

Here to Help

*AQHA stewards are at AQHA-approved shows
to gently guide, educate and protect the horse.*

**By Becky Newell
and Christine Hamilton**

TALK TO SOME OF THE 75 AQHA STEWARDS AND THE SHOW MANAGERS they've worked with during the past year and you'll hear them all compare the responsibilities of the stewards at AQHA shows to that of parents: to gently guide and educate exhibitors on show etiquette, AQHA rules and acceptable training practices.

With the stewards program, which was started last year, the Association hopes to prevent inhumane practices and unsportsmanlike conduct, says Ward Stutz, AQHA senior director of breed integrity and education.

It all goes back to putting the horse first, which is reflected in AQHA's welfare statement: "Above all, the American Quarter Horse's welfare is paramount to other considerations, and the continual development of procedures that ensure the humane treatment of the breed and fair competition supercedes all other concerns."

When AQHA started the stewards program, it tested potential stewards on their knowledge of the AQHA rulebook, and took them through a day-long training session on the duties of being a steward, including ways to prevent abuse and deal with difficult situations. Those who passed the test and signed an AQHA Stewards Code of Ethics, became part of a pool of about 35 stewards, who were sent to AQHA-approved shows to roam the show grounds and warm-up areas "to identify, document and intervene to correct inhumane activities." Soon, a stewards training manual was developed to give stewards a written set of guidelines, and training was enhanced.

The AQHA program, which is funded through show processing fees that are collected at AQHA shows, is loosely modeled after those of the United States Equestrian Federation and the

437.5 AQHA STEWARDS

Designation as an AQHA steward is a privilege, not a right, bestowed by the Executive Committee according to procedures formulated by it, to individuals whose equine expertise and personal character merit the honor. An individual's conduct as an AQHA steward must be exemplary and is subject to continual Executive Committee review, with an automatic review after three (3) years of becoming an AQHA steward. Designation as an AQHA steward is revocable by the Executive Committee at any time with or without cause and with or without notice and formal hearing. An AQHA steward's responsibilities are as follows:

- (a) Monitor show grounds for inhumane treatment of horses and unsportsmanlike conduct;
- (b) Answer exhibitors' questions about rules;
- (c) Assist show officials with proper set up of practice jumps and courses;
- (d) Investigate complaints of class filling;
- (e) Evaluate potentially unsafe conditions related to the show, e.g. poor footing in the warm-up area, and bring to attention of show management to correct;
- (f) Issue warning or removal cards from show ground as warranted according to AQHA rules and/or guidelines;
- (g) Timely file an AQHA steward's report and evaluation with AQHA;
- (h) Adhere to the AQHA Stewards Code of Ethics.



AQHA Steward Clark Parker minds the exhibitor order at the AQHA World Championship Show in-gate.

CHRISTINE HAMILTON

Fédération Equestre Internationale. The National Reining Horse Association recently implemented a stewards program, as well.

“Our primary concerns immediately are animal welfare and ensuring AQHA shows meet the highest standards regardless of size,” Ward says. “Stewards will be trained and tested on AQHA’s rulebook and the stewards training manual, and will be trained to handle difficult situations professionally with courtesy and tact. Stewards are not meant to be feared but rather to be AQHA’s on-site ambassadors.”

“In the eyes of some, this program comes off as a police-action,” says Tom Persechino AQHA executive director of competition and breed integrity. “But it’s not. Where the stewards program is concerned, let’s be ‘for’ not ‘against’ this program ... because it’s about protecting the horse and helping exhibitors.”

And that’s why Stephanie Lynn, an AQHA Professional Horseman and judge from Summerfield, Florida, became a steward.

“I truly believe in AQHA, animal welfare and the need to protect the horse,” she says. “I also believe that some trainers have not been trained in animal care and some are truly ignorant to the needs of the horse. I know that some have taken their authority too far, but I have also witnessed times when a steward’s presence has initiated better behavior in ‘rough’ trainers. The (implied) threat of being ‘written up’ has kept some ugly behavior in check.”

Many stewards and show managers liken the AQHA Stewards Program to the work done by the seven men who were part of the former AQHA Regional Representatives Program.

