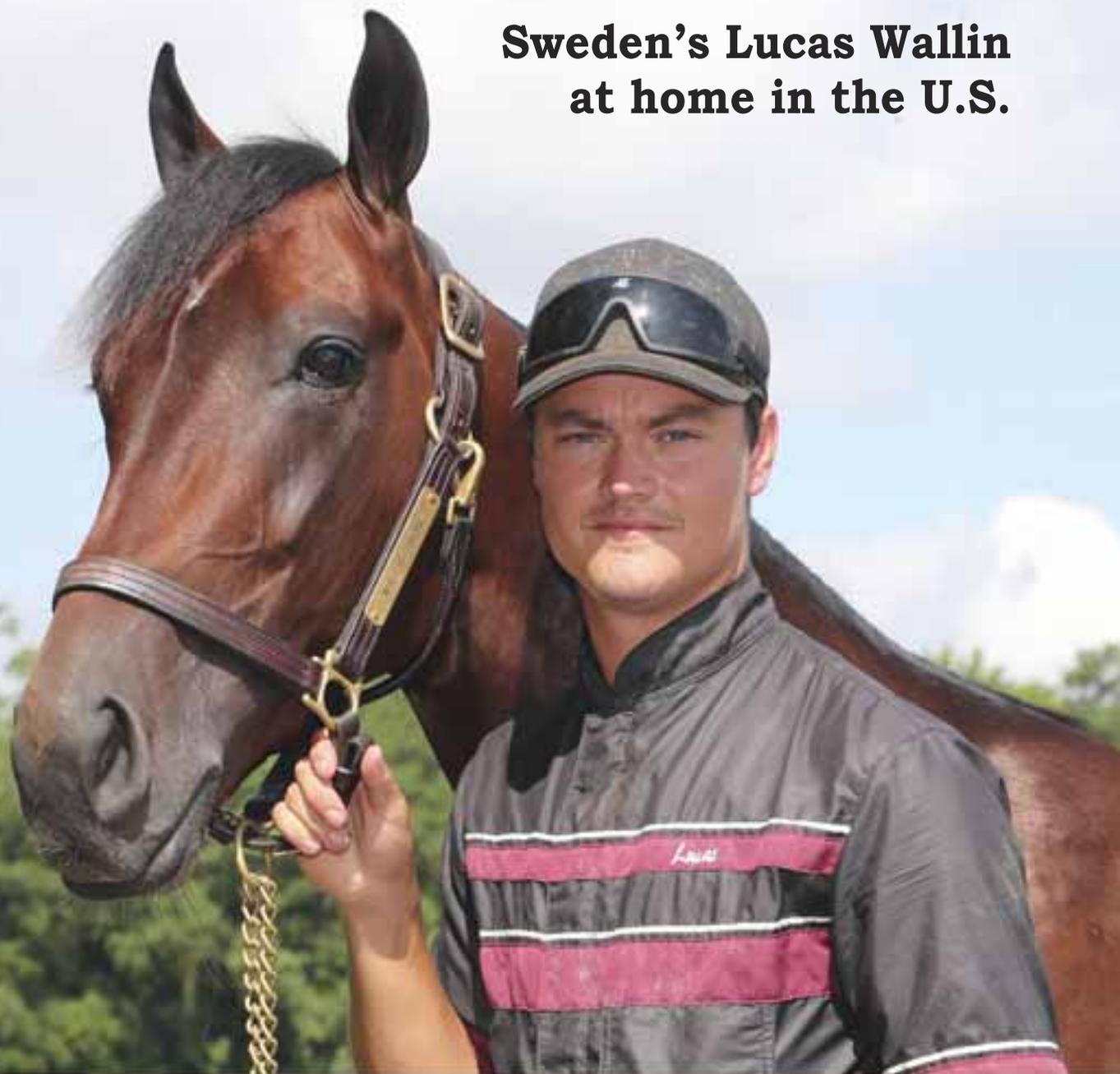


# NOVEMBER 22 Youth Beats

The harness racing 'zine for teens

## AMERICAN DREAM

Sweden's Lucas Wallin  
at home in the U.S.



