

The Pony World's 'Best Kept Secret'

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AIRVILLE (York Co.) — "They're unique and probably one of the pony world's best-kept secrets. People don't know about the POA breed, but once they find out, they're hooked," said Nikki Rineholt.

Rineholt, along with husband Brad, "ride, show, train, and breed," Pony of the Americas (POA) animals. The couple now has 24 adults and 10 babies on their 62-acre "Nick of Time Farm," which includes a stallion and junior stallion.

"They're docile, very friendly, and trainable. That's the whole point of the breed, is that they can be trained by kids. Young children can handle and train to ride them," said Rineholt. The ponies can also be trained to drive.

"They're great for kids," said Rineholt, who attests to their "great personality and disposition," and pointing out that children even 10-years old can show the stallions.

The national organization is, in fact, expressly for people 18 years

old and under, although an adult program also exists. Forty POA clubs, which may sponsor scholarships or pony giveaways, are found nationally, according to Rineholt. Show classes are based around children and "shows are a good family environment," she said.

"It's a good place for 4-H kids to go, since it's the next level of showing before moving onto to horses," said Nikki.

Breed History

The breed traces its roots to a Mason City, Iowa, according to Website information. An attorney who purchased an Arab/Appaloosa mare accidentally bred by a Shetland pony saw potential in the foal, which eventually became the foundation sire for the breed.

Original standards set the pace for the breed's characteristics: the head was to be small and dished as the Arab; the body was to be muscled as the Quarter Horse; and the coloring had to be Appaloosa. The registry went from the original stallion in 1954 to 1996's registry of over 40,000.

The breed can be identified by three characteristics. The ponies have striped hooves and "sclera," or the white ring around the brown part of the eye, a trait of the Appaloosa breed. The ponies also have mottled skin around the eyes, genital areas, or nose.

Coat color patterns acceptable to registry include "leopards," or large spots; "blankets," or solid up front with a patch of color over the rump; "frosted," a solid color with a scattering of color; a "few spot," or basically white with color along with snowflake, or marbled roan.

The height requirement is 46-56 inches, and ponies range anywhere in that specification.

"We try to breed for all sizes. Ponies are meant for children, so you should have all sizes, just like you have all sizes of children," she said.

"My husband, who is 6'3", rides. They can carry basically anybody — they're not just for kids," said Rineholt, who adds that they have sold their ponies to older women who are looking for something "a little closer to the ground" to ride.

Versatility is also a hallmark of the breed. They can compete in halter, riding, jumping, and game classes in competition.

The Foals

Although foaling season has kept the Rineholts close to home, as soon as the last foal is on the ground, the show tour will begin. With halter classes available, even the foals will participate.

The foals can be born solid and within six months have a frost or roan out. Ponies must have color to enter the show ring, although solid ponies may serve as breeding stock.

The POA is economical and affordable, said Rineholt. Class entry prices are \$4 and include classes such as Western pleasure, reining, trail, leadline equitation, hunter, hack, costume, showmanship, barrel racing, goat tying. The over-300 shows per year consist of three separate age groups for youth.

Prices for the ponies start at \$1,000. "A good, quiet kids' pony will range from \$3,000-\$5,000," she said. Top show horses, how-



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ever, have reached from \$12,000 to a private sale of \$25,000.

Working with ponies, said Rineholt, teaches valuable life lessons. Since children can not only groom, clip, and show the animals but also finish their pony's training, "kids feel fulfilled when they do the work."

"You can turn your kids loose and you don't have to worry," she said, adding that the some ponies even prefer being handled by children.

Not Just A Phase

Originally from Harford County, Maryland, Rineholt "always just loved horses," proving that her passion was "not just a phase," as her parents first believed.

She began taking riding lessons from her first grade teacher and later worked in the barn to earn lessons. "I did anything I could to ride them. I worked to board or ride the horses," she said. Rineholt has been showing POAs since she was six years old and is sold on the quality of the breed.

Rineholt and her husband, Brad, a farrier for 21 years, met at an Appaloosa operation where she was a trainer. They were married four years later, last October, in the arena of their new farm. The new run-in shed was built with wedding money. Their current property has their finger-

prints as they recently put in the fencing, arena, pasture water system, and barn that Nikki designed.

She now allows her own riding students to help clean the barn in exchange for riding lessons, as she once did. Other plans include offering services such as clinics and summer camps.

Nikki, who also showed horses on the Appaloosa circuit, has logged thousands of miles traveling from show ring to show ring. The breed added Register of Merit Awards for halter, performance and gaming. A POA earning all three receives the highest of all awards, Supreme Champion.

In pursuit of earning the points necessary to receive the supreme champion title, she traveled from show to show before "Campbell's Dreamcatcher" earned the title. The experience was a good one, however, as she especially enjoys the "big family" of POA breeders and show ring participants.

Clubs offer a variety of events from "play day" shows and clinics to cookouts, trail rides and awards banquets. For more information check out the Website at www.poac.org or write to the Pony of the Americas Club, Inc.; 5240 Elmwood Avenue; Indianapolis, IN 46203. Phone (317) 788-0107, e-mail poac@iquest.net.



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Free Outdoor Concert And Hoedown At Leesport Market

LEESPORT (Berks Co.) — In celebration of its 54th anniversary, the Leesport Farmers Market will host a free outdoor concert of live music, hoedown dancing, and entertainment, Wednesday, July 11 from 6:30 to 9:30 p.m. Concert appearances include The Mountain Folk Band, famous for its bluegrass, folk, and

mountain music.

The Leesport Farmers Market is in Leesport, between Reading and Hamburg on Route 61. It is open every Wednesday, year-round, from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. For more information, phone (610) 926-1307, or see the market's Website at www.leesportmarket.com.

