

JUNE 25 Youth Beats

The harness racing 'zine for teens



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SCAN ME

Youth Beats



Introducing young people to the Standardbred breed is extremely rewarding for Suzanne D'Ambrose



JAMES WITHERITE
Youth Beats editor

TREVOR EARLEY PHOTO

Letter from the Editor

When I first started working in the harness racing industry as a broadcaster and writer, I admittedly had zero hands-on horse experience. I knew there was a lot for me to learn about horsemanship, but I couldn't fathom the depth or breadth of everything that goes on to get a horse ready to compete week in and week out until I experienced it firsthand.

Early in my first season calling races at Harrah's Philadelphia, I connected with trainer Mike Posner, who raced a few horses there in addition to Freehold Raceway. He invited me to his farm on mornings that we didn't race to learn the ins and outs of horsemanship, and, with a thirst for horsemanship knowledge so I could better do my actual job (and better know what I'm looking at and talking about), I took him up on his gracious offer. Mike and his crew taught me how to clean stalls, harness and bathe a horse, and I eventually went my first training mile over his half-mile farm track.

Among the horses who taught me the basics of what goes on behind the scenes was a trotter named Independent Act, and he was an excellent teacher. Calm, patient, responsive, liked his work, friendly. And in the time since he gave me some of my first miles in a jog cart, he has introduced numerous others to the Standardbred breed with the help of Suzanne D'Ambrose, who adopted him after his racing career concluded and works with both the Harness Horse Youth Foundation and the Monmouth County (N.J.) 4-H to connect young people with horses. I caught up with Suzanne recently, and her story begins on page 10.

As always, thank you for reading, and I hope you enjoy this edition of *Youth Beats*!

Cheers, James

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Suzanne D'Ambrose shares her love of Standardbreds with the next generation

BY JAMES WITHERITE

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CHASING A DREAM

*Irvin Crews is making his mark
in the sport he loves*

BY JESSICA HALLETT

A native of Halifax, N.S., 21-year-old Irvin Crews has spent his life enjoying harness racing. At the age of 4, he moved to Saint John, N.B., and for as long as Crews can remember, he attended harness races.

"From a young age, my dad would take me to visit his friend Heath Campbell racing in Bangor, Maine, which started my interest in the sport of harness racing," Crews said. "My mom even made me an outfit that resembled Heath's suit that I would wear to the races when we came to visit. I spent a majority of my life playing hockey in Canada but always enjoyed my trips to visit and watch the races."

Fast forward to age 17, and Crews aimed his direction towards a focus in racing.

"I started to really invest more time into working with the horses, spending most summer days jogging horses and helping around the barn," he said.





Last year, at the age of 20, the young horseman found his way into a race bike for his start at driving in qualifiers at Bangor before appearing in his first lifetime race. In July, Crews started on the Maine fair circuit and made 16 trips behind the gate from July to December.

It was in October that Crews crossed the finish line in victory for the first time with Rocks Fantasy, a horse he owns and trains himself, at the Great Fryeburg Fair.

"My first ever driving and training win was at the Fryeburg Fair in Maine, which is the largest fair in the state," Crews said. "It was with my own horse, Rocks Fantasy. To win your first race with one of your own that you have poured your heart into is unexplainable. When I pulled up after the race, I couldn't even see where I was going due to the tears of joy, happiness and relief to have the first driving win!"

Now, a year older and with his first recorded win under his belt, Crews has moved to Saratoga Springs, N.Y., to break out on the scene at the historic harness track. In addition to catch driving, he has three horses under his care.

"My first pari-mutuel driving win was a little more of an uphill battle as I had come out to Saratoga to face the New York circuit. I had been getting close to crossing the finish line first but never could quite get there."

But, on March 25, Crews crossed that bridge and won a fillies and mares claiming pace with Zack Gray's Premier Delainey, crossing another milestone off the bucket list.

"Once that moment came, it was yet another full circle moment!" he said. "I had won with Premier Delainey, trained by my brother-in-law Zackary Gray and cared for by my wife, Dawn Crews. To have the first pari-mutuel win come in the same family-oriented fashion, I wouldn't trade it for the world."

And now Crews' resume has lengthened with additional driving assignments and catch drives at the upstate New York track, including traveling to neighboring tracks Monticello Raceway and Vernon Downs. He can be spotted with orange and black colors with a pair of stars donning the front and back.

"[My colors] pay homage to the family that took me under their wing and [the family] I truly idolized, the Campbells. Watching brothers Heath and Drew Campbell compete against each other, their respect for the horses and the industry, and their sometimes-harsh criticism has pushed me to be the driver I have become and hope to grow to be."



All photos courtesy of Jessica Hallett

And while his first wins hold a special place in his heart, Crews agrees that winning isn't everything.

