

Horse Power

Equine Council promotes horses in Oldham County

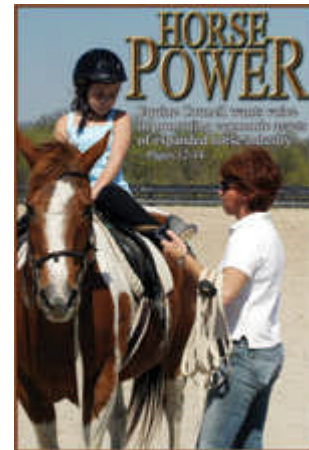
Group seeks more economic growth for the industry

By Helen E. McKinney
Contributing Writer

(September 2007) – For the past 23 years, Mary Lowry has lived in Oldham County and couldn't imagine living anywhere else. After all, this is where her home and business are at Alta Vista Farms, located on Hwy. 42 in Skylight, Ky.

She conducts lesson programs, clinics and camps there. Over time, her focus has shifted from teaching and competing to the administrative side of the horse industry, and she is now on a mission to create a greater awareness of the horse community in the county.

Like many in the equine industry, Lowry believes her peers are not aware of the numerous equine services offered by individuals in the county. In a two-fold effort to determine the economic impact of the horse industry while establishing a networking system for those who make a living in the industry, Lowry has become a major force behind the establishment of the Oldham County Equine Council.



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Begun in January, the 18-member council and Lowry believe the equine community is a big part of the future of Oldham County. She was recruited by Oldham Ahead, an organization that deals with land use issues, to assemble a group of horse industry leaders to build a countywide forum to promote the county's assets in this industry.

“A council is something we have talked about for some time,” said Oldham Ahead Executive Director Doug Wampler. “One of the main goals is to make it an organization that can talk as one voice for the equine community in the county,” he said. Those employed in the industry are so