



PARAGRAPHS

Newsletter of United States Driving for the Disabled

Summer 2012

THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

This is an exciting time to be associated with the United States Driving for the Disabled, Inc. Members of the Board of Trustees are busy making things happen, the very things that define USDFD and provide service to the driving community. Diane Kastama, Vice-President and Chair of the Team USA committee, is organizing, mentoring, and working to raise money for the team's participation in the Para Equestrian World Championships in Breda, The Netherlands this year. Board members Joy Adamski and Susan Guinan have refined the Sybil Dukehart scholarship program, have received applications from drivers and organizers, and will present to the Board at the June meeting our first granted scholarships.

USDFD is celebrating the addition of two new drivers, Paul Roberti and Stephanie Putnam. Both are competing in Combined Driving Events with adaptive equipment that is catalogued on our web page. Both dream of someday joining Team USA. I pulled up beside Stephanie as she was learning the cones course at the Vineyard Classic CDE in Woodland, CA. When I asked her if she was loving it, she smiled her radiant smile and proclaimed, "I am addicted."

You get to meet both Paul and Stephanie in this issue of our newsletter, which has a new editor and a new name. Linda Yutzy has agreed to oversee the editing, publishing, and distribution of PARAGRAPHS (formerly Hoofbeats and Heartbeats).

Being the President of USDFD at this time feels much the same as sitting in my carriage at the start of E, listening to the count-down of seconds and holding on to my good mare, who is also listening to that count-down. The volunteer says, "three – two – one and you are off." I hear the click of my navigator's timers. My mare breaks into a canter and we are off! Adrenaline surges; the course is ours! Aren't you glad you are aboard? ¶

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DATES TO REMEMBER

Drawing for Raffle **July 29**

2012 Para-Equestrian World Championships **August 30-Sept. 2** in Breda, The Netherlands.

USDFD.ORG

MISSION AND PURPOSE

United States Driving for the Disabled, Inc., a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, seeks to improve the lives of physically challenged individuals throughout the United States and Canada by providing the experience of driving horses in a safe and challenging environment.

Our mission is to provide the extraordinary benefit of therapeutic driving to as many people as possible through sharing knowledge, experience, and serving as a resource for innovations in adaptive equipment for drivers, trainers, and programs offering carriage driving.

The Sybil Dukehart Memorial Fund seeks to provide financial assistance to equip and train disabled drivers through providing scholarship funds to applicants.

USDFD fosters opportunities for drivers to compete in national and international amateur competitions by training and providing financial support for Team USA.



Stephanie Putnam and Shadow. See article on page 2.

The first thing Stefanie Putman thought about after the injury that left her a quadriplegic was horses.

From riding ponies as a youngster, to showing hunters and jumpers, to playing polo (she was president of the Polo Team in college) Stefanie's life had been sustained by her powerful connection with horses. After receiving a B.S. in Graphic Communications at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, Stefanie started working on her Masters Degree in Advertising at the San Francisco Academy of Art University in the late spring of 2009. She intended to return to the show ring after her career in advertising was established.

The trajectory of her life changed decisively on August 23, 2009. A devastating spinal cord injury (non-horse related) left her a C4-C5 quadriplegic at the age of 24. After a year of grueling therapy, Stefanie's passion for horses drew her in a direction that is a testimony to the generosity, dedication, faith, and love of some amazing people and to her own courage and determination to find a way to still believe in the beauty of her dreams.

Over the next year one question kept cropping up: "Will I ever be able to ride again?" The answer from the experts was repeatedly one that Stefanie did to want to hear and did not want to accept. Finally, in August 2010 Stefanie asked the question yet again. The answer did not change, but a new door opened...one that had never occurred to her before! A wonderful hippotherapy specialist suggested a carriage driving program geared to accommodate disabilities and directed her to Access Adventure in Fairfield, Ca.

Paralyzed from the chest down with very limited core strength and only the use of her biceps and shoulder muscles, Stefanie initially drove directly from her wheelchair which was loaded onto a special carriage by a solar powered battery operated lift. She progressed to a single horse carriage using an adaptive seat for disabled sports activities obtained through a custom seating manufacturer in Denver. A fellow carriage driver designed leather wrist-cuffs with hooks for clipping onto the reins and donated them to her. This enabled her to "hold" the reins and steer the horse(s) even though her hands have no sensation or functionality. Access Adventure Director, Michael Muir, offered Stefanie the reconnection with horses which she so desperately needed in her life. Carriage driving gave Stefanie a feeling of freedom from the limits imposed by her severely compromised mobility and enabled her to begin moving forward with her life.



