. I think we both like the fast speed the best!"

For this article, I interviewed Ron and Sherry about their background, what



The mare Eldrotning from Beat N' Branch Icelandics (FEIF-ID Number US2016205158), being shown for conformation judging by Carrie Lyons-Brandt at the FEIF Breed Assessment in Virginia. Eldrotning was the highest-scoring domestic-bred mare evaluated in 2023, making her the second Cantella Award winner owned by Ron and Sherry Hoover.

brought them to Icelandic horse breeding, their goals and techniques, and their advice for other breeders.

## THE BEGINNING

Both Ron and Sherry grew up with horses and actually met because of a horse—though it was a Saddlebred, not an Icelandic. Ron began riding when he was six years old and also learned to drive ponies. He raised

money for his church by charging 10 cents a ride for pony-driven buggy rides or saddle rides. As children, both Ron and Sherry were involved in 4-H, as were their own children, who rode primarily Arabs and Quarter horses. Now, of course, the Hoover children are riding and showing Icelandics, and accompanying the Beat N' Branch horses to breed assessments. Ron and Sherry's two grandsons, ages 10 and 14, are involved in 4H with Icelandics, and recently enjoyed "a great trail riding and camping adventure" in the winter.

Ron and Sherry became interested in Icelandics, as many do, after seeing them at an expo. It was Equine Affaire in Ohio, in 2005, and Icelandic rider and trainer Guðmar Pétursson did a demonstration that amazed them. Ron said, "Let's go find the Icies!" In the breed barn, they found Lanny Carroll of Northstar, an established breeding farm in Ohio. Lanny showed them some horses that were for sale, including a pregnant Icelandic mare who was due to foal in just two months. The mare was not Lanny's, but had been bred to his stallion. That foal was Ron and Sherry's first experience in raising an Icelandic.

By then, their children, who had been keeping them busy with 4-H and all their



The stallion Kvikur from Beat N' Branch (US2019105421) shown by Terral Hill at the 2024 breed assessment in Iowa.





other activities, had left home, leaving Sherry and Ron with a bit more time for their own horses, clearly the “first love” which had brought them together originally. Meanwhile, Ron’s Saddlebred had gotten old, so they decided to start breeding Icelandics. As Ron said, “We started breeding and then we learned something about it!” They certainly enjoyed raising foals, as well as training them from early days.

In 2011, they heard about a seminar with FEIF breeding judge Barbara Frische and trainer Kristján Kristjánsson to be offered by the NEIHC, a regional club of the USIHC. They went to visit Kristján’s farm, Thor Icelandics in Claverack, NY, with a young colt and two of their riding horses. There they began their education, learning from Kristján “the characteristics of really good, well-bred Icelandic horses.” At that time, they had been breeding one mare, their first, to the best stallions nearby. Kristján indicated that they needed a “really good foundation mare” for their fledgling breeding program. “He honestly told Ron, ‘You need better mares!’” Sherry remembers.

### THE FOUNDATION

Ron and Sherry learned how to “do their homework.” As members of the USIHC, they had access to the WorldFengur database, the international studbook of Icelandic horses, and they spent hours reviewing the pedigrees of likely young mares before they decided who they would choose. They took several trips back to Thor Icelandics for further education and guidance. Ron was systematic in his research and listed “pros and cons” for each of the three-year-old mares that they considered.

This procedure led them to decide on Kvika (US2010204585), bred by Lori Leo at Four Winds Farm, to become their final choice for the role of Beat N’ Branch Foundation Mare. The Hoovers took Kvika to a young horse assessment with Barbara

Frische as judge. The mare scored well, and Barbara encouraged Ron to continue training her for “even gaits with light aids.” At age five, Kvika was ridden in a St. Patrick’s day trail ride. She “did great, with lots of other horses (of several breeds) and riders in costume.”

They learned from Guðmar Pétursson that “if you train for a breed evaluation, you have to commit to going through with it,” so they followed his advice. The nearest training facility to their home in Ohio was Taktur Icelandics in Kentucky, where Carrie Lyons-Brandt and Terral Hill started working with Kvika that autumn. As typical for young horses in training, the mare had the winter off and returned to Taktur in the spring of 2016. At this time, she began to engage in competitions, and she came in fourth in Green Horse Tölt.

The next challenge was finding a breeding show to take her to. Official breed assessments are “costly and hard to organize, and it is hard to justify the effort of flying in international breeding judges if only a very few horses would be shown. Farms with the necessary track and facilities try to gauge interest,” Sherry explains. The most recent assessment had been held in 2015. There were none in 2016 or 2017, and only the possibility of one in 2018. A clinic held at Léttleiki Icelandics in Kentucky had been designed as a (potential) breeding show, so they decided to go there. Rasmus Møller Jensen, a competition rider, trainer, and saddle designer, taught them a lot in that clinic, and Ron and Kvika worked hard on her gaits and, especially, on her having clean two-beat pace.

Early in 2018, they were again at the Ohio Equine Affaire when Guðmar Pétursson was performing. Guðmar gave them “a fatherly talk” about Kvika. He thought that she would do well in a breed assessment, but that there were some areas of concern.

Beat N’ Branch horses Kvikur (left) and Kvika (center), both ridden here by Terral Hill, and Eldrottning (right), ridden by Carrie Lyons-Brandt, have all been officially assessed for conformation and rideability at FEIF Breeding Shows. The two mares both won the Cantella Award, while Kvikur is on track to win the Elwell Award for the highest-judged domestic-bred stallion of 2024.

Since the breeding show planned for May at Léttleiki Icelandics might be their only chance to have Kvika evaluated, Ron and Sherry decided to go for it. At Taktur, many training techniques are available, including water treadmill fitness training, and there are two trainers who can take turns riding and discussing what each of them see, so Ron and Sherry decided that sending Kvika back to Taktur was the most efficient way possible to ready her for the May assessment. Later, Laura Benson from Valkyrie Icelandics also joined Kvika’s training team.

At Léttleiki Icelandics on May 22, 2018, the forecast was for very hot weather. At an official assessment, the horses are first measured and judged on eight points of conformation. Then they are ridden, on a straight track, in each gait and judged on nine points under saddle. The conformation and ridden abilities scores are then weighted and combined for the horse’s total score. Despite the heat, Kvika did beautifully, earning a total score of 8.16—considered a “first prize” score, as being over 8.0. The Hoovers now had a first-prize, foundation mare for their breeding program.

Even “had Kvika not attained first prize,” Sherry said, “the assessment would not have been a waste of time or money, as her scores would have indicated areas that needed improvement.” The next step was to make a plan, using her individual scores for each of the seventeen traits judged, to help them select a stallion who matched or bettered those scores. The Hoovers consulted





Ron Hoover leads 2018 Cantella Award-winner Kvika from Four Winds Farm and her 2024 filly.

WorldFengur's "Virtual Mate" tool, which helps to predict the potential for foals from any mating between two evaluated horses, to help them make their decision.

#### **BEAT N' BRANCH TODAY**

Ron and Sherry believe in breeding only first-prize mares to first-prize stallions. They find that this gives the foals better conformation and makes them easier to train. "Our goal is to breed the best five-gaited horses possible," the Hoovers say.