Norton: From Saddle to Sulky  
page 2

Standardbreds On Showcase  
page 4

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page 12

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# Youth Beats



Cover

Lucas Wallin and Breeders Crown champion Rebuff  
PHOTO COURTESY MARK HALL



**JAMES WITHERITE**  
*Youth Beats editor*

## Letter from the Editor

If there's anything I've learned since my first live experience with harness racing — when I was 12 — it's that there isn't one "right way" to get involved. Part of the beauty of our great sport is that every individual who participates in it — in one way or another — has seemingly blazed their own unique trail into the game.

In this issue of *Youth Beats*, we explore the journeys of a couple young people who are achieving success in harness racing. Sophie Norton, a first-generation horsewoman, never dreamed she'd one day end up assisting Vernon Downs leading trainer Kerin Warner when she started riding lessons as a youngster. Meanwhile, half-way around the world, Lucas Wallin's weekend trips to racetracks throughout Sweden with his uncle turned out to be the foundation that led him to a Breeders Crown title last year with Rebuff (they're featured together on our front cover).

No matter your level of interest in harness racing, there's something for you in the pages that follow. These stories have been enjoyable for our crew to put together, and I'm hopeful that you enjoy them just as much as we have.

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The Harness Horse Youth Foundation looks back on an action-packed 2022 season

**James Witherite**  
Assistant Editor, *Hoof Beats*

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# From Saddle to Sulky

*Sophie Norton turned childhood love of horses into a career*

BY JAMES WITHERITE

Harness racing is often a family affair, but not for Sophie Norton. The 21-year-old is blazing her own trail in the game, making strides toward a career with Standardbreds after an unlikely — but serendipitous — path led her to the Vernon Downs backstretch.

“I didn’t come from a racing family; I didn’t even come from a horse family,” Norton said. “When I was little, I decided that I wanted to work with horses. My parents bought me the bare minimum — a pair of jeans, paddock boots and a riding helmet — and said that you can have lessons once a week. I hated it! But they said that I had to stick it out for five months because they bought me the stuff. I ended up falling in love with it. Sixteen years later, here I am still working with the horses.”

Riding horses provided Norton her early education, but she found her way into harness racing when she first attended the Harness Horse Youth Foundation camp at Vernon — 20 minutes from her home in New Hartford, N.Y. — in the summer of 2013. She participated in HHYF’s leadership camp the next two summers, but then relegated harness racing to the back burner — until one of her professors at SUNY Morrisville, Standardbred trainer Kerin Warner,

rekindled her interest.

“When I went to tour the school, I went to go see the Thoroughbred program, and I found (Kerin) instead,” said Norton, who graduated from Morrisville in 2021 with an associate degree in equine science with a concentration in racing. “He asked if I ever thought about harness racing. I said, ‘No. I tried it, I liked



it, but I don’t know if I want to make a career out of it.’ He just looked at me and said, ‘No, I’ll see you in class,’ and he walked away. I didn’t think anything of it until a year later when I was sitting in his class.”

Norton, who, at 4-foot-11 and 108 pounds, is the ideal build for a jockey, originally went to Morrisville for the equine rehabilitation and Thoroughbred racing curricula. However, when the Thoroughbred program was discontinued, the first-generation horsewoman found herself at a crossroads — and her path ultimately led, predictably, in hindsight, back to harness racing.

“I didn’t want to do Western or English breaking and training because I had grown up doing that and it was a little old to me,” Norton said. “Then Kerin Warner said, ‘Why don’t you come down this summer and just jog a couple?’ I was putting it off because I wasn’t really interested. He said, ‘I heard you were in the Youth Foundation. Please just come jog a couple horses.’ So I did, just to humor him, and it reawakened my interest in it.”

Upon graduation, Norton joined Warner’s stable at Vernon, where her education has continued on the racetrack. She is hands-on with all 25 horses in the stable, and her job description varies widely from day to day.





“I do a little bit of everything,” she said. “He calls me a second trainer, but in addition to training, I jog, I’m a groom, I paddock horses for him, I clean stalls — I really do it all.” Considering that she drove in her first qualifier in May and logged seven more qualifying drives through the end of July, “all” isn’t the slightest bit of an exaggeration. Given her stature, driving won’t likely be a major component in her career, but it’s one she enjoys nonetheless.

“I’m not going to get many drives as a catch-driver (being 4-foot-11), but Kerin is willing to give me some of his horses to drive,” Norton said. “I’ll probably just drive his horses and then eventually my own horses.”

