

IHSA founder visits Alfred University

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Bob Cacchione has seen his share of collegiate equestrian facilities over the years; as founder and executive director of the Intercollegiate Horse Show Association, he has visited hundreds. Last weekend Cacchione paid a visit to Alfred University's and came away impressed.

"This place is absolutely incredible," Cacchione said of the Bromeley-Daggett Equestrian Center at Maris Cuneo Equine Park. "For a college facility...Wow!"

Cacchione raved not only about the AU riding facility, but also the University's Equestrian Program in general.

"There are three things that make a good college riding program. One, the college has to believe in it and support it. Two, the people running the program have to have the credentials. And three, you have to have the facilities," he said. "Obviously, (Alfred University) recognizes and supports the program. The people here Nancy (Kohler, program director), Harry (Hurd, Western head coach) and Steve (Shank, Western instructor and assistant Western coach) have incredible credentials. And you obviously have a first-class facility."

If anyone knows excellence in a collegiate riding program, it's Cacchione, who founded the IHSA 46 year ago. In 1967, he was a freshman at Fairleigh Dickinson University in Teaneck, NJ, who came to college with experience riding horses while growing up. He said he and five other students formed a riding club that year and he began giving lessons. Soon, the club's membership swelled to 40 and he became a riding instructor for the university.

The following year, a group of riders from FDU-Madison came to Teaneck and competed with students there in a horse show. An article on that show appeared in Equine magazine, and riders from six more schools came to compete in a show at FDU the fall of 1968. Hence, the IHSA was born. Today, more than 400 colleges and universities in the United States and Canada are IHSA members, with more than 10,000 collegiate riders in 38 regions participating in hunt seat and Western competitions.

The Cacchione Cup, named in Cacchione's honor, is awarded each year in conjunction with the United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) to the national individual high point hunt seat rider. Among the Cacchione Cup's winners are three Olympic gold medalists.

IHSA competitions focus not as much on ability as on inclusivity, Cacchione said. That's evident by the way IHSA shows are contested. Visiting teams don't bring their own horses; they use those provided by the host school. Names are drawn at random to determine which horses each rider will seat. Riders compete in eight classes from regular season shows right on up to nationals depending on their ability.

"There are eight levels in each discipline (hunt seat and Western), so anyone can ride. It makes for great team camaraderie," he said. "When I created the IHSA, I didn't care about the riders' ability or financial means. I wanted to give as many people as possible the opportunity to ride."

Cacchione toured the Alfred University equestrian center, where on Saturday he would watch as the Saxons' hunt seat team competed in a show with 12 other schools and took first place. The previous evening, a barbecue dinner was held at the equestrian center in honor of his birthday. He spoke of the tremendous asset AU has in the equestrian center. "Imagine what prospective new students and their families say when they first see this facility. Then they meet the people who work here and it's a done deal."

Bromeley-Daggett Equestrian Center at Maris Cuneo Equine Park is situated on 400 acres a short drive from the AU campus. Opened in 2005, the building housing the indoor competition riding ring, stables, offices and classrooms was funded by a donation from alumni Robert Daggett '81, a Board of Trustees member, and his late mother Catherine Bromeley-Daggett, '58. A donation from Peter Cuneo '67, a trustee and former board chairman, and his wife, Maris, funded the purchase and development of the surrounding acreage. AU offers a minor in equine studies, which combines riding and classroom instruction at the equestrian center.

Kohler was quick to credit Cacchione for his role in fostering growth in collegiate riding nationwide, which in turn made it possible for the University to invest in the program at AU. "I'd guess there are hundreds of college facilities that were built because of the IHSA. It's his organization that led to this facility being built," she said.

The IHSA has no headquarters, said Cacchione, who lives in Fairfield, CT. It is a non-profit, all-volunteer organization that is overseen by a 50-member Board of Directors. Kohler, as president of IHSA Zone 2, Region I, is a member of the board. Because of her position, AU is an IHSA President College, and as such is designated as the host school for the regional hunt seat and Western championships that are held each spring. The organization hands out about 30 \$1,000 scholarships each year to riders at member schools; AU students have in the past been recipients, Kohler said.