Because Ron is tall, they like to breed for height as well as for conformation. Ron feels best on a 14-hand horse. Many people in the US consider Icelandic horses to be ponies because of their size (according to many competitions, including 4H, a horse of any breed that stands less than 14.2 hands is considered a pony), and there seems to be a somewhat stronger market for larger Icelandic horses.

The Hoovers do not breed to a stallion that they have not met. They want to be sure that the stallion is "nice and workable," as that kind of temperament is often passed on. They spend a lot of time trailering their mares to the location where the stallion lives. They meet the stallion first, to be sure that he and the mare to be bred do not have the same weaknesses. Ron also uses WorldFengur consistently to really know the horses' strengths or weaknesses, based on the official evaluations of both horses.

Ron and Sherry say that they have tried using artificial insemination, but it was not successful for them at all. "Timing is every-

thing with AI." They tried three times with one mare, and it failed every time, resulting in the mare remaining open (unbred) for a year. Sherry reported that AI sounds like it should be easy, but that it requires a vet to check daily to confirm ovulation and to determine the best date for insemination. Once the ovulation date is ascertained, the stallion owner is contacted, semen is collected (for a fee), and shipping is arranged for very quick delivery. The owner of the mare thus has additional vet fees, as well as the stallion fee. They feel lucky that they are near the stallions in Kentucky. They find it is better to truck the mare to the stallion, rather than bringing the stallion to the mare. Fees for live cover include vet checks, boarding fees, and the stallion fee.

They have produced 13 "from Beat N' Branch" foals since Kvika won the 2018 Cantella Award. They have one new filly this year, sired by Lykill frá Stóra-Ási. Six foals, including the newest, are from Kvika. They have kept one of her foals as a stallion. Kvikur from Beat N' Branch (US2019105421), a palomino, was sired by Strokkur frá Syðri-Gegnishólum, who is owned by Heidi Benson of Sæstaðir Icelandics. Kvikur is currently five years old and is stabled at Taktur Icelandics in Kentucky. At the 2024 breed assessment, he earned a score of 8.04 for conformation, which is first prize. His ridden scores were not as high, bringing his total score to 7.51. The Hoovers were pleased with his performance as a five-year-old and are continuing his training.

The Hoovers use a variety of professional trainers, but Ron gets all the young horses started with "the basics." He enjoys training the young ones and spends a lot of time with them. He starts with basic groundwork in December. He likes to start them in the snow, ponying them off an older, well-trained gelding. He sets up some obstacles, such as going through a swale in the snow, so that they learn some judgment. As the foals mature, they do groundwork, are ridden bareback in the barn, and ponied off a dependable mare or gelding. They experience being saddled, and Ron lies over their backs to give them the feeling of weight in the saddle. It is all a slow process and, generally, the Hoovers send the young ones off for professional training when they are approximately four years old.

They like to take their horses to an official breed assessment at around age five. There, both their physical and mental abilities, as well as their progress in training, are considered. Even if the horse does not score well the first time, a breed assessment gives guidance for training and helps them judge the horse's appropriateness for future breeding.

It is essential, Ron and Sherry say, for anyone interested in breeding Icelandic horses to take lessons on how to train them. They both credit the formal training that their horses have received from Carrie Lyons-Brandt and Terral Hill of Taktur Icelandics, as well as the ongoing mentoring the Hoovers themselves have received from a variety of trainers who specialize in Icelandic horses, including Kristján Kristjánsson of Thor Icelandics in New York and Guðmar Pétursson of Hestaland in Iceland. For newcomers to breeding the Icelandic horse, Sherry suggests going to clinics and becoming involved with a local Icelandic horse club. She is currently president of the Sirius Club of Ohio and Kentucky. She also suggests showing your horse(s) at US National Ranking Icelandic Horse Shows, as it is an excellent way to meet owners, trainers, riders, and others passionate about the Icelandic horse.

#### **CONTACT**

Ron & Sherry Hoover at Beat N' Branch Icelandics, 4709 Beat Road, Litchfield, OH 44253; 330-635-5623; 890hoover@gmail.com



# ANNE ELWELL: A LEGEND

by Amy Goddard

**E**ditors' note: The US breeding award for stallions is named for Anne W. Elwell (July 1, 1942–Dec. 31, 2023), one of the founding members of the USIHC. This tribute was compiled by Amy Goddard, with memories from Andrea Barber, Cindy Dunne, Eileen Gunipero, and Sara Conklin.

The first time I met Anne Elwell was at her Helms Hill Farm in Washingtonville, NY. It was the fall of 1992, and Anne was hosting a fun show. I had just started riding Icelandics, a couple of months prior, with Ann Kruise (previously Ann Passannante, an Icelandic horse trainer located in North Salem, NY) and was in the process of transitioning from riding “big horses” to Icelandics.

At that time I lived in Somers, NY, just an hour's drive to Helms Hill. I had a pleasant feeling driving into the farm and walking down the driveway to the track. The paddocks and pastures contained friendly Icelandics of many colors, and there was a relaxed feeling about the place—so unlike the stables where I'd taken riding lessons growing up.

Anne was welcoming, and happy to introduce me to her horses and riders. When a sudden downpour paused the show, many of the riders—and their horses—crowded under the lunch tent. Not only geldings and mares, but stallions as well, all calm and waiting out the rainstorm! I will never



Anne and trainer Baldvín Ári (Baddi) Guðlaugsson of Efri-Rauðalækur in Iceland introduced many people to Icelandics in the 1980s and '90s through clinics, demos, and importing horses.



Anne Elwell (on right) rides in a drill team with Baldvín Ári Guðlaugsson, Cindy Dunne, and Sara Conklin in the early years of the USIHC. Based in New York, their team performed at horse shows as far away as North Carolina and Iowa, including at the famous Devon Horse Show in Pennsylvania.

forget the impression that made on me, and at that moment I knew that Icelandics were going to be “my” breed.

I attended clinics, events, and meetings at Helms Hill from 1993 through 2006, and then in 2007 Anne moved to North Carolina. I saw her only once after that, when she visited a horse show in Vermont in 2009.

Learning of her passing, I asked those who had known Anne, some much longer and better than I, to send me their memories and personal insights of Anne, and how she influenced the growth of the breed in the US.

As Eileen Gunipero wrote in the *Quarterly* in Issue One 2009, “It is impossible to separate the history of the USIHC and the growth of the Icelandic horse in the United States from the personal history of Anne Elwell. From the first meeting around a kitchen table on January 19, 1986, through 2009, Anne contributed an astounding amount of time, effort, money, energy, insight, guidance, and sanity. She also caused her share of insanity. She did not shy from controversy or confrontation, nor did she lose sight of the big

picture and the welfare of this breed. She could be a fierce opponent and a magnificent proponent.

“Anne served most of her years in the USIHC as Secretary. She was the founding editor (and for many years, the financial reservoir) of the *Quarterly* magazine. She supported and participated in countless demos around the country, to showcase and promote the Icelandic horse. She served on innumerable committees, and as a rep at various FEIF meetings. Anne and Sophie founded the Northeast Gaited Horse Show that quickly outgrew its start in Fonda, NY, and filled a much larger facility in Dillsburg, PA.

