



Dear AQHA Members,

At the 2011 AQHA Convention, the youth committee and the AQHA Board of Directors agreed the Association needs to focus more attention on the youth segment of its membership. With more than 28,000 members, the American Quarter Horse Youth Association is currently one of the largest equine organizations in the world. About 9,000, or one-third, of those 28,000 members actually show or compete with their horses.

Our youth membership is so important to the future of the equine industry. What we're finding is that for a child to be involved in this industry, more than likely their families would have been involved. So, we're inadvertently limiting our audience, and having a hard time attracting kids from outside the industry.

In this day and age, there's so much to offer children: activities, sports programs, and schools offer so much more. Many of these activities are being offered at a much younger age. In many instances, we're not getting to kids early enough and by the time they are old enough to enter our organization or any horse event, they're already invested in other activities. This may not appear to be a problem right now, but down the road 10, 20, 30 or 40 years from now, these kids are the future of our industry and the future leaders of AQHA.

So after the convention, a number of AQHA staff and committee members met to develop and implement a strategic operating plan to create a completely new experience for youth. To accomplish this massive undertaking, the group recognized that a completely new youth experience would offer new opportunities to raise funds for this operation. Another point the group agreed on was AQHYA would become a more focused group under the new organization, and AQHYA would concentrate on youth that exhibit and compete with their American Quarter Horses.

If a new concept can attract horse-crazy kids by offering relevant means of entertainment and continuing education, with a path toward getting on an actual horse, we would have more success in attracting members to the equine industry.

To support this new initiative, we're painstakingly reviewing all of our past youth programs to bring those ideas, methods, partners and educational modules to be able to offer an even better set of educational tools to assist this much needed industry movement.

Central to the new effort should be the creation of an engaging new digital experience. Let's face it; we need to reach kids where they live – the Internet. By creating this relevant experience, our program would be available 24/7 to kids via multiple digital platforms. This experience could provide hours of opportunities for kids to be involved with horses without disrupting their current activities and family time.

Along with what we've learned from educational programs done in the past, we're also going to rely on our AQHA Professional Horsemen, AQHA directors and our Alliance Partners, such as the Certified Horsemanship Association, to connect kids to living, breathing horses.

While my description of this blossoming program may seem a bit broad, we want to take the time to get this right and be able to offer horse-crazy kids a place where they can learn about and touch horses.

We've got to do whatever we can to create more programs, better programs that attract youth to our business. I think every single one of us involved in the equine industry now has to get involved in this initiative, to act as recruiters, ambassadors and salespeople. It's our duty. As much enjoyment and as much pleasure people like me have gotten out of this industry and this horse and this Association, we've got to do whatever we can so this Association remains viable for future generations.

Other big strides taken by AQHA include:

- **Leveling:** In 2011, AQHA began managing more closely the number and types of approved shows, as well as developing a leveling program to offer a broader variety of exhibitor skill-level classes. The result has been the new AQHA show leveling program, which will include more and different levels, including new Rookie, Intermediate and Progressive. More of the plan will be launched in 2012; it should be fully implemented in 2013.
- **Rookie Classes:** In 2011, AQHA introduced a trial run of rookie classes created by the AQHA Blue-Ribbon Task Force to make the transition from 4-H, open showing or no show experience at all less intimidating and more comfortable for exhibitors. The goal of these classes is to reach AQHA members of all ages and riding levels. The classes were tested at several shows.
- **Intermediate Awards:** At the 2011 Built Ford Tough AQHYA, Adequan Select, Bank of America Amateur and FedEx Open world championship shows, AQHA recognized the top three Intermediate exhibitors in each youth, amateur, Select amateur and open class. This is a great way to introduce some of the show or competition-leveling concepts that we have been exploring over the last couple of years. Recognizing the Intermediate exhibitor is a way to shine the spotlight on exhibitors who have worked hard to qualify for our world shows and are tough competitors at our world shows year after year, but don't make it into the top 10.
- **Novice Championship Shows:** During the last few years, AQHA has been working to create a level playing field for all of its show competitors. One of the more exciting changes included in the leveling program is the addition of the AQHA Novice championship shows. Novice competitors will have their choice between two show locations on the weekend of October 5-7, 2012. The SmartPak AQHA Western Novice Championship Show is that weekend at the South Point Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas, and the Nutrena AQHA Eastern Novice Championship Show is at the Tennessee Miller Coliseum in Murfreesboro, Tennessee.
- The brand-new **AQHA Ranching Heritage Breeders**, the **AQHA Ranching Heritage Challenge** and the **AQHA Young Horse Development Project** are all part of AQHA's push to recognize the solid ranch horses that contributed to the success of the breed. AQHA Ranching Heritage Breeder is a designation for a ranch that is an AQHA member and produces American Quarter Horses for a remuda that is used to work cattle on the ranch. Ranches must apply for the designation, which also requires a 10-year breeder award, and candidates for the program must be approved by the AQHA Ranching Council. Horses bred by Ranching Heritage Breeders will be eligible for Ranching Heritage Challenge. The Young Horse Development Project gives older AQHYA members the chance to participate in a hands-on horse training opportunity that will teach the fundamentals of horsemanship. The youth will have the chance to showcase their skills at designated events where they can earn scholarships and prizes.

I have enjoyed serving as your 2011 AQHA president and on the AQHA Executive Committee for the last few years. I will continue to support the American Quarter Horse industry and look forward to the future of our organization.

Peter J. Cofrancesco III
AQHA President