

Paying it forward all week long

Charities benefit from 4th of July Shows

By Sadie Fowler

Pride is an obvious word choice when it comes to describing how organizers feel about putting on horse shows that benefit the communities or agencies to which they serve. Add the time of year to this week's slate of classes and pride becomes paired with patriotism, tradition, and celebration. The cluster of shows that take place between June 28 through Independence Day have become synonymous with two things: Contenders and charities.

The Fourth of July Shows piggyback off one another starting Wednesday with a total of four shows showcasing some of the breed's best horses, with many trainers and exhibitors showing at all four events throughout the week. The competition is what drives entries, but more importantly, the number of entries and the success of the shows drive several charitable organizations. Hundreds of thousands of dollars raised by these shows over decades have greatly impacted local charities.

"It all started with two shows and people were able to come because they were off for the Fourth of July and could travel easily," said Linda Scrivner, a long-time sales representative with the Walking

Horse Report. "Two eventually became three shows because people came and enjoyed the shows and as the crowds became bigger even more people came to ride. People could come easily because it was one less day they'd have to take off from work. Many also felt this was a great way to celebrate the holiday."

Starting with the Christmas in July show June 28 and moving on to the Money Tree Classic, Woodbury Lions Club and culminating with the Owingsville show on July 4, many exhibitors even tout patriotic apparel by riding in red, white and blue.

The tradition began with members of the Woodbury Lions Club, the oldest of the 4th of July shows, organizing a horse show 79 years ago to help fulfill the club's mission of preserving eye sight. Bruce Steelman has served in his current role as horse show chair since 1998, almost as long as he's been a member of the club. He said he's just as excited about this year's show, which features 39 classes that will be judged by Aaron Self, as he was nearly 20 years ago.

"For years we were the largest one night show in the nation," he said. "We depend on this show but we also strive to treat all our out-of-town guests with the utmost gratitude. We want to treat them like royalty and for them to have the very best time they can while they're in Woodbury."

A ballpark estimate of \$10,000 raised from the show last year alone went into efforts to support the Lion's Club mission of eye sight preservation, with specific contributions being made to the Tennessee School of the Blind.

Other entities supported include the Cannon County Library, senior center and local 4-H and extension clubs.

"Without the horse show we could not do a fraction of this," he said. "We rely heavily on it and it is by far our largest activity of the year."

Steelman said the show has raised countless funds for the Lion's Club service projects, but it's also a pillar event that gives Woodbury part of its identity.

"It puts us the spotlight," he said. "It's our thing, and everyone from the industry to local government to local businesses give us great support."

While shows supported by well-known organizations such as the Lion's Clubs have excelled for years due in part to a strong core base of members to prepare for the show, there's another emerging group of show organizers that are also impacting local communities and charities. Julie Lambert, also a representative at the Walking Horse Report, has a heart for giving and saw a need several years in her Bedford County community as well as the horse industry.

Lambert was no stranger to horse show management when she decided to start up the Christmas in July show. For years, she managed the popular Tony Rice Show during this July 4th week of shows. When the center, which helps men combat the addiction of drugs and alcohol, decided they no longer wanted to host a show for their annual fundraiser, Lambert formed a new group, Walking for Angels.

"The Tony Rice show helped people and that's why I became involved," she said. "I'm all about helping people. When it went away I didn't



Sarah Smith, right, is president of the Walking Horse Ladies' Auxiliary, which hosts the Money Tree Classic June 30. This show benefits therapeutic riding programs.

The Woodbury Lions Club has put on its charity show for 79 years to serve its mission of sight preservation. The show is also part of the Woodbury community's identity.





Christmas in July is another show held during the streak of holiday shows this week. This one benefits local children in the Bedford County community during Christmas.

want to lose those dates so we decided to start the Christmas in July."

She and her informal group of volunteers put on the two-day event that typically raises \$15,000 for local children in need during the holiday season. Its sister horse show, held in November (Walking for Angels) nearly matches that amount. All proceeds go toward buying essential items like shoes, clothing and toys for about 350 children the group hears about from the school system, the Boys & Girls Club of Bedford County, Early Head Start, the Child Development Center, the Center for Family Development and private citizens.