“The USIHC has grown immensely since 1986. Change is inevitable, but growth is not. Many more unsung contributors have brought the USIHC and the breed to the place it is in today. This is not meant to minimize any other's dedication or thankless hours of hard work, but rather, by highlighting one founding member's years of service, it is meant to give the membership today a perspective of how much has been accomplished.”





Anne striking a pose with one of her imported stallions. “Her passion,” says Sara Conklin, “truly helped to shape the direction of the Icelandic breed in this country.”

## DISCOVERY

by Eileen Gunipero

Anne Werneke Elwell decided in adulthood that she no longer needed her parents’ permission to own a horse. Her first foray into equine ownership was with Arabian horses. Life was good. It would have been even better if her friend, Sophie Katakozinos, shared the same passion and wasn’t afraid to ride. In 1983, when Sophie saw an article in *Equus* magazine on the Icelandic horse, she assured Anne that this might be a horse breed that she could muster up the courage to mount. The article featured Laurie Veness in Wisconsin. After a telephone conversation with Laurie, more research, and a rather circuitous route, Anne found a man in Walden, NY, and purchased a gelding named Logi.

While Sophie never did get the “riding bug,” she became an ardent and hard-working advocate of the breed for decades. As Anne rode more, read more about, and did more with her Icelandic horses, a dressage teacher commented to her that the breed would never be embraced in the US without a proper breed organization. This innocent comment resonated deep in Elwell’s soul and the crusade was launched.

The fledgling Icelandic Horse Federation was incubated in the autumn of 1985 on the east coast. The International Icelandic Horse Association took on a life

on the west coast. Admission to FEIF was open to only one group from the country—a united breed organization had to be formed. With a subtext of its own and drama befitting our organization, the United States Icelandic Horse Congress came to be in 1987. That same year, the US had its first “official” presence at the World Championships in Austria when a US Exhibition team, choreographed by an Austrian Icelandic horse trainer, Dani Gehmacher, bravely performed.

When Anne met and worked with Dani, she instantly realized that this woman had the talent and knowledge the Icelandic horse community in the US so desperately needed. Dani was already making trips to the west coast, and Anne invited her to stop on the east coast on her way back to where she worked, the esteemed Wiesenhof Icelandic horse farm in Germany. In 1989, the first US Team competed at the World Championships under the tutelage of Bruno Podlech, owner of Wiesenhof.

In 1986, while Anne was immersed in

the excitement of discovering the horse breed that would literally shape her life, she felt it was imperative to go to Iceland to see the horse in its native habitat. Anne was a strong advocate for understanding the nature of the horse by investigating and understanding the land, people, and climate that shaped it. She had a fierce protectiveness of the horses’ innate characteristics most evident in their natural surroundings.

Icelandic horseman Stefán Sigurðsson came to the US when Peter Strong imported a herd to Connecticut in 1970. When Anne contacted Stefán and explained her desire to go to the “mother country” and learn, he directed Anne and her group of trekkers to Reynir Hjartarson. A young trainer, Baldvín Ári Guðlaugsson, was working for Reynir at that time. Two of the young people in the group with Anne, Reynir’s daughter and Baldvín Ári, bonded on this trip. It was agreed that fellow horse trainer Ann Passannante would have Reynir’s daughter visit her, and “Baddi” would come to Anne Elwell’s farm.



Anne riding Kjarnar vom Wiesenhof at the Tunbridge Open in Vermont in 2007. This photo by Thorrún Kristjánsdóttir appeared on the cover of Issue One 2009 of *The Icelandic Horse Quarterly*.





Anne and Sara Conklin braving the Icelandic summer weather to watch the national horseshow, Landsmót, in 1986. Icelandics, Anne convinced Sara and many others, were “the most magical horses in the world!”

Along with a friendship with a young trainer, Anne brought home three excellent mares: one being Elding frá Refsstað 3. It was a fitting start to Helms Hill Farm’s outstanding herd of riding and breeding horses.

Perhaps Anne’s greatest contributions to the Icelandic horse in the US were the results of her breeding program. Many “firsts” and “bests” came into, and out of, Helms Hill Farm. Through Anne’s strong desire to produce only the best, her ability to learn and match breeding lines, and her strong personal relationships with other knowledgeable breeders throughout the world, she has left a legacy recognized here and abroad.

As Anne grew older, her interests shifted from the Icelandic horse to the English mastiff dog. Though she continued to occasionally ride for a period, her focus eventually shifted entirely to her work with the Southern States Mastiff Rescue, which she approached with the same dedication she had shown to the USIHC. Once in North Carolina, several mastiffs became part of Anne’s family, each receiving her unwavering attention (read: intense laser focus) to training, diet, and care.

The last few years of Anne’s life were difficult. She struggled with failing vision and hearing, and severe osteoporosis resulting in consecutive leg breaks and surgeries, complicated by diabetes. Despite these challenges, Anne insisted on living alone, about 20 minutes from where I live. She required daily visits and, in the last two

to three years, often round-the-clock care. Jim and I cared for Anne, her horses, and her dogs, and it took a toll on us both, leaving us physically and emotionally drained.

I’m not sure if anyone from the Icelandic horse community kept in touch with Anne, but it seems Anne did not keep in touch with many people in return. Given her extensive contributions to the Congress and her wide network of contacts, I’m sure there are many who have fond memories of her.

## MAGICAL HORSES

by Sara Conklin

While visiting Northampton, MA in 1985, a friend and I saw a sign for an “All-Breed Horse Expo” at the fairgrounds. Filled with curiosity, we stopped by. We saw the usual horse breed demos, as well as Icelandics tölting around. My friend, Adrien (not a horse person), was fascinated by them. Myself, a hunter-jumper person, thought they were too small. We picked up one of the catalogs and headed back to NYC.

A few weeks later, Adrien called me and said “Hey, there is an Icelandic horse farm, Helms Hill Farm, in Washingtonville, NY, about an hour from the city—why don’t you call them and see if we can visit?” I called the number and spoke to Anne, who enthusiastically invited us up for a Saturday afternoon to see the horses.

Anne was new to Icelandics, coming from the Arabian horse world, but her newfound passion was infectious. She

was very animated as she spoke about the gaits, their way of being raised in Iceland, and their wonderful temperament. These were the most magical horses in the world! Anne announced with much excitement that she was on her way to Iceland to ride and bring back horses, as well as a young Icelandic horse trainer known as “Baddi” to stay on her farm and help teach and train her horses.

Anne insisted I try one of the horses to experience the tólt and she pointed to a lovely white gelding named Logi, peering out of a stall, looking ready to go. As I was not quite dressed for riding, I hesitated, but with encouragement I mounted Logi and off we went, tölting down Anne’s long dirt driveway at a good clip. I can still remember the thrill of that smooth floating gait called tólt, as I felt it for the first time! Anne, being the natural salesperson that she was, knew the tólt was going to win people over every time.

That was the beginning of my 20-year relationship with Anne Elwell, the horses, the US Icelandic Horse Federation (prior to the Congress), the USIHC, and an amazing journey full of friendships, breed shows, competitions here and abroad, travel to Iceland and Germany to buy horses, clinics, and training—and of course (some) drama along the way!