"Every human being that has ever driven a racehorse can tell you their favorite thing about driving is winning! That is true, but there is another factor many may not see. It's when you're driving the long shot of the race or for one of the smaller stables, and you drive their horse the best you can, give it all you can as a driver, and the horse gets a good check. You come back to the paddock ... the smiles on those trainer's faces and grooms almost in tears because their horse did good, that has to warm your soul."

Having the opportunity to grow up close to the business and learn from numerous experienced horsepeople, Crews has picked up a lot of knowledge and advice from them in addition to from those around him. He focuses on doing the job he loves and pushes out all of the extra noise.

"There are a couple pieces of advice or mottos that I have carried with me that I bring into everyday life here at the racetrack. One piece comes from a country song by Cody Johnson; the lyrics are, 'If

you've got a dream, chase it, because a dream won't chase you back.' And to me, you have to wake up every day wanting this life, wanting to do this, excited for the opportunities you get, and doing the most you can with what you have because for me this is the dream. To have a few horses of my own and sit behind horses every day for a living is the dream. Secondly, my wife always says to me before every race day to 'run your race.' I take that as to clear my head, to take out all the noise, listen to your horse and do the best you can do."

Crews just enjoys the day-to-day grind at Saratoga, in the barn and on the track.

"On a race day, it's quite simple. I wake up and go to the barn to get my horses tended to. You'll find me most of the mornings on the backtrack of Saratoga jogging horses. Then I'll either head up to the main track at Saratoga to drive or take a ride over to Vernon Downs, where I have been getting some opportunity as well. Once at the races, I like to take a few minutes to myself and to play out what I intend for each race, also checking in with the trainers I will be driving for that day. I feel as though I have come a long way from where I started.

"My confidence and abilities have improved, but I still have so much more to learn and room to grow; however, to wake up every day doing what I love, in such a beautiful place with great people by my side, I feel like I am truly chasing after everything I have dreamed of," Crews concluded.



2025 HHYF Events Schedule

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Summer Programs

April 12
Lebanon OH

June 17
Anderson IN

June 19
Greenville OH

June 21-25
Leadership, Anderson IN

July 30-31
Goshen NY

August 4-5
Manalapan NJ

August 8-9
Woodstock VA



Field trips / School visits

April 25
Oxford IN

May 11
Chester PA

June 27
Anderson IN

September TBA
Corydon IN

Public Events

March 27-29
IN Equine Roundup IN

April 10 - 13
Equine Affair OH

July 11-13
Breyerfest KY

July 26
American Dream NJ

August 2
Hambletonian NJ

October 29 -
November 1
National FFA Convention IN



Scan here to
register and for
more information

Ages 11 and up; preregistration
required for summer programs



Twin B **JOE FRESH**



USTA photographer Mark Hall captures 2024 Horse of the Year TWIN B



JOE FRESH as she wins the 2024 Breeders Crown at the Meadowlands

CELEBRATING

Pacer's century



For the third consecutive year, the Harness Horse Youth Foundation on April 27 made the trip to Oxford, Ind., the birthplace of the turn-of-the-century Standardbred sensation Dan Patch, to assist in the celebration and related festivities of the pacing hero's birthday.

Benton Central Junior-Senior High School's seventh- and eighth-grade classes, 240 students in total, attended a Standardbred convocation of sorts. Both grades in their entirety watched a brief video in the school's auditorium about Dan Patch with introductory comments provided by harness racing historian and commentator Bob Heyden. The audience then dispersed into four prearranged groups of approximately 60 young people each, who rotated through four stations that were relevant to harness racing.

The stations, their speakers and topics were:

Dan Patch's Local Importance

Pam Messner, from the family of Dan Messner, Dan Patch's breeder and original owner; and Gwen Erwood, former Oxford resident and a huge Dan Patch fan, discussed the pacer's importance in the community (Dan Patch memories and memorabilia collection on loan from Bob Glaspie).

Dan Patch's National Significance

- Anthropologist Gerry Waite spoke on the rise of Dan Patch's popularity nationwide thanks to the marketing efforts of his last owner, Marion Savage.

Harness Racing 101

HHYF executive director Ellen Taylor and volunteer Sue Utterback discussed the difference between trotting and pacing and led participants through an interactive matching game comparing horse and human items.

Meet & Greet C D's Miss M

With the help of HHYF volunteer Vicky Rouch, each student was given the opportunity to pet "Missy," the HHYF stable member, and learn about HHYF summer programs. Plans are already underway for the 2026 celebration and school activities.

