



## THE UNITED STATES PONY CLUBS, INC. PRESS RELEASE

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### **Pony Club Presents Education and Awards at the 2023 USPC Convention, Sponsored by Stephens College and Supported by Via Nova Training**

**January 31, 2023 (Lexington, KY)** — Pony Club members, leaders, and volunteers, as well as equine enthusiasts, gathered for the 2023 USPC Convention, Sponsored by Stephens College and Supported by Via Nova Training, held Jan. 18–22 at the Marriott St. Louis Grand in St. Louis, Mo. Nearly 450 attendees enjoyed more than 40 educational workshops and seminars, plus meetings and awards presentations, and special Pony Club activities. The event offered a blend of in-person, livestream, and on-demand content, bringing additional value and flexibility to the Convention experience.

Representatives from 36 Pony Club regions worked together to learn and expand Pony Club programming for current and future members. In addition to leadership training and educational workshops, the event offered a variety of opportunities—from exploring the Anatomy Lab, sponsored by Banixx Horse & Pet Care, to shopping at the trade fair and silent auction. Pony Club members got advice to prepare for Horse Management at certifications and rallies, including interactive displays in the Horse Management Hands-On Room sponsored by Indian Hills Thoroughbred Farm. Workshop topics delivered important horse health information and insights on equine behavior, rider fitness and sports psychology, career opportunities in the equine industry, plus updates on helmet safety, and much more. The youngest attendees enjoyed horse-related activities and educational fun in the Pony Paddock, sponsored by the Arabian Horse Youth Association, Breyer Model Horses, and Trafalgar Square Books.

Friday’s Convention activities welcomed 21 delegates to the 2023 National Youth Congress thanks to support from the Western & English Sales Association (WESA), as well as honoring three inductees into this year’s Academy of Achievement: Sandra Gebhart, DVM; Deb Kirsch, and William West “Wes” Thompson. The USPC Research Project Fair, presented by Grayson-Jockey Club Research Foundation with support from Kentucky Equine Research, was popular with members of all ages and levels, with 37 participants presenting 29 total projects, both in person and virtually. Pony Club leaders enjoyed a day of professional development sessions with guest speaker Jay McChord, who works regularly with equine industry organizations on ways to communicate and collaborate more effectively in today’s multigenerational environment. The training, supported by Specialty Program Insurors and the Mattingley Leadership Training Fund, is eligible for continuing education credits.

Many Pony Club awards were presented at the Saturday morning Meeting of the Corporation. Six clubs were recognized for their member dedication and longevity with the United States Pony Clubs and they received the Club Milestone Award, given to clubs reaching their 25th or 50th anniversary years.

Four Pony Club members who earned A-level certifications received special recognition for their accomplishment. The A certification is the top level in the USPC certification program and is widely recognized throughout the equine industry as the mark of a highly competent and knowledgeable horse person.

The Brookfield Land Conservation Award was presented to Tidewater Pony Club from the Delmarva Region, while the Flash Teamwork Award went to beloved Pony Club mount Princess Fiona, owned by Beth Walkowicz and nominated by Lori Gmerek, district commissioner of East Aurora-Lake Erie Pony Club in the Western New York Region.

Princess Fiona shared a few words of acknowledgement via her humans on social media. “I’d like to thank Pony Club for developing riders who learn to do things like groom, mount, and ride tactfully and thoughtfully. Pony Club emphasizes respecting us, the equines, as athletes in our own right who need proper nutrition, extensive veterinary care, the best stable management, and, most importantly, TIDBITS. Thank you, Pony Club, for having two whole pages of the D Manual dedicated to tidbits.”

The Saturday night banquet was a highlight as attendees celebrated the recipients of the USPC Founders Awards, honoring dedicated longtime volunteers Debra Sue Waters and Brenda Yike. Five-star eventer and A-certified Pony Club alum Allison Springer, sponsored by Brooke USA Foundation, was the featured speaker. Springer shared how she got her start in Pony Club and how her experiences in USPC laid the foundation for her future success as a rider, trainer, coach, and equine welfare ambassador.

The 2023 USPC Convention was possible thanks to the support of our sponsors, including Convention title sponsor Stephens College; supporting sponsor Via Nova Training; USPC corporate sponsors Kerrits, Shapley’s, The Horse, Triple Crown Nutrition, Wintec, and Zoetis; and event sponsors, including the American Association of Equine Practitioners, Arabian Horse Youth Association, Banixx Horse & Pet Care, Breyer Model Horses, Brooke USA Foundation, Dressage4Kids, Fair Hill Saddlery, Grayson-Jockey Club Foundation, Indian Hills Thoroughbred Farm, Kentucky Equine Research, the Mattingley Leadership Training Fund, Santa Cruz Animal Health, Specialty Program Insurors, Trafalgar Square Books, Unicorn Trails, University of Missouri College of Veterinary Medicine, and Western & English Sales Association.

Convention attendees will have access to view recorded content and on-demand workshops via the virtual event platform through August 1, 2023.

Proposals are now being accepted [online](#) for 2024 educational workshops; more information is available [here](#). Pony Club invites all horse lovers to save the date for 2024 USPC Convention to be held Jan. 24–28 at the Peppermill Reno Resort in Reno, Nev., with trade fair, silent auction, and sponsorship opportunities available.

**[About The United States Pony Clubs, Inc.](#)** — The United States Pony Clubs, Inc. (USPC or Pony

Club) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization that builds the foundation of teamwork and sportsmanship through riding, mounted sports, and care of horses and ponies, while developing and enhancing leadership, confidence, responsibility, and a sense of community in its youth and adult members. USPC is proud to offer instruction and competitive opportunities in 11 competitive disciplines through hundreds of clubs and centers across the United States. USPC's educational standards continue to be instrumental in curriculum development for schools, universities, equestrian professionals, and organizations across the United States. Many of the nation's top equestrians, including Olympic team members, as well as successful business professionals and leaders in a variety of fields, have roots in Pony Club. For more information, please visit [www.ponyclub.org](http://www.ponyclub.org).