In those early years, it was a small group of people who found each other. When I got involved, the breed organization met around Anne’s kitchen table. Although a busy divorce lawyer by profession, Anne poured every extra minute into the horses, leveraging the resources of her law office from both a people and a materials resource perspective. Anne’s legal secretary and friend, Sophie Katakozinos, ran the details behind the scenes: If Anne had an idea, it was Sophie who executed it, by organizing demonstrations, clinics, shows, travel, and meetings. Anne’s law office became the USIHC headquarters.

What I remember in those early days was the fun of the adventures we took with the horses. They started small; my first one was a breed demonstration in 1986 at a fairgrounds in Woodstock, VT, with just four of us: Cindy Dunne, Ann Passanante, Anne, and myself. Then came the long-haul trips to shows in North Carolina and Ohio, including the prestigious Devon Horse show in Pennsylvania, with very fancy hunter-jumpers and dressage horses,



and all the “Lily Pulitzer” you can imagine. We were the noontime main attraction during each day of the show, and we occupied our own barn to welcome visitors and curiosity-seekers.

Other fond memories included weekends in Waitsfield, VT with Karen Winhold at her Vermont Icelandic Horse Farm, and Equine Affaire in Springfield, MA, where we were the main attraction at night for the tölt and pace demonstration, a huge crowd-pleaser with the audience on their feet cheering. But my favorite activity was “America Week,” which Anne arranged with Dani Gehmacher at Wiesenhof, a large Icelandic horse farm located in the heart of the Black Forest in Germany. Riders came from both the east and west coasts to stay in a little guest house on the farm, train in the darkest, dankest month of the year, March, and build lasting friendships.

I remember the constant comings and goings of young trainers from Iceland and Germany who lived on Helms Hill. It was quite an experience for them to come to the US, alone for the first time in another country, excited to learn and teach here was always activity, with multi-day teaching and training clinics with judges from Iceland and other countries. A lot of these people became good friends to Anne and others.

When I think of Anne’s passing it is bittersweet, as she was a passionate advocate for the horses, but anyone who knew Anne knew that she was not always easy to get along with, and that her strong opinions were a challenge to many. But what they also know, however, and what I want others to know, was that her passion for the breed, for the horses, and for her causes, truly helped to shape the direction of the Icelandic breed in this country. I am very appreciative that the *Quarterly* is paying tribute to her contributions.

## COMMITMENT

by Cindy Dunne

I first met Anne in 1986. It had been four years since I had spent months in Iceland working on a farm and riding horses. Because there were so few Icelandics in the eastern US, I had, by this time, pretty much given up ever riding them here. Then I heard from a friend that a woman in the Hudson Valley had imported a group of horses from Iceland. I made my way to

Helms Hill Farm and met Anne. That was the start of a long friendship.

Anne was passionate about the breed and dedicated to promoting it in the US, as well as getting a national organization and registry off the ground. Anne also believed that knowledge about the horse and the traditions surrounding it were important for the success of the breed in the US and for the well-being of the horse. In 1986, a group of Icelandic horse enthusiasts, including myself, created the US Icelandic Horse Federation (which later was merged with the west coast organization to become the USIHC) and *The Icelandic Horse Quarterly* magazine, which Anne edited and I designed.

Anne also organized many events to promote these wonderful horses. A small group of us formed a drill team and performed at horse shows as far away as Asheville, NC and Chicago, IL—Anne’s huge 10-horse trailer getting us there. We even performed at the 10-day Devon Horse Show in Pennsylvania with a drill team of 10 horses. Anne brought in riders from Iceland to join in the effort. Anne also organized the first breeding horse assessments in the US and worked to spread knowledge of breeding lines, traditions, and theories that help make informed breeding decisions.

It was because of Anne that I was able to continue my Icelandic horse education. For this I am eternally grateful. Anne brought to the US teachers and trainers for clinics. It was through these clinics that I met such esteemed trainers as Baldvín Ári Guðlaugsson, Guðmar Pétursson, Herdís Reynisdóttir, Walter Feldmann Jr. (whom I got to apprentice with in Holland), Bruno Podlech, Dani Gehmacher, and Birga Wild. It was through Anne’s connection with Bruno that the first two teams to compete in the Icelandic Horse World Championships (1989, 1991) were able to train at his farm, Wiesenhof, in Germany and ride borrowed horses that Wiesenhof arranged. I was a member of both teams, and it was a great experience. The goal of the team was not so much competition (we were still so new at this), but education, and to let FEIF member countries know that we were serious. I remember Anne saying, “Our goal is to look respectable.” I think we did a pretty good job.

I bought my first two horses from Anne. First, a young stud colt—Lofftari from Helms Hill. He’s a very talented horse

who has been loved by many. He is now 34 years old and still introducing people to the breed (and gathering more fans). Then I bought a filly—Hrefna from Helms Hill—a really fun and talented mare who I recently retired. These horses have meant much to me over the years.

When I think about Anne and the early days of the USIHC, I remember her dedication to spreading knowledge of the horses as well as her commitment to excellence in all aspects of Icelandic horsemanship and breeding. Her contribution to the establishment of Icelandic horses in the US cannot be overstated. Thank you, Anne.

## PASSION

by Andrea Barber

My husband Steve and I first became interested in Icelandic horses in 1997. Our initial experience with these wonderful animals was at Anne’s Helms Hill Farm. I still vividly remember that day. Anne spent a lot of time introducing us to the breed. We met her amazing stallion, Prúður frá Neðra-Ási II, and took lessons. I was fortunate enough to ride Anne’s exceptional mare, Elding frá Refsstað 3.

This encounter marked the beginning of many years of learning about the breed, with Anne generously sharing her knowledge. We spent countless hours on the track, as she hosted clinics several times a year with excellent clinicians. Even more enriching was the time spent at Anne’s kitchen table, where she held court—passionately discussing bloodlines and breeding.

Our relationship was not without its challenges. Anne and I had our share of disagreements over the years; she could be as difficult as she was generous. However, during our later years on the USIHC board, we developed a much better partnership. Perhaps it was because we were both attorneys and approached issues similarly, or maybe we simply learned how to work better together over time. Our relationship matured and became more productive.

Anne was a complex individual, and I believe most people experienced that in their interactions with her. Nevertheless, her impact on the Icelandic horse breed in the US is undeniable and lasting. I am grateful to have known her and to have learned so much from her.



# A LIFE IN THERAPY

by Mary Lunn

This story is about a different kind of life for an Icelandic horse.

My husband wanted to breed horses back in 1996. He looked at Paso Finos and some other breeds and then heard about Icelandics. He visited a couple of farms in Canada, as there were few people in the northern Kentucky/Ohio area raising them back then. He was in the process of buying a mare from Robyn Hood's farm in British Columbia, when Robyn organized a T-Touch workshop. Our family went to Robyn's, and I was able to work with her during the workshop. I was instantly sold on Icelandics. I am an occupational therapist, and I immediately saw a connection with their size and temperament, and thought, "We could start a therapeutic riding program."

I knew nothing about the logistics of starting such a program at the time, but with some research, and finding others who knew what to do, we started Milestones in 1999 with five children as our first students and five Icelandic horses, a Quarter horse and a Morgan mix. One of those five Icelandics is still with the program. "Dath" is nearing 40 and can sometimes still carry a very light rider.