— from the Harness Horse Youth Foundation



DAN P
CHAMPION HARNESS H
RECOR
DRIVEN BY M

DAN PATCH

- long legacy lives on in the Hoosier State



Harness Horse Youth Foundation Summer Event Schedule

- June 8 - Fair Winds Farm - Cream Ridge, N.J.
- * June 17 - DeLong Stable - Anderson, Ind.
- * June 19 - Great Darke County Fair - Greenville, Ohio
- * June 21-25 - HHYF Leadership Camp - Anderson, Ind.
- June 27 - Westfield Field Trip - Westfield, Ind.
- July 11-13 - Breyerfest @ Kentucky Horse Park - Lexington, Ky.
- * July 30-31 - Goshen Historic Track - Goshen, N.Y.
- Aug. 2 - 100th Hambletonian - East Rutherford, N.J.
- * Aug. 4-5 - Gaitway Farm - Manalapan, N.J.
- * Aug. 8-9 - Shenandoah Downs - Woodstock, Va.
- September (dates TBA) - Harrison County Ag Days - Corydon, Ind.
- Oct. 29-Nov. 1 - National FFA Convention - Indianapolis, Ind.

* denotes pre-registration required

To register, visit hhyf.org or scan the QR code.



DAN PATCH
HORSE OF THE WORLD
1859-1914
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA

Paying It Forward

Suzanne D'Ambrose shares her love of Standardbreds with the next generation

BY JAMES WITHERITE

By her own admission, Suzanne D'Ambrose was "practically born in a saddle," so it comes as no surprise that horses are a major part of her life, particularly her off-the-track Standardbred, Independent Act. The combination of a deep appreciation of the animal and a career in education has led D'Ambrose to become a catalyst for numerous young people in New Jersey to develop that same love of horses and for some to pursue careers in the Standardbred industry.

"I taught law enforcement for 26 years to juniors and seniors in high school, and they would go on to be police officers, maybe some attorneys," explained D'Ambrose, who earned



a master's degree at Seton Hall University and also served as a summer police officer on the Jersey Shore for 12 years. It was during that time — in the early 2000s, to be exact — that she was first introduced to the Standardbred breed while coming back from a hiatus from riding.

"My first one that I owned was a Jersey-bred named Chai Mister," D'Ambrose recalled. "I was taking some lessons at a farm, to get back into (riding). I saw him there and I said, 'Who's that one?' 'He's a Standardbred; the girl that had him just left him, but we're not going to get rid of him.'

"So, I took my lessons on him. And then one thing led to another, and for a dollar to make



it equal, I took him as mine. He was maybe 18 or 19 when I got him. He taught me everything.”

The unraced son of Nevele Prize-Rayjoyce was D’Ambrose’s companion for trail rides until his passing in 2009, at the age of 26. The previous November, D’Ambrose adopted Independent Act, a now 24-year-old son of Conway Hall-Solo Act who won eight races and earned \$61,110 on the racetrack while competing mostly under the care of trainer Mike Posner. In the trotter’s post-racing career, “Indy,” as he is affectionately known, has joined D’Ambrose at numerous Standardbred Pleasure Horse Organization of New Jersey events as well as in the outreach work D’Ambrose does with teens involved with Monmouth County (N.J.) 4-H.

“I’m more into the education where the other girls are more into the showing part of it,” explained D’Ambrose, who serves as a 4-H advisor in addition to her current role as the Standardbred pleasure horse delegate for the New Jersey Equine Advisory Board. “We’re doing more and more things. I set up events, field trips — everything is for the Standardbred.”

“A lot of times, they wanted to learn braiding. So, they would come to the farm I board at, and they would learn braiding on him,” she



continued. “I do equine massage, too, and we used Indy as our model for the kids who wanted to learn equine massage.”

From 2021 to 2024, D’Ambrose organized tours of the Freehold Raceway backstretch for 4-H club members to get an up-close perspective of racing Standardbreds, as well as visits to central New Jersey breeding operations Fair Winds Farm and Southwind Farms to meet mares and foals and to learn about the breeding element of the industry. She has also conducted art classes in which students learn the physical characteristics of Standardbreds in preparation to draw and paint them.



“They had a blast,” D’Ambrose said. “We do a lot of stuff, and they’re really into it.”

... so much so that some of the young people D’Ambrose has worked with have since gone on to become more involved with Standardbreds.

“Sarah Irianne came to our (HHYF) camps, and she’s a 4-H kid,” D’Ambrose said. “And she was warming up a horse at the Meadowlands for the first time last month. And she loves it, and she wants to continue. She’s done really good with the competitions, for that horsemanship.

“Jacqueline Tanzi is working at Fair Winds Farm; she’s into the foaling, the mares and all that. She’s doing online college, so she’s able to stay with Mark Mullen (Fair Winds owner), and Heather Zitone (farm manager) was teaching her foal watch and everything.