Stephanie is thoroughly inspected by Shadow, her new partner in driving.

Stefanie exudes hope and transcendence with a radiant smile that brings joy to all who meet her. She is working toward completing the Masters degree in Advertising that she had started prior to her injury. And she has rekindled her competitive streak, replacing dreams of success in the show jumping arena with the goal of qualifying for Team USA and someday representing the U.S. in the World Para-Equestrian Driving Championships.

Last September in 2011 she participated in her first three day Combined Driving Event at Shady Oaks driving one of Gerard Paagman's fabulous Friesians, Marcus, which he very graciously loaned to her. Gerard also introduced her to the current World Champion Disabled Driver Jacques Poppen and his wife Eva from The Netherlands, and they spent a week coaching Stefanie prior to the event. At Shady Oaks Stefanie formed a close connection with Phyllis Grupe, an accomplished advanced level competitor, who through her ongoing encouragement and support has been instrumental in restoring Stefanie's confidence in herself and

in helping Stefanie make the transition into the competitive arena.

Early in 2012 Stefanie's path led her to Leslie Berndt – an international competitor who will be representing the U.S. this year at the World Singles Championship. Leslie and Stefanie bonded famously when Stefanie showed up for her first lesson. When Leslie brought out Scott Monroe's legendary black Morgan, Shadow, the 3 time U.S. National Champion for Stefanie to drive, she was bowled over. There was no looking back. Stefanie and Shadow hit it off so well that Leslie persuaded Scott to allow her new pupil to lease Shadow. This amazing horse is now stabled with Stefanie at nearby Leap of Faith Farms (with owner/managers Jim and Mariah Bradford-Urban's incredible support) where she is able to drive four times a week and also train with Leslie frequently. The 18-year-old Shadow had been with Scott since the horse was three, and he was still actively competing at an international level. Scott and Leslie's generosity and faith in Stefanie is truly awe inspiring and the results are nothing

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"A SINGLE DREAM ...

short of miraculous. Stefanie's upper body strength has increased, as have her driving skills. Stefanie's debut with Shadow was at the May 2012 Vineyard Classic CDE and under Leslie and Scott's tutelage, Stefanie and Shadow competed successfully while capturing everybody's hearts.

In Stefanie's words, "I just needed horses in my life and carriage driving has given that back to me. After I was injured I was repeatedly told that horses would never be a part of my world again. Many people out there in my situation with catastrophic disabilities have similar experiences – they are told that they have to do something else, that they can't continue with the dreams they

had before. The sense of loss is enormous. Now I am able to continue with my goals. I am able to come out of myself, to move beyond the confines of my wheelchair and my disability, and to feel that life might be full and rich and exciting despite the challenges I face. It brings life to my heart again – to focus on what is possible and not on what has been lost. I am learning how to communicate with my new body, how to better use and strengthen my remaining functionality, and how to feel "normal" again, in a sense. When I am carriage driving, people do not even realize that I am disabled and I can forget about it as well. I am able to feel at one with the horse just like when I was able to ride. It is a wonderful feeling of connection, freedom, independence, and empowerment."

Stefanie's mantra has always been: "Do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail." Stefanie hopes to be a role model for other special needs persons like herself and to promote the concept of Therapeutic Driving (and carriage driving in general) as an avenue for well-being and transformation. She currently sits on the Board of Directors for "Leaps and Bounds" (Mariah's visionary equine assisted therapy program at Leap of Faith Farms). We look forward with great anticipation and excitement to her continuing, incredible journey which is truly an inspiration to everyone around her. ¶

MEET PAUL ROBERTI



Paul's long term goal is to compete in the national championships and world championships for the disabled.

Paul Roberti, a native Rhode Islander and an avid sportsman was a tennis teaching professional and a New England Age Group triathlete for over 20 years. At the age of 40, he returned to college to receive his bachelor's degree in exercise physiology and athletic training. He continued his education and received a master's degree in sports medicine. In 2002, he worked as the athletic trainer at the United States Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado and in 2003 he worked as the head athletic trainer for the United States Bobsled and Skeleton Federation in St. Moritz, Switzerland and Winterberg, Germany. Paul went on to have a very successful career as both a teacher and administrator in education and sports medicine.

At the age of 52, on July 20, 2003 during a triathlon, Paul was struck by an automobile and rendered a T-7 complete paraplegic.

After his injury, Paul sought out new ventures to maintain his involvement in sports. He discovered that almost any sport available to the general population was also available to the disabled population with some adaptations. He discovered wheelchair fencing while doing his rehab for his injury at the Shepherd Center in Georgia. He competed in wheelchair fencing throughout the United States, Europe and Canada and was ranked nationally and internationally.