Word quickly spread, and we increased our rider population. We started as a program for children with cognitive, physical, and psychological impairments, but those children are now adults, and many of our first clients continue to ride with us. Over the years, our students have had diagnoses such as autism, cerebral palsy with seizures, Fragile X, Down Syndrome, and various other syndromes. Many of our students are non-verbal. We continue to have a waiting list to this day.

As we increased our rider numbers, we also increased the number of horses. We did incorporate some Quarter horses into our program, but we have usually had more Icelandics than any other breed. At one point, we had 10 Icelandic horses. The Icelandics have exceeded all expectations in our program. Everyone loves them, saying "they are just like big puppies," but they literally carry their weight. When people ask about their size and their ability to carry larger people, I explain that they are the only horse in Iceland and everybody rides them.



Mary Lunn leads Dath, ridden by Austin with help from instructor Trisha Kremer. Dath is nearing 40, but is happy to carry a very light rider. He has been with the Milestones Equestrian Achievement Program since it opened in 1999.

What I find so special about the Icelandics is their intuitive personalities. They know their job and seem to take it quite seriously. We had a horse whisperer come and talk with a few of our horses. We told her nothing about them. After she had spent time with one horse in particular she said, "He likes his job and he knows his job, but he really doesn't want to mess with us non-special people." This was dead-on, as when we rode him, he was very contrary and really didn't listen to our cues. But this same horse would patiently wait for a rider who became a little unbalanced in our outdoor arena, which had a slight slope. We thought he was being stubborn, but then we realized he wanted her to feel comfortable after making a turn on the downhill side and was giving her time to regain her balance.

## BOMB-PROOF HORSES

Horses in therapeutic riding programs have to be basically bomb proof, which seems to have come naturally to most of our Icelandics. To begin, all of our riders will have at least a leader. Due to their physical and or cognitive issues, some of our riders need one or two people on the side to help support them, either physically or to follow the directions of the lesson, or both. So the horse has to feel comfortable being closed in.

Some of our students cannot sit independently on a stable surface, let alone on one that moves up and down, side to side, and forward and backward. There are children who yell and scream, sometimes in happy voices, sometimes not. We have several riders who experience seizures. The horses usually know before we do and stop.



As we are trying to get the horse to move on, and they are resisting, we see the signs of a seizure starting.

And while we try to control certain behaviors, sometimes things happen too quickly. On one occasion, a student was grooming a horse and suddenly threw his brush in the air. It came down almost hitting the horse; she looked at it, but didn't move, as he was still next to her. To give the rider a different kind of input, we have had children ride backward. One student leaned down and wrapped his hands around the horse's tail. She did look back, wondering what was going on, but did nothing else.

There are also a lot of props and toys that we use during lessons to help our students either with cognitive or physical challenges, such as crossing the midline, reaching out of their comfort zone, or using a non-dominant extremity. For example, putting "ear rings" on the horse challenges their balance and their ability to reach forward. We use upright poles and mailboxes to encourage reaching, and the horses have to be able to tolerate mixed cues, as the riders learn to steer, stop, back up, and occasionally dodge errant balls and big dice.

We use other toys for attention and balance work, such as stringing a "barrel-full-of-monkeys" toy, and as things fall off or slide down the horse's sides or neck, they need to stay calm. We have used big gymnastic balls to play polo. We brought the horses into the arena for this, before the students arrived, to desensitize them to the swinging noodles and the big balls rolling around, but they had little issue with the activity.

Sometimes in the summer heat, we play water games. We do have some horses who do not appreciate having water dripped on them, so they don't get to play on those days.

### **WORKING HARD, HAVING FUN**

The riders often become attached to certain horses and vice versa. Dath, mentioned earlier, is one such horse. She was very attached to a young rider who was in a wheelchair. She knew when he was late and would hang her head over the barrier to look down the path to the arena, waiting for him. As he did not have good body control or the ability to lift his arms, she would put her head in his lap so he could pet her face.

Another rider who also used a wheelchair most of the time would get the greatest pleasure from one of the geldings, because he could ride and control something bigger

than himself (and his twin brother could not). When we lost that horse, the little boy came to the farm and did a balloon launch in honor of Askur. Many tears were shed, as the colorful balloons filled the sky.

This same horse was white and was dubbed Pegasus by a little girl with Down Syndrome. She said he made her feel like she could fly. Families have often made comments that their children get more out of riding than out of traditional, clinic-type settings. As a therapist myself, I see the same. The riders do not realize how hard they are working, because they are having fun.

One young rider who had severe reflux and was hard of hearing and non-verbal when she started riding, began having fewer episodes of reflux within a six-week period. Her parents reported that no other therapies had been changed. The movement of the horse helped her build her core strength, we think, and therefore lessened the reflux.

We still have our program in Northern Kentucky, but we did move to a bigger barn so that we could offer lessons more often. In addition to our therapeutic riders, we also serve adults over 50 who ride for flexibility and core strength, as well as to further their riding abilities.

At this time, unfortunately, we only have four Icelandics, including our senior, but loveable, Dath. So our other three have significant followings. We have several other breeds, such as fox trotter, draft cross (for our larger, heavier riders), Gypsy vanner, Haflinger and Quarter horse mixes. I would obviously like to increase the number of Icelandics in our program, as they serve our population so well.

### **CONTACT**

Mary O'Brien Lunn, co-founder and program director at Milestones Equestrian Achievement Program, 12372 Riggs Rd., Independence KY 41011; [www.milestone-sinc.org](http://www.milestone-sinc.org)



Henri negotiates the streamers of an obstacle course in May 2018, with two of the Milestones' volunteers and a young rider. As director Mary Lunn says, the Icelandics "know their job and seem to take it quite seriously."



# THE NEW NATIONAL TEAM

by Jana Meyer and Carrie Lyons-Brandt

In Icelandic horse sport riding, many countries in FEIF have a National Team that operates year round in support of their top riders and horses. Having a US team is something that a few of our top riders have been dreaming of for a long time, and during the World Championships in 2023 these dreams turned into a clear vision. At the Championships, the members of the American team noticed how cohesive the other teams were, and how that aided the teams' overall success.

Jana Meyer, Carrie Lyons-Brandt, and Ásta Covert, in particular, began discussing the idea of implementing a US version of this concept to support our riders. After interviewing team trainers and team leaders from multiple other FEIF countries, they started working on a proposal to bring to the USIHC Sport Committee. Through extensive work within the Sport Committee and with the USIHC Board of Directors, that proposal saw several amendments and revisions, ultimately resulting in the formation of our very own USIHC National Team.

The primary goals of our National Team are to support our top sport competition riders, through developing teamwork, educational opportunities, financial support, and preparedness for the World Championships. We are hoping that,



"Every day I get to work with this horse feels like a gift," says National Team member Jeff Rose of Colorado.



Jana Meyer of Lunar Hill Icelandics in Vermont was chosen to be the first National Team Leader. The USIHC National Team was established to serve as role models for the Icelandic horse community in the US.

over the long term, having a National Team will inspire more riders to participate in this sport, to continue to educate themselves further, and to become more interested in the higher levels of good horsemanship. Hopefully, our National Team riders will serve as role models for the broader USIHC membership.