“And Gianna (Jacqueline’s sister), I think, wants to get into being a vet tech. She used to ride Indy all the time! All the time, I’d go, ‘Where’s my horse?’ and they’d go, ‘Gianna’s got him; he’s out on the trails!’ She came from Quarter Horses and paint horses, and she’s into Standardbreds now, too. They were both New Jersey Junior Equestrian of the Year.



“And then Hayden Swartz — I don’t know what she’s going to do with it; she’s still young. But here she is at the National Standardbred Show, both driving and riding, and she’s doing really well.”

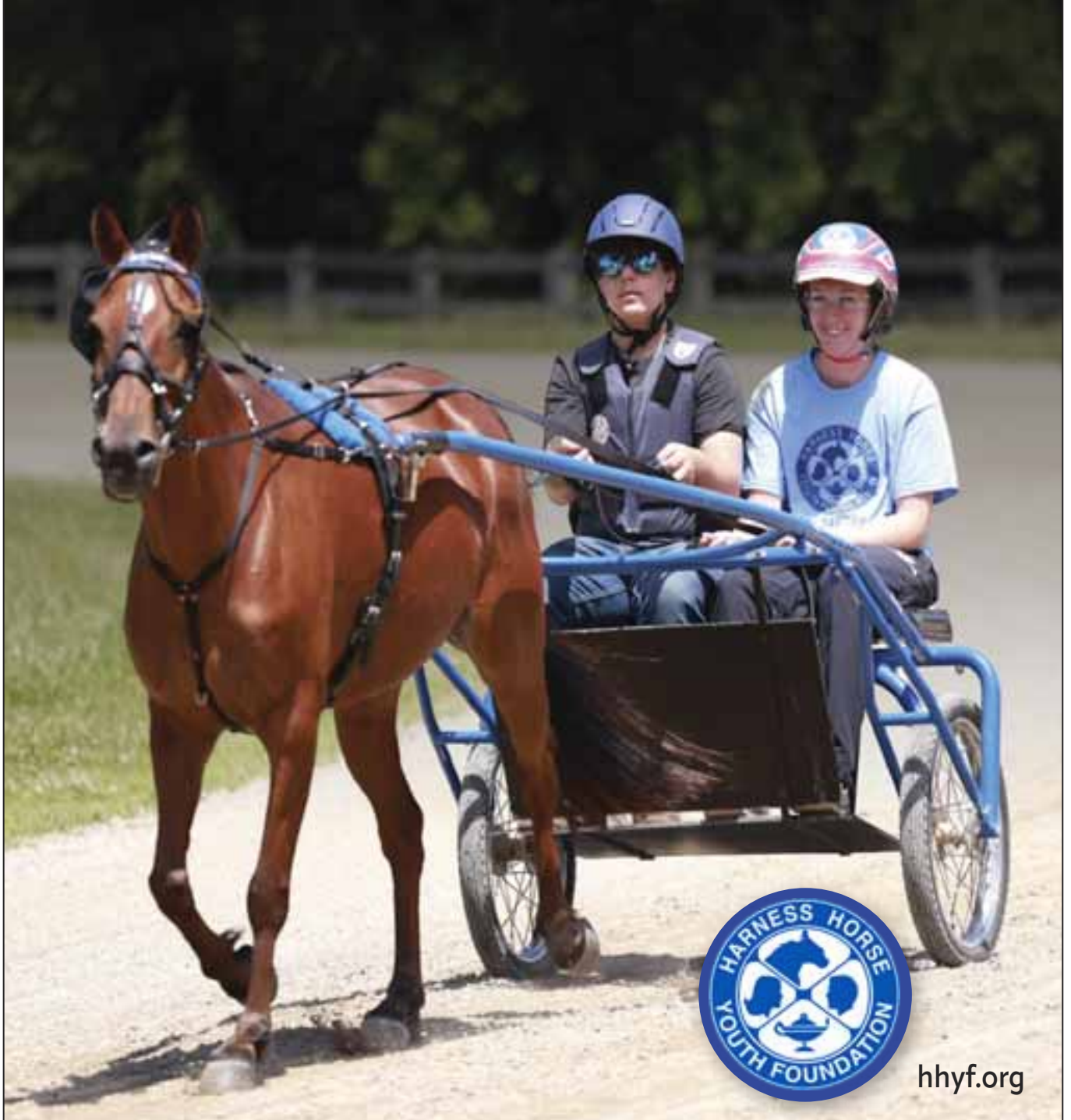
Through her vocation as an educator and avocation as a horsewoman, Suzanne D’Ambrose has positively impacted countless lives.

“Seeing the smiles on the faces of the youngsters as they are introduced to the Standardbred breed is extremely rewarding,” said D’Ambrose. “Standardbreds are loving, good-looking, and easy to work with!”



STRONGER TOGETHER, UNSTOPPABLE AS A TEAM.

HARNESS HORSE YOUTH FOUNDATION



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