With her focus on building a career primarily as a trainer, and her boots on the ground seven days a week — “I don’t really want a day off,” she says — Sophie Norton believes that anyone with a willingness to work hard and be receptive to learning can make a career in harness racing, be it on the track or behind the scenes.

“If you were to find a trainer and say, ‘I want to get into this sport; is there anything I can do?’ they’ll probably take you on — somebody will, at least,” she said. “You’ll start out cleaning stalls or rubbing horses. And then, eventually, as they get to know you better, you’ll start jogging and training. You have to earn it in this sport, but it’s worth it, especially if you find the right person to help you.”



# Celebrating Standardbreds

## Ohio horsepeople showcase the breed to new audience at Breyerfest

*The Kentucky Horse Park, in Lexington, Ky., is no stranger to Standardbreds. The Park, which opened in 1978, was built on the original grounds of Walnut Hall Farm, one of harness racing's leading breeding operations since the 1890s. Once the home of great Standardbreds Cam Fella and Staying Together, the Park currently houses Mr Muscleman, Western Dreamer, Won The West and Marion Ma-rauder in its Hall of Champions.*

*From July 15-17, Ohio Standardbreds and Friends (OSAF) — a group dedicated to having fun with their equine counterparts while at the same time promoting the breed — visited the park along with 12 of their Standardbreds to participate in the 33rd annual Breyerfest, a celebration of horses, model horses and art. Throughout the three-day event, OSAF showcased the Standardbred breed — both in the show ring and along the shedrow — before dozens of horse lovers young and old.*

*Breyerfest, which attracts horse lovers and Breyer model horse enthusiasts alike, first took place in 1990. The annual event celebrates horses of all breeds who have won exemplary awards and have their own Breyer models — made of molded plastic and painted to look like the horses themselves — and also comprises a model horse show where collectors enter their models for awards.*

*The 2022 Breyerfest marked the eighth year of OSAF's participation in the event. This year's festival theme was "Prost!" — which means "Cheers!" in German — and aptly featured all things German. During demonstrations, the group showcased the versatility of the Standardbred by riding in various western and English disciplines along with the American and German flags, costume, sidesaddle and driving. The riders — some as young as 17 — spent countless hours making sure their horses adjusted well to all the commotion in the arena and improving their bonds with their horses. The following is OSAF member Paige Kopiec's experience as a participant at the 2022 Breyerfest.*

BY PAIGE KOPIEC

Participating with OSAF was an experience that I will likely never forget, and I enjoyed every moment of it — especially being able to promote the Standardbred breed with other young people. The people were all welcoming, and I loved the personalities of all their horses. Most of the Standardbreds had their heads outside of the stalls, eating up all the attention they were receiving from children and their families. Several

children came up to pet the horses and asked questions about them. A few even asked some riders to sign their Breyer model horses they brought with their Standardbred's name.

When people walked by the stalls, it gave me an opportunity to meet several visitors who had Standardbreds growing up. I heard how amazing their horses were for them — some raced, some led different careers, and others were just the horses that they



rode bareback during the summer. Some people had even seen us in our demonstration and came to the barns looking for our group.

When it came time for our demonstration each day, the arena had a fair amount of commotion, but our horses and riders handled it exceptionally well. Between the large audience, vendors and the announcement system, there was plenty there to make any horse nervous, but our horses kept their focus, taking everything in stride. A background on the breed — and each horse's story — was read aloud to the viewers, and then each horse and person had their time to shine.

Once the announcer moved on to the next horse, we kept going around the arena and stopped along the rail so people could pet our horses, and we answered any questions they had. People would come down the aisles from the top of the seating just to be able to pet the horses on the rail. I remember how many smiles this created, and how many parents were so grateful for all of us making sure that as many people as possible got to pet a horse.

This group's goal is to educate people on what incredible and versatile horses Standardbreds can be, and to give people the opportunity to interact with real horses.



DEBBIE SCHIFF PHOTO

Between all the disciplines that OSFA brought to Breyerfest and the interactions we had with many of the park's visitors, we achieved our goal of having fun with our equine partners and educating people about the breed. I am appreciative of everybody involved in this opportunity, and I hope that Ohio Standardbreds and Friends, along with others, can continue to attend events like this in the years to come.