In 2024, our first National Team Riders were announced, along with our first National Team Leader, Jana Meyer. At the time this article is being written, the team is still in the process of selecting a Team Trainer. Information on how to qualify is extensively outlined in the National Team document on the USIHC website (<https://icelandics.org>) under Ride—Competition. Among other qualifications, all National Team members must have a minimum average score of at least 6.0 in our National Rankings in the individual, group open, and/or P2 Pace Race rankings. Scores contributing to the rankings may be obtained through our bi-annual Virtual Shows (if a rider's horse is located outside the US) and through in-person competitions nationally. All riders must compete in one US-based show each year, but this can be in any class and there are no scoring qualifications.

Hoping these riders will serve as role models for our broader community, a Code of Conduct was developed which includes guidance on the welfare of the horse, good horsemanship, and good sportsmanship, among more general regulations.

The goals for this first National Team are to begin offering virtual coaching sessions with our team trainer, virtual lectures and educational resources, at least one in-person team event, and some team apparel. We are also hoping that the provided information and education will trickle down to the broader USIHC membership through communication, lessons, clinics, and other learning opportunities.

We realize that the United States has a unique geographical challenge, due to the size of our country, but we are excited to work toward creative ways to develop our team and sport as a whole.

The current members of the USIHC National Team are (in alphabetical order): Heidi Benson, Laura Benson, Carrie Lyons Brandt, Sigrún Brynjarsdóttir, Caeli Cavanagh, Lori Cretney, Ásta Covert, Alexandra Dannenmann, Terral Hill, Virginia Lauridsen, Lucy Nold, Jeff Rose, and Alexandra Venable.

In the next several issues of the *Quarterly*, we plan to interview each member of the team. For this issue, we have asked Ásta, Caeli, Carrie, Heidi, and Jeff to share some insights with us.

## PHYSICAL FITNESS

**Q:** Competing at the top level requires a very talented, fit, willing, and well-trained equine partner. How do you get your horse physically fit and trained for the top level of competition?

**Asta:** First, I make sure my horse is in a good mental state and is happy and healthy. I use an Aqua Treadmill at a local equine clinic to train stamina, so my horse is ready and fit to be pushed when needed. Then I use a lot of lateral work to keep my horse straight and between my aids. Warm-up is important, and I often use groundwork before I ride as a warm-up. Watching my horse move is another important factor for me. I use longeing



with or without side reins, as well as ponying off a horse or a bike. There are many different factors to elevating your horse to the highest level. Good feed is important to their physical fitness and overall health, so that they are willing and wanting to work with you. Keeping all these elements in mind makes it possible to continue striving for a higher level of performance.

Caeli: I work about five times a week with my competition level horses. At least once a week, we do some sort of groundwork, and the other four days I vary between softening and strengthening, conditioning, and riding out. I try very hard to train my horses systematically and never rush their training or skip any steps. I try to adhere to the Hólar training pyramid, which sets relaxation as the base and then encourages moving up the steps to suppleness, forward thinking, beat, contact, straightness, roundness, and then finally impulsion, collection, and extension. Every step builds off of the previous one, and returning to previous steps and strengthening them only further contributes to the strength of your advanced work. If you try to skip steps, it only comes back to hurt you and your horse later. For conditioning work, I love hill work and cavaletti training, which both allow me to add variety into my training as well as condition for hind end power and



Heidi Benson and her stallion Strokkur frá Syðri-Gegnishólum. "I try hard not to complicate things," she says, so he never sees training as "work."



"Riding with my family in a really good self-carrying tölt is the best feeling," says Ásta. Here she rides Galdur with her daughter, Anna Bella Covert, on Segull frá Syðri-Gegnishólum.

cardiovascular health. I am very proud of the fact that my main competition horses, Dropi and Þeyr, are still performing at a high level in their late teens, Dropi is 19 and Þeyr is 17 and they are, respectively, currently the second highest ranked in four gait and the highest ranked in five gait nationally. It makes me happy to know that they feel good enough at their age to still show off their best and continuously get better, which gives me further evidence that my attention to systematic proper training has paid off in their overall movement and health.

Carrie: Physical fitness involves developing both physical strength and stamina so that the horse can feel confident competing. I find that this is key with Vaskur, because he has a tendency to lack forward-thinking energy under saddle. I have found that making sure he is physically prepared, to the point that competition is easy, is important to maintaining him as a willing competitive partner. I find that physical fitness for competition is developed in four different ways. First, I use extensive dressage training to help build his topline, strength, and balance undersaddle. Second, I use longer trail rides over varied terrain to help develop his stamina in a way that he finds fun and enjoyable. Third, I use an interval training program developed by

the famous pace rider Charlotte Cook. I have found her program to be one of the most effective mechanisms by which to develop a horse's fitness. It is a 10-week program, and involves riding gaits for specific times at specific speeds with walk breaks in between. Each week increases in intensity level. Fourth, we practice on our oval track each of the elements that we plan to compete in. For Vaskur, we keep these sessions short and irregular, as he will burn out if ridden too much on the track. That said, it is always important to actually practice what will be asked of the horse competitively, gait-wise, to make sure the horse is prepared. I am proud to say that in the competitions this spring, Vaskur barely broke a sweat and never showed a super-elevated respiration rate, proving that this four-pronged approach really works for him.

Heidi: My horse Strokkur, who I have been training with since 2017, is a confident and powerful five-gaiter who will try hard to do everything right, but with that comes a natural tendency to anticipate what he thinks comes next in the program. So when it comes to training for competitions, I practice very little of the actual five-gait program. Instead, I like to use lots of different transition combinations, into and out of the gaits, and also different speeds on safely varied





At left, Heidi and Strokkur blast off in flying pace: "It's the most fun!" At right, Ásta and Galdur frá Syðri-Gegnishólum dance in tölt. Says Ásta, "Feeling the horse wanting to perform for you is like nothing else."

terrain, as well as on level footing. I feel that this keeps us on our toes and makes it easier for quick and effortless changes, if needed, once we are on the competition track. I also find that training in this way builds more positivity in his responses to me and more confidence in my ability to trust that he understands my meaning when a quick change has to be made. I feel strongly that 90% of the ride should be focused on warming up, and I try to be consistent in strengthening and suppling his body, with either focused longeing exercises or in-hand work routines to improve both lateral and longitudinal flexion. I rarely just get on and ask him to carry me without some form of this work first.

Jeff: I have the pleasure of working with Vals frá Osi, a 13-year-old gelding that I imported from Iceland four years ago. Vals is an experienced, well-trained four-gaited horse, and it's such an honor to get to work with and learn from him. Physically speaking, I try to work with him as consistently as possible. I live a long way from the barn (and my job loves to get in the way of my riding plans), but I try to fit in at least four training rides per week. Like everyone, our riding focus changes depending on the time of year and the proximity to competitions or clinics. Colorado winters help us to spend our time working in the indoor arena on suppleness, self carriage, and balance, through basic dressage exercises. In the spring we focus more on building strength and stamina. The barn is located close to a trailhead that goes up a large bluff, and there's just no substitute

for a ride up the bluff to build muscle. Summer riding tends to focus more on keeping fit, working on transitions, and sharpening our focus for competitions. After some time off in the fall, we'll spend more time going on longer rides on the dirt roads and riding paths surrounding the barn. All in all, we spend a lot of time in lessons, doing shoulder-in exercises and lots of running walk.