“I think the (stewards) is a great program and it’s really an extension, to me, of the regional representatives program,” says Denny Thorsell, an AQHA steward and judge from Burbank, Ohio. “Economics made (AQHA) do away with (the regional representatives) program. From the good-will aspect of (overall) relationships with AQHA, that program was a super, super program. Because it was one of the ways in which the average person could relate to the Association and have access to it.”

There were only seven regional representatives; there are now 75 stewards.

“There are more of (the stewards) so we can have them at more shows,” says Don Moore, who with wife Carol manages several AQHA-approved shows. “I like having a rep or a steward at a show. It’s a big benefit to me and it’s a benefit to the exhibitors, too. The (stewards) just answer a lot of questions for exhibitors and (do things) that just takes a load off of me, and they are representing AQHA, so they can answer questions that require an answer from AQHA, not necessarily show management.

Clark Parker, an AQHA steward, served as an AQHA regional representative for a number of years.

“The best way to get along is to approach people with a positive attitude,” he says. “There’s a difference between ‘asking’ someone to do something and ‘telling’ them. Horse show people are independent. We’re there to help, not be the cops.”

And with a mixture of experience among the stewards, they all know they are there to help one another. Stewards even call each other to discuss situations they’re faced with at a show and to talk over the possible solutions and how to handle them, Clark adds.

“The Stewards carry their identification visible, try to make contact with exhibitors ... make themselves available. I see exhibitors talking to them and asking questions, so I know they’re being used,” Don says.

“I just think that any program like this is of a benefit to AQHA in several ways. I think they benefit the Association by getting feedback; it benefits AQHA by making exhibitors

AQHA STEWARD CODE OF ETHICS

Designation as an AQHA-approved steward is a privilege, bestowed on individuals whose equine expertise and personal character merit the honor. In carrying out our role of providing service to the American Quarter Horse industry, we recognize the need to do so in a professional manner, and to deal with the public and our colleagues with integrity.

By signing below, I agree to the following:

- **To ensure that the welfare of the American Quarter Horse is paramount and that every American Quarter Horse shall at all times be treated humanely and with dignity, respect and compassion.**
- **To uphold AQHA rules and guidelines pertaining to inhumane treatment and the welfare of the horse.**
- **Statement of Position, pages 9 - 14**
- **40I, Page 88**
- **104(a), Page 35**
- **44I(c), (g), (h) & (i), pages 121 & 122-126**
- **To uphold AQHA rules pertaining to unsportsmanlike conduct.**
- **44I(a), (b), (d), (e) & (f), pages 120 - 122**
- **To monitor show grounds for inhumane treatment and unsportsmanlike conduct**
- **To have the conviction to discuss and dissuade inhumane treatment and unsportsmanlike conduct with individuals engaging in such conduct.**
- **To report inhumane treatment and unsportsmanlike conduct to show management and AQHA per AQHA Steward Reporting guidelines.**
- **To adhere to the professional standards of AQHA and at all times, act in a professional manner.**
- **To be courteous, and to steward with a positive attitude.**
- **To not accept any sort of remuneration, consideration or anything of value that constitutes a bribe in the furtherance of stewarding duties.**
- **To promptly report to the senior director of breed integrity and animal welfare any attempt by third parties to bribe me or otherwise influence me in the furtherance of my stewarding services.**
- **To report any information regarding bribes or illegal persuasion of show officials, whether directed toward me or other officials.**
- **To instill confidence among exhibitors and the public in the American Quarter Horse industry, avoiding any action conducive to discrediting it or membership in the American Quarter Horse Association.**

I understand and agree that designation as an AQHA Steward is a privilege and not a right. I further understand and agree that such designation is revocable by AQHA without cause, notice or formal hearing.

feel like AQHA cares; and it benefits the exhibitors by having AQHA representatives there who can answer questions. It definitely benefits show management.”

The AQHA Executive Committee recently appointed a stewards oversight and selection committee, which will review applications and make recommendations on applicants who are eligible for stewards school. The committee will also review individual steward conduct and actions if there is an issue at an event.