"We've never turned anyone down," she said, explaining she works directly with local counselors to determine specific needs for each child. "I couldn't believe it when I met with the guidance counselor at a local school for the first time. I was surprised about the number of kids in foster care here or living with grandparents. I was surprised how many needs there are, and I know we make a big difference."

Lambert is excited about something a little different the group is doing this year. Horse trainers will actually be taking a selection of the recipient children shopping, adding an element of fun to the project.

Lambert's drive to help people is as evident as her love for the horse, which is the other reason she likes putting on horse shows. She said as membership among larger organizations that have put on many successful shows in the past declines, there is a need for volunteers to put on horse shows.

"We are losing some shows because of this reason," she said. "Putting on a horse show is tough. We need volunteers to do this in order to keep our horse shows going."

Christmas in July kicks off at 5 p.m. June 28 and 29 and serves as the only triple point show of the week, with Chris Bobo, Derek Bonner and Johnny Puckett marking the cards of this year's event.

"It's one of the best shows we have and is greatly supported by the trainers, owners and sponsors," she said. "I believe the support is there in part because they know the money impacts and helps more people directly than any other show."

Another local woman with the heart for both helping others and the horse, Sarah Smith spearheads the second show of the week, the Money Tree Classic. Smith is the president of the Walking Horse Trainers' Auxiliary, which is a membership-based group with the prime goal of supporting trainers and the community, educating and informing the public about the horse, and conducting special projects that benefit the Walking Horse Trainers' Association.

"We try to do whatever we can to help people," she said. Whether it's supporting a trainer in need during a trying time or using the tens of thousands of dollars generated over the years at their horse show to help children in some way, they aim to help others as well.

Money Tree generally benefits therapeutic riding programs that fall under the Walking Horses Overcoming Obstacles (WHOO) group. Several programs from WHOO received grants from the auxiliary this year including Great Strides of Shelbyville, Horse Play from Tullahoma, Maury Magic Riders in Columbia, Saddle Up! (Franklin), Safety Net Riding Academy from Alabama, and Southern Stars in Lebanon. Smith estimated approximately \$1000 to \$1500 goes to each of about six receiving WHOO charities each year.

Great Strides alone has benefited from the auxiliary for 22 years, with several of the others also in the 20-year range. Local students also benefit from them as they offer three \$2500 scholarships each

year and they also support Vanderbilt Children's Hospital and St. Jude's.

Smith said they go above and beyond to make their show special, but her personal favorite part of the show is the floral horse shoe each winner receives.

"You know, some of us in the auxiliary aim to have the best horse show of the year," she said. "We do the floral horse shoe, have the largest purse, we've been named 'Best One Night Show of the Year' and those types of things, but when it's all said and done we raise a lot of money to give to local charities."

Trainers and exhibitors support this show in part because of the tradition and competition, but also because of the extra-special hospitality offered by the auxiliary members like Smith and her tenacious team.

"Many of us are wives of trainers or connected to the industry, and so we really, really want to make everyone happy," she said. "The people showing are often our family members, or a friend, or a friend of a family member. What makes us different is we are not some other (group) down the street. We are a part of the industry and we're one big family. For example, I'm not going to shut a gate on someone (late for a class) because that's my friend. I don't care if our show goes an extra 30 minutes because of it."

Top notch contenders show up for this show, too, with many horses showing that often go on to win at the Celebration.

"There's too many to count," she said. "I think one year we tried and we had like 20 horses that had gone on to win at the Celebration."

Money Tree kicks off with opening ceremonies at 5:30 p.m. Friday, June 30 at the Bedford County Agricultural Center. Travis Craft of Croston, Kentucky will mark the cards and fellow auxiliary member Jennifer Barr will be on duty as photographer.

Woodbury wraps up the week Saturday, July 1 with the holiday horse show streak continuing the following week with Owingsville, which will be featured in the next edition of Walking Horse Report.

IF YOU GO

Christmas in July is held June 28 and 29 at the Bedford County Agricultural Center at 5 p.m. Money Tree, also held at the Ag Center, kicks off at 5:30 p.m. on June 30. The Woodbury Lions Club show celebrates its 79th year July 1, and Owingsville wraps up the week of July 4th shows July 1-3.