

May 15, 2010

An open letter from Fern Feldman, Region 8 Director

I returned from our spring USDF Executive Board meeting on Sunday night, April 18, 2010. We arrive in Lexington, KY sometime on the Friday, and then meet all day Saturday and ½ day on Sunday. It really does take me a couple of weeks to decompress, but I feel the same way after the annual convention. Let me share with you some of the topics discussed:

Part of our responsibility as members of the Executive Board is to review the performance of our Executive Director. Prior to the meeting, we have all spent some time with written criteria, responding confidentially to George. He amasses the information and, keeping it all anonymous, averages out the responses and quotes several where relevant. The Management Committee (the officers and one elected regional director) discuss this all first and then makes a recommendation to the rest of us. Personally, I am a staunch supporter of our Executive Director, Stephan Hiensch. Our job is to guide him and to help him lead USDF as best as he can and to the best of our expectations. I believe he has done that, and continues to do so. I am happy to say that the Executive Board is of the same mind.

In his President's message, George alluded to the first ever conference call with all the Council and Committee Chairs and the Executive Board. Especially at this time of transitioning to a different structure, he felt that it was a beneficial thing to do and anticipated that it could prove effective in the future. He also said that GMO's could go online to submit their information directly.

In Stephan's Executive Director's report, he said that membership has now started to hold steady, and that he anticipates a slow recovery rather than a further degradation of members. There has been a small decline in GM membership and a small increase in PM membership, but essentially our forecasts seem fairly accurate. However, he did say that event participation is down and businesses are simply doing less advertising. This impacts the cost of our publications (negatively), so that is taxing our budget. Another remarkable milestone: there has been no staff turnover in the last 12 months. With the WEG only a few months away, USDF is going to be primarily concerned with membership hospitality, and traffic will probably be related to merchandise purchase and visits to the Hall of Fame.

The Council and Committee restructuring of USDF is an ongoing process. At the present time, there are 3 Councils: the Administrative Council, the Technical Council, and the Activities Council. The Committees under the Administrative Council are Membership, GMO, Historical Recognition, Bylaws, and Nominating. The Committees under the Technical Council are Judges, "L" Program, Freestyle, Competition Management, TD, and Instructor/Trainer. The Committees under the Activities Council are Adult Programs, youth Programs, FEI Jr/YR, Regional Championships, Sport Horse, and Awards. There are also two Independent Committees: Audit and Steering. Without making everyone crazy, there are still some committees (such as the Nominating Committee) that will have a member from each region. Other committees that do not require regional representation would ideally have geographical representation (that is, not every member from the northeast.) I again must stress that our goal is to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

Another topic of concern for USDF is the website. I do receive the negative comments about it from many of you, and I can tell you that USDF is going to work on it. That sounds rather lame, and, without, defending what we have, everyone does know that improving any website takes time, expertise and money. USDF does have a lot of work to do in this area, and I hope I can let you know about some progress as it occurs.

On a totally separate note: I attended a Level 1 Recognized Dressage Show a week or so ago and had a great time. The atmosphere was, I think, exactly as intended: most of the people trailered in (it was one day), so the secretary tried hard to make times convenient and close together for any individual doing more than one test or any group coming in together. This particular show (mainly because it really was a “trial balloon” for this farm) was intro-4<sup>th</sup> seemed to cater to professionals trying out a young horse; adults (often amateurs) trying a first recognized show; and most importantly—people trying not to spend a fortune attending a show. The cost was significantly less because there were no stabling fees. With only one warm-up ring and one official ring, the warm-up never became over-crowded. The set-up was intimate—thus, volunteer help could be kept at a minimum. And, the overall atmosphere was helpful and relaxing—trying to make the experience for horse and rider a pleasant one. As per the regulations, there was no food available for purchase, but that was hardly a problem as it had been in the prizelist, one often was not there all day long, and, finally, I personally never leave home without supplying myself with all the nutrients that I might need for as long as 12 hours! I always attend to my stomach! Now, the weather happened to be ideal, so being outside was totally fine, and it was fun to see horses comfortably tied to trailers as the grooms and/or riders were themselves sitting in chairs and relaxing.

So, I do think that the Level 1 show is a great addition to the complement of possibilities, and I do hope that other farms and organizers might try to put them on. This particular one was managed by Vicki Hammers-O’Neil (Once Again Farm in Meriden, CT) and secretaried by Steve Reinhardt. Congratulations to them for doing this, and I hope that the endeavor proves moderately profitable to the organizers so that we, as the beneficiaries, will be able to enjoy more of these in the future.

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