**MENTAL FITNESS**

Q: How do you prepare and motivate your horse mentally for consistently high performance?

Asta: I make sure to keep a lot of

variety in the training, so they don't get mentally tired of working hard and so that they continue to want to work with their rider. They love the Aqua Treadmill: It is challenging training, without too much impact or stress. During the show season, I take them there once a week. Then I longe or pony them for more free and fun training. We have harder sessions, too. It all depends on how they are feeling each time they come out for training, and what I feel like they need to improve on before the next session. It is important to know your horse well to keep them fit and happy.



Caeli Cavanagh and Peyr frá Ytra-Vallholti, now 17. "I am very proud of the fact that my main competition horses," Caeli says, "are still performing at a high level in their late teens."





Peyr frá Ytra-Vallholti “loves the mental challenge of liberty,” Caeli says. “It really lets me get in tune with him.”

Caeli: We try to keep our horses engaged in our work together by introducing a lot of variety in our training. I especially like to use liberty work in my training, and Peyr loves the mental challenge of liberty. It really lets me get in tune with him, which is especially important for him because he can be quite insecure at times. I feel like the more liberty work I do with him, the more we get in sync with each other, which also makes it so I can be much faster to pick up on any signals from him that he is unsure of a situation and gives me the tools in my toolbox I need to increase his confidence in whatever situation comes our way. Dropi likes some trick training, but feels his best when he gets to move out. I like to ride him around the property and let him move out on the trail, so he can really show off. Of course, mental balance for all of my horses is based in meeting their physical and mental needs. We try to maintain a relaxed atmosphere, and have plenty of turn-out in social groups for all our horses, not just our competition horses. Additionally, for all my competition horses, I give them about two months of downtime per year to allow them time to just be horses after the competition season ends.

Carrie: This is one of the biggest challenges with Vaskur. Vaskur’s spirit animal is a turtle. He can be totally dead to the driving aids, but he can also be-

come extremely introverted and go into his shell. When he shuts down, he can even become quite dangerous, because when he internalizes that much and becomes tense, he can explode—bucking in certain situations. We have found that a variety of things are important when it comes to maintaining his mental balance for keeping him safe for riding, competing, and having fun together. The first

thing that we have found helps Vaskur is turn-out with his buddies, Þólinn and Cookie. Cookie is a miniature pony and Þólinn is an Icelandic gelding. Many stallions live by themselves, but for Vaskur that can be devastating emotionally. He loves being the leader of his boy band! Þólinn and Cookie are my two liberty competition horses, so another thing that Vaskur enjoys is being the ridden horse for liberty “team off the ridden horse” competition training. Vaskur in particular has fun chasing down Cookie when he is misbehaving.

Heidi: I keep the training sessions short and as simple and clear as possible. I try hard not to complicate things, so he never sees it as “work.” A typical training session for us can be as short as 15 minutes, or up to 45 minutes, depending on how mentally intense it is. And when we have particularly good sessions, I will stop training for a couple of days sometimes and just let him have some “horse time,” with no human stimulation other than seeing to his basic needs, so he can digest what he has learned. I treat these breaks, where I just stop everything and leave him alone, as part of his mental training, and it has never failed that when I start over again, after a few days off for both of us, he remembers and improves. I also like to ride him out regularly on



Carrie Lyons-Brandt and Vaskur frá Kagaðarhóli. “Making sure he is physically prepared, to the point that competition is easy, is important to maintaining him as a willing competitive partner,” Carrie says.



adventures, to encourage his positive forward energy—and because it’s uncomplicated and fun for both of us.

Jeff: Vals is a horse who loves to perform on the oval track. Covid hit right as Vals got here from Iceland, so it was two years before we got to go to an in-person competition. When he first stepped on the oval track in Kentucky, post-Covid, Vals was blowing, licking, and chewing as if he was thinking, “Finally, I can get to work.” Since he is a horse who takes his job seriously, I try to work on mental softness to increase our connection and trust. We’re really lucky to get to work with Coralie Denmeade of Tamangur Icelandics as our trainer and teacher, as well as with a natural horsemanship teacher who comes to her barn twice per month. Working with them has been a huge help in trying to help both Vals and myself open up, look to each other, and approach everything with as much softness as possible.

## FUN

Q: What is the most fun you have with your horse?

Heidi: The most fun for me with Strokkur is riding his flying pace!

Asta: Riding with my family in a really good self-carrying tölt is the best feeling. And feeling the horse wanting to perform for you and pushing himself for you is like nothing else.

Caeli: Every day I get to work with my competition horses is fun: from competition to beach days, liberty performances, and riding through the woods. The joy I get from the partnership I have with them is amazing: from the kick of adrenaline we get when Þeyr and I pace through fire, to the joy of performing a half pass in trot with Dropi, to enjoying a groom-and-carrot-stretch session with either one.

Carrie: Together, Vaskur and I really enjoy bareback riding and trail rides. He really is happiest on the trails and particularly loves a good gallop. One of my favorite things to do is to let him gallop up a long hill, and I drop the reins and put both arms straight up in the air like I’m flying. This type of freedom for him and me is probably one of the most important pieces of our relationship. He gets to be empowered and independent of the rein, and I get to be a little girl again flying on my horse.



Jeff Rose competing on Vals frá Osi. “Icelandic horse competitions are for everyone, and they’re a ton of fun.”

Jeff: I know it’s trite, but it’s all fun. Every day I get to work with this horse feels like a gift that I probably don’t deserve, and I learn something from him every time we work together. Some of the most memorable rides were with him in Iceland in winter; fast tempo tölt in competitions, while sharing the track with friends; and even just stopping for a break in the middle of a trail ride, along a river near the barn.

I hope the National Team can help take some of the stigma and pressure out of the idea of competitions and encourage everyone to get together with these unique and exceptional horses, irrespective of whether you’re a total novice or an experienced professional. Competitions in the US are so much fun, with a wide variety of classes, ranging from three-gait and pleasure tölt, all the way to F1-Five-Gait and Pace Test. Sure, scores are a part of it, but I think they are only a small

part of it. From the times when I couldn’t get a horse to trot to save my life, to the times when everything just went right, I’ve always enjoyed working with my horses, seeing our community come together, and learning from other riders.

The old saying goes that our best competition horses are also our best trail horses, and that is just so true. Icelandic horse competitions are for everyone, and they’re a ton of fun. If you’re at all interested in learning more about the sport, or going to your first competition, please reach out to anyone on the USIHC Board or the National Team and they’ll be happy to help in any way they can.

## RESOURCES

To learn more about the US National Team, go to <https://icelandics.org/competition/> and scroll down to download the PDF “USIHC National Team.”





# MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

**New Membership Application**     **Membership Renewal**

Individual     Individual Three Year     Individual Lifetime     Family     Junior     Junior Lifetime

Name: .....

Address: .....

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I am a United States Citizen and/or my primary residence\* is the United States.

