



For hundreds of years, South Carolina has served as a desirable haven for the equine industry. With its mild temperatures and sandy footing, entire households, including horses and grooms, came by rail to enjoy their favorite equestrian sports in the moderate climate of the Carolina Sand Hills.

Today the Palmetto State is base for approximately four million residents, and the South Carolina Equine Census recently reported approximately 84,000 equines with a value of \$332 million.

The communities of Camden and Aiken have recently built and/or renovated their horse show facilities that now attract the Southeast's leading hunter/jumper trainers, riders and genuine horse enthusiasts.

While these grounds feature hundreds of permanent stalls, abundant lunging pads, wash racks, camper hook ups and all weather footing throughout their numerous rings, one of the most important ingredients to a successful show is its show management team.

Recently I had an opportunity to visit with Cathy and Rick Cram, owners of Progressive Show Jumping, Inc. (PSJ) to get their insights on the challenges and the successes that they have enjoyed in the horse show management business.

Progressive Show Jumping

Making Every Stride Count

— By Sally Floyd Kay

Making a living was the primary catalyst behind Rick's launch into the horse show business. "When college was no longer affordable, I began RSC Horse Show Services in Aiken in 1988," he offers. "I built jumps in my Mom's back yard and ran my first horse show at Ramblewood in Aiken in 1987."

Horse shows and their respective disciplines attract a variety of exhibitors and therefore a broad spectrum of personalities, needs and expectations. Cathy and Rick both agree that one of the biggest challenges thus far is the ability to keep everyone happy.

"At the same time we believe it's also one of our biggest successes in that we started a family, developed the Highfields Event Center (in Aiken, SC) and have maintained a 19-year healthy marriage," they chuckle.

According to the Crams, their selection of shows has come full circle. The initial shows they produced not only had a grass roots focus but were also unrecognized by the various horse associations. Those shows soon evolved into ones that are regionally sanctioned.

Currently, PSJ has nine shows that are nationally sanctioned by the United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) AA rated, which is the highest rating that a show can receive.

"Two years ago, I saw an old friend at a tack store," commented Cathy. "She said she missed coming to the PSJ shows. I asked her why they weren't participating any more and she indicated that the PSJ series shows had become too competitive. That's when we decided to offer the 'Just For Fun' series of shows and they have really taken off," she mused.

"You can never assume in this business, and it's important that you maintain ongoing communications with your exhibitors. We really appreciate the feedback we receive from our customers in an effort to constantly improve to meet their needs."

And speaking of full circle, the Cram's presence in Camden is nothing new. They came very close to purchasing the then "Tri-Color" facility in the early 1990's but decided the timing was not right for them or their family and remained in Lexington, South Carolina.

More recently, however, PSJ has leased the South Carolina Hunter/Jumper Association (SCHJA) date and acquired the "Camden Spectacular" aka the "Queen City Classic" date that had been previously owned by Judy Young, Brian Flynn and most recently, Robbie Hunt.

"They have done a spectacular job with the SCEP (South Carolina Equine Park)," affirmed Cathy and Rick. "We know first-hand that it's no easy task and requires a considerable investment. We are very fortunate that the community of Camden has stepped up to the plate and realizes what an asset a show facility can be to its economy."

April's show series will consist of two shows at SCEP, the Camden Spring Classic (6-10) and the SCHJA Benefit (14-17); followed by two shows at Highfields Event Center, the Aiken Spring Classic Masters (20-24) and the Aiken Spring Classic Finale (27 – May 1).

"Our hope is that these shows will become a monthly destination for those returning North from the Florida circuits," stated Rick. "Additionally, we anticipate a considerable draw from the Southeast region."



Cathy and Rick Cram, owners of Progressive Show Jumping, Inc.

The Cram's goals for this year's circuit are to keep it fun yet maintain its authenticity. Generous prize money will again be offered throughout the hunter and jumper divisions.

The increasingly popular United States Hunter Jumper Association (USHJA) Derby will be featured in addition to a grand prix, VIP tent and numerous social events.

"It's always great to be able to move into a show for two weeks," admits Cathy. "This type of schedule allows for the show and its exhibitors to minimize expenses, particularly travel and set-up / tear-down."

The economic downturn coupled with the growing interest in horse show management business has increased the degree of competitiveness. Critics believe that

there are too many shows offered within too close proximity. PSJ has remained a popular choice for many competitors by offering cash awards yet maintaining reasonable entry and stall fees.

"We challenge exhibitors to read and compare prize lists," asserts Cathy. "They will see the incentive to participate in our shows."

PSJ's goal is to provide cost-effective horse shows that offer top tier courses and class formats.

Through making safety a priority and awarding accomplishments, it gives the rider and his/her horse the opportunity to gain the confidence needed to compete in this exhilarating sport. ■