MICHELE KOPIEC PHOTO

# 2022 HAMBLETONIAN

Three-year-old trotters are sent on their way in the \$1 million Hambletonian in East Rutherford, N.J., and won by COOL PAPA BELL (No. 6, y



PHOTO BY MARK HALL

# DNIAN

*bletonian, held Aug. 6 at the Meadowlands,  
(yellow saddle pad).*



# EXCEEDING

## Lucas Wallin making the most of his American dream

BY JAMES WITHERITE



Lucas Wallin has enjoyed some of the highest highs harness racing has to offer — participating in two Hambletonians and winning a Breeders Crown — all before turning 30. Thanks to a literal world of experience working under some of trotting’s most successful and knowledgeable practitioners, Wallin promises to etch his name alongside theirs in due time.

The native of Sweden was practically born into the sport: his grandfather owned horses and his mother had riding horses, but it was with his uncle — trainer Joakim Wallin — with whom Lucas got his early lessons.

“I drove in pony races when I was eight or nine,” Lucas said. “And then, every time I had an afternoon off — I remember I even called in sick from school from the last couple of lessons to go with my uncle to the race-tracks — I went with him to different racetracks in Sweden. Then, on weekends and holidays from school, I worked in his barn.”

When he was 15, Wallin got his first taste of American harness racing while he and a friend visited on an extended holiday.

“I just fell in love with it right away,” he said. “I even

went with a horse trailer from Jersey to the Red Mile (in Kentucky). I was sitting there between the horses just to see that. It was a lot of fun.”

Wallin returned to Sweden to study Standardbreds and trotting more in depth at the Wången school — nine hours north from his hometown of Mjölby. Soon after, he landed his first job as a groom under trainer Stefan Persson, for whom he worked for 1-1/2 years.

Ever since his summer sojourn to the U.S., Wallin’s ultimate plan was to return — “I said that one day I would come back,” he said — but that plan changed when an opportunity to refine his craft under the tutelage of Dutch trainer Bas Crebas arose.

“I got a call from the Netherlands and got a good offer to be a second trainer, train horses, and then race and drive a lot,” Wallin explained. “I drove in Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany — France, even.”

Wallin never lost sight of his American dream. In 2014, Wallin learned that fellow Swede Åke Svanstedt sought an assistant trainer at his new base of operations in Wrightstown, N.J., and it proved to be the perfect time for the then 21-year-old to make his move.

“When Åke and the people at his stable called, it was an easy decision to move over,” Wallin recounted. “I started as a second trainer, and I learned it day by day. After a while, he told me I should get a license so I could drive qualifiers and a couple overnights (regular races at pari-mutuel tracks). He gave me a huge responsibility doing it. We did OK, and he gave me more chances and more responsibility in the stable — talking to vets, blacksmiths and owners; doing the training. I had three very good years there.”



**Top left:** Rebuff and trainer Lucas Wallin. **Top right:** Rebuff gave Lucas Wallin his biggest win to date when he captured the 2021 Breeders Crown 2-Year-Old Colt Trot at the Meadowlands. **Bottom:** Wallin also drove the aptly named Cuatro De Julio (Spanish for "Fourth of July") in 12 starts in 2021 for trainer Marie Ortolan Bar, including a second-place finish in the 2021 Kentucky Futurity (bottom left) and a seventh-place finish in the 2021 Hambletonian (in pre-race warmup bottom right) after forcing a blistering pace out of post 10, but has cut back on driving this year to concentrate on his own stable. **Photos by Mark Hall.**

# EXPECTATIONS

Between his education at Wången and his time working with his uncle, Crebas and Svanstedt, Wallin had more than acquired the tools to strike out on his own. In July 2016, he bought 2-year-old trotter Yankee Doodle Andi at the Meadowlands Mixed Sale, but his career remained at a crossroads.

“He was stabled at (Marcus) Melander’s farm,” Wallin said of Yankee Doodle Andi. “So, I said that I’m going to give it four weeks and think what I should do. I helped Marcus training a couple horses and I had my own horse, and then somebody else called and asked if I wanted to have a horse.”

After also acquiring the horse Appomattox for Finnish owner Reima Kuisla and 32-time winner Rossini in 2017, Wallin’s career path became much clearer. His stable has since grown to 23 horses, mainly 2- and 3-year-old trotters. Of course, his claim to fame is 2021 Breeders Crown 2-Year-Old Colt Trot champion Rebuff, a trotter Wallin first spotted as a yearling in 2020.