*\*Primary Residence - must reside in the US for a minimum of 6 months and one day per calendar year to be eligible.*

I prefer not to receive a copy of the *Quarterly* magazine in the US Mail.

Regional Club (optional): .....

If you have selected a **Family Membership** please complete the following for the second adult and any children to be included in the membership (use the back of the page to add more family members):

Name	Year of Birth (juniors only)	Email (optional)

**Farm Listing** Paid members of the USIHC may opt to include a farm listing on the Congress' website ([www.icelandics.org](http://www.icelandics.org)) and printed in *The Icelandic Horse Quarterly*. There is a \$110.00 annual fee for the farm listing in addition to your membership fee.

Farm: ..... Owners: .....

Address: .....

City: ..... State: ..... Zip Code: .....

Phone: ..... Email: ..... Web: .....

Membership Fees & Restrictions	
<b>Individual</b>	<b>\$60/year</b> <b>\$150/ Three Year Membership</b> <b>\$1200/ Lifetime Membership</b>
<b>Family</b>	<b>\$80/year</b> Two adults and unlimited children (under 18 years) living in the same household. Adults can vote.
<b>Junior</b>	<b>\$50/year or \$280/Lifetime membership</b> One child (under 18 years). Not eligible to vote. Lifetime membership is valid until 18.

Membership Fee:	\$.....
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Your membership expires on the anniversary of your payment except for Individual Lifetime Memberships.





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The Bedford Riding Lanes Association relies on its members, generous donors, and a team of volunteers to be able to serve the community.

[www.bedfordridinglanes.org](http://www.bedfordridinglanes.org)

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The owners of the farms listed below have offered to have you visit in order to become acquainted with the Icelandic horse. Some are breeders, some importers, and some are interested in breed promotion alone. Their listing here does not constitute an endorsement of any kind by the USIHC.

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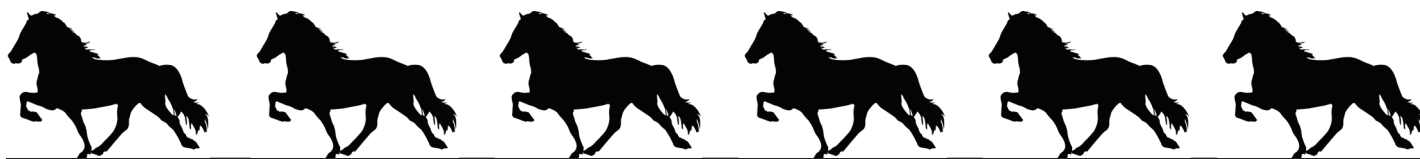
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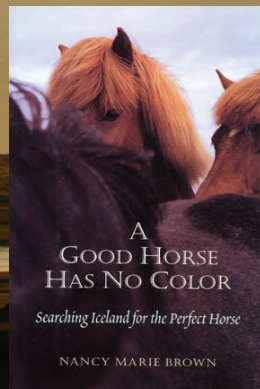
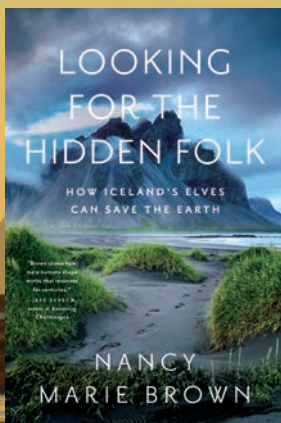
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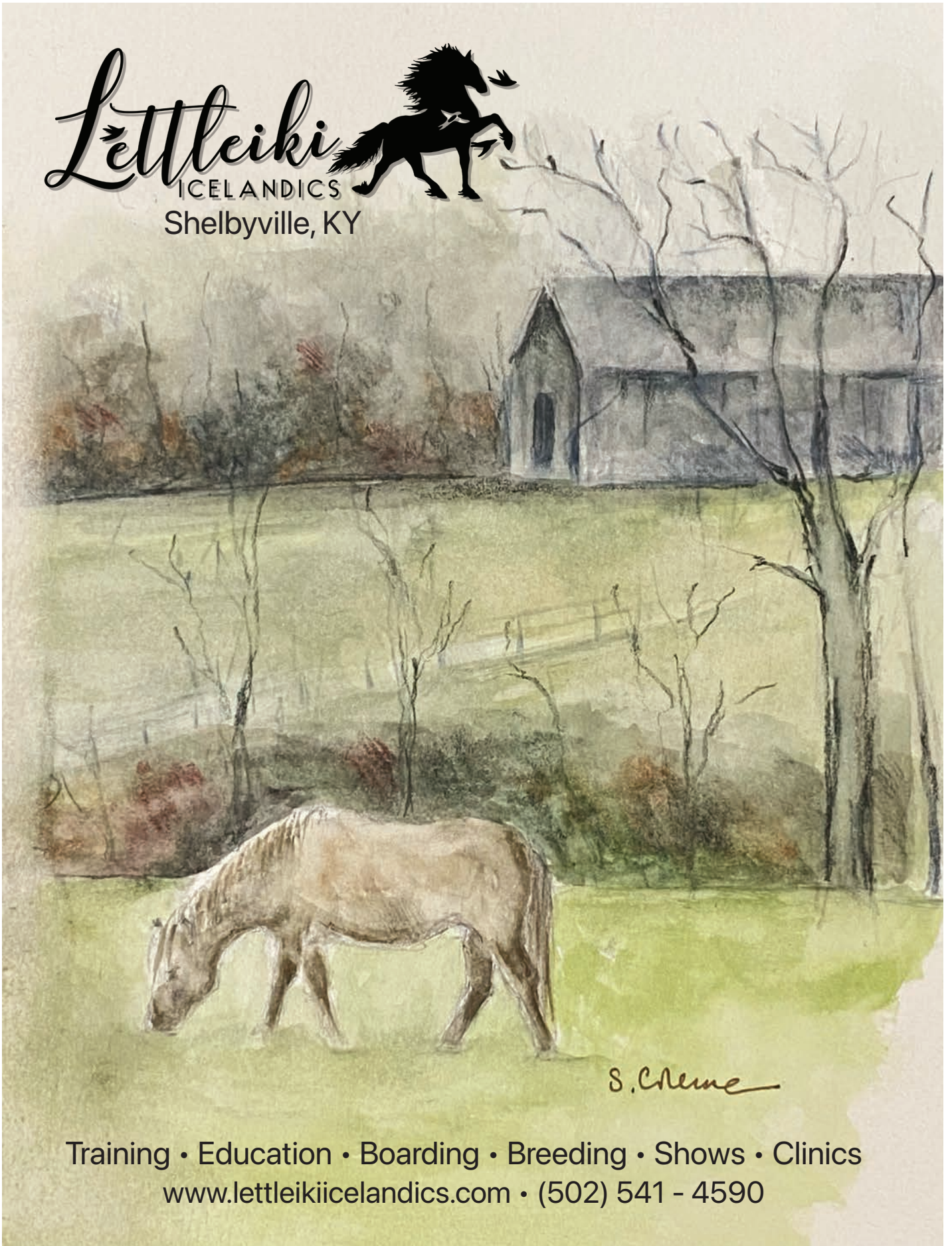
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