In April 2011, Paul wanted to try something different and started to research adaptive carriage driving and found that it was indeed possible. He started taking lessons last year at the New Horizons Center for Equine Assisted Therapy at Cornerstone Farm in Foster, Rhode Island under the coaching of Beth Stone. After Paul discovered combined carriage driving events, he enlisted the services of Kutzmann Carriage in Poland to



Kutzmann carriage with a seat adapted for Paul's needs.

construct a carriage with a seat adapted for Paul's needs. This carriage gives Paul equal footing and allows him to compete in events with everyone. His long term goal is to compete in the national championships and world championships for the disabled.

Paul feels that just because someone is disabled, it shouldn't limit their capabilities to do anything they want to do if you think outside the box. ¶

PAUL'S FOUR INGREDIENTS TO SUCCESS

- 1 Have passion for what you want to do
- 2 Be tenacious and practice every day
- 3 Be adaptive to unforeseen circumstances
- 4 Smile and enjoy yourself in your venture

WORLD PARA EQUESTRIAN DRIVING CHAMPIONSHIPS **AUGUST 30-SEPTEMBER 2, 2012 IN BRED, THE NETHERLANDS**

The United States Driving for the Disabled (USDfD) is in the process of sending a team of Para-Equestrian drivers to the World Championships to be held August 30-Sept 2, 2012 in Breda, The Netherlands. This is a complex process and much goes on behind the scenes. The World Championships take place every two years. Often we do not know the site of the host city until 8-10 months prior to the event.

The FEI governs these world championships, therefore, our National Governing Body in the USA is the United States Equestrian Federation (USEF). The USEF receives an invitation to send a team to the World Championships. Often this invitation is received only a few months prior to the event.

We at USDfD serve as the National Affiliate to the USEF for Para-Equestrian drivers. We poll the active Para-Equestrian drivers early in the championship year asking for recommendations for Coach and Chef d'Equipe. We also ask for names to be submitted as selectors. We put together the selection criteria based on previous years and any changes that are made in those two years. All of this is then submitted to the USEF's High Performance Committee for Para-Equestrians for their approval. Once approved the application and criteria are then sent to the drivers so they may apply to be selected for the team.

USDfD keeps track of deadlines and verifies that all appropriate paperwork and fee requirements are met. While this process slowly advances, we are busy locating

horses, equipment and facilities in the host country. This can be difficult as we do not really know who will be going until the team is selected. However, we need to have everything organized so that all will fall into place when the time arrives for the team to leave for Europe.

Because many of the para-equestrian drivers live on fixed incomes, it can be a financial hardship to compete. We work with many people to get services and equipment donated or at minimal cost. USDfD also applies for grants and seeks donations from raffles to help send the team to the World Championships.

USDfD updates our website and facebook page as information becomes available on procedures and on our competitors so that our drivers may stay informed. As time draws nearer, we decide the dates for training camp and coordinate with the coach and chef d'equipe as to when they will be there. We inform drivers of the options for lodging and transportation so they can make their personal arrangements.

Once in Europe, the Coach becomes Queen/King and decides who will drive which horses or ponies. They set the schedule for lessons as we "learn" our horses and practice, practice, practice. The logistics continue with verification of soundness, passports, and transportation to and from the competition.

During the event there are things such as Nations' Night when the drivers and support staff serve up USA food and drink. We also ask the drivers to bring something special

for the owners of the horses that we are borrowing/leasing for the competition.

The best part is that it is a wonderful and very rewarding opportunity to see all the Para-Equestrians from various countries compete in driving and to see everyone's smiles as they successfully complete the course and show to the world that carriage driving is a great equalizer. ¶



Editor

Linda Yutzky

PARAGRAPHS is published quarterly by United States Driving for the Disabled, Inc., a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

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Articles and photos are welcome. Please include name and email address of author. Label photos with identification of subject and photo credit. High resolution digital files are preferred. Contact Office for additional instructions. All submissions are subject to editing for clarity and length.

UNITED STATES DRIVING FOR THE DISABLED TEAM USA HARNESS RAFFLE!

Countryside Manufacturing has generously donated a Comfy Fit Harness to be raffled off in support of USEF's Team USA. The harness is made of a durable synthetic material and is padded with an extra soft pebble leather or vinyl that is wrapped around a soft layer of felt. With multiple sizes, and many features available, the raffle winner will be the proud owner of the beautiful custom made single harness they dreamed of owning!

\$10 each or 6 for \$50 ~ Drawing held on July 29 at the Duck Club CDE.
Buy online at www.usdfd.org