“I bought him in Lexington after I looked at him a couple times,” Wallin said. “I sold 10 percent to a guy from the Netherlands I knew since I worked there, and I sold 75 percent to a Norwegian guy who lives in Switzerland. He owned two horses in my barn back there. There was 15 percent left over, and I loved him, so I was more than happy to keep the 15 percent — even if it was a lot of money for me. I was willing to take that risk.”

That 15 percent amounted to a \$30,000 outlay for Wallin — a substantial investment — but it turned out to be money well spent. The \$200,000 yearling has since earned over triple his purchase price, highlighted by his Breeders Crown title last fall and his 1:49.4 mile in the Stanley Dancer Memorial in July. And for the 29-year-old Wallin, nothing has compared to having been able to develop a champion Standardbred from his first steps onto the racetrack.

“There’s no better feeling than when you find a yearling you like, you inspect him, buy him, break him, train him down, and win a big stakes race with him,” he said. “To be on that journey — that’s amazing.”

Not only has Wallin established a stable in his new home of New Egypt, N.J., but also a family. He and his wife, Mikaela, are expecting



their first child in November.

“We knew each other in Sweden, but we got to know each other more here,” he said. “She worked for Åke before she went (to work) with Marcus (Melander, her brother), so that’s how we really met.”

Although the Wallins may share Swedish roots, America has truly become their home. “I have no plans at all to move from the U.S.,” Lucas said. “I love this country; I love the sport here. We’re living the dream, and I have very good people around me.”

Wallin believes that a genuine love of horses, desire to learn, and work ethic are universal qualities that can set a budding horseperson up for success.

“You need to show that you are interested, first of all, in the horses. You need to love the animal,” he said. “It’s so important to work hard and have the right people around you, too. I’ve done better and better each year, and it feels like we get better horses to work with. If you work hard, most of the time good things will happen to you.”



# STANDARD BRED SPOTLIGHT



Kentucky native Scott Egger has spent over 30 years in the harness racing industry, and currently serves as an associate judge at Harrah's Philadelphia. Youth Beats caught up with Scott to provide an inside look into the many hats worn by racing officials and his journey to the judges' stand.

Ask A

Pro



**YB: What led you to become a judge?**

SE: My junior year of high school, I got a summer job at Louisville Downs in the publicity office and working in the judges' stand as a photo finish runner. It was back in the old days when they would print the photo finishes and I would post one in the clubhouse and one in the grandstand. During the races, I put the running numbers (the numbers of the top four horses during and after each race) on the board and I'd pick up claims (declarations to purchase horses out of certain races). I thought, "This has got to be the greatest job in the world; these guys get paid to watch horse races!"

**YB: How long have you been a judge?**

SE: I got my first judging job in 1992 or 1993 at Raceway Park. I was also racing secretary and director of racing at Raceway Park for awhile — anything that needed to be done. From there, I went to Hoosier Park, then back to Toledo, and then made it to the East Coast.

**YB: What responsibilities do you have on race day, and also away from the races?**

SE: During the races, you're a referee. You watch the races and make sure everyone is giving their best effort; you look for fouls on the track, interference, and you also look out for the welfare of the horses. You assess penalties if people are driving in a way that interferes with other horses. The main job is to defend the best interest of the betting public and to give them a fair shake. We also oversee the draw (a random process to determine horses' starting positions for each race). You make sure the horses' health certificates and Coggins (a blood test that detects the presence of a serious equine disease) are turned in, and once the races are drawn, you make sure that horses are eligible and that people are licensed.

**YB: Horse racing was the first sport for officials to adopt video replay to aid decision-making. How does that play into your role adjudicating races?**

SE: We use video replay to look at everything. We always watch the stretch (the final straightaway to the finish) after every race, and if there's anything that any of the three judges sees at any point during the race, we can go back and look at that. It's not like football where a coach throws the challenge flag and the referees use the video; we use it every race to review at least the stretch.

**YB: What path or paths exist for somebody who might be interested in becoming an official?**

SE: I started off as a photo finish runner. And to work in a race office, you need to learn a bunch of different jobs. All the experience you can get comes in handy. I learned how to chart (compile an account of each race that indicates times, intermediate and finish positions of each horse, and other pertinent information), proof the program, put races together. You get experience however you can; any horsemanship experience is helpful, too. The USTA and the Racing Officials Accreditation Program put on a school every year or every other year, depending on needs and interest.



# A LEGACY LIVES ON

*Granddaughter of Hall of Famer Stanley Dancer  
shares her HHYF experience*

by Delaney Chaisson

Would you ever think of racing a harness horse?

I didn't, but my mom and I saw and heard about this harness racing program for kids. This experience was more than fun; it was exciting to carry on the legacy of my grandpa, Stanley Dancer, and to experience what he did. It helped me understand that he didn't just race — he bonded with all his horses.

I was nervous when I got to the camp, but the trainers and other kids were so nice. As we walked to the barn, we learned some essential barn rules and Miss Ellen explained why the rules are critical. After that, I settled into a group with three other kids and Miss Katie as our group leader. I learned so much that can help me in the future.

We tacked a horse up and then took its equipment off to give us an understanding of how to tack up a horse. We then proceeded to the Harness Racing Hall of Fame. The instructors and tour guide were both nice and knowledgeable. The tour guide educated us on the important parts of harness racing history, and lunch followed at the museum. We then went back to the barn, got into our groups, and tacked our horses back up — I think many of us had a better understanding of how since we did it earlier in the day. We took the horses onto the track, and we all took turns getting on the jog cart. I was second, so right after someone else in my group went, I hopped on.



*Delaney Chaisson, the 13-year-old granddaughter of legendary horseman Stanley Dancer, takes the lines for the first time with assistance from Shane Darish at an HHYF camp in Goshen, N.Y.*

The excitement I felt was through the roof. I felt like I could see my grandpa watching me and cheering me on, and that feeling helped my confidence while on the jog cart. I went a mile, and it was so much. When I hopped off the jog cart, the rest of my group members went.

After everybody was done, we took our horses back to the barn and untacked them, and we were ready to rinse them down. Our group leader held the lead rope while we gave the horse a bath. When we were done, we put the horses in their stalls and started cleaning tack. Before we left, we got to see how the blacksmith did the hooves — a cool experience that I'd never seen in live action.

When we left the barn to return to our parents, we each got a bag with some stuff in it. I left knowing I had a great time and felt very welcome. I couldn't have asked for a better camp experience.



# HHYF: In Pictures

**Looking back on an  
action-packed 2022**

The warmth of summer sunshine seems like a long time ago, but here are some highlights and photos to inspire readers and potential campers until the 2023 Harness Horse Youth Foundation schedule is announced!



*Ohio camps, at Van Wert and Marysville, were held before school let out in May, but the horses were conditioned and ready for their summer adventures.*



*For the first time, our Leadership Program was held in Anderson, Ind., near Harrah's Hoosier Park,*

*Crimson Lane Farm, DeLong Farm, New Wave Equine and Robert Taylor's training center. Such fun field trips while still caring for and jogging the HHYF Trottingbreds. DeLong Farm also hosted a one-day camp and visit from a nearby school.*





*It was fantastic to have HHYF trustee Corey Callahan jump right in as team leader in Harrington, Del.*



*It's a long haul to Maine, but so worth it. The excitement and hospitality were infectious, and it was good to be back in the Pine Tree State after a several-year hiatus. The first day of the two-day camp included the regular care, grooming, harnessing and jogging of the HHYF stable at the Windsor fairgrounds. The second day, after morning chores, it was off to an afternoon of races at the Union Fair.*

*The setting just doesn't get any better than Goshen Historic Track and the Hall of Fame, which hosted a one-day camp.*



*The setting just doesn't get any better than Goshen Historic Track and the Hall of Fame, which hosted a one-day camp.*



*Hot, hot, hot again in New Jersey, but the Gaitway Farm camp participants learned a bunch about harness racing. (Rumor has it that Miss Ellen had a little fun with the hose in an effort to cool the campers off while the jog carts got washed!)*

*A camp at Shenandoah Downs, Harrison County Ag Days, and a booth at the National FFA Convention in October concluded the 2022 HHYF travel season.*



*A camp at Shenandoah Downs, Harrison County Ag Days, and a booth at the National FFA Convention in October concluded the 2022 HHYF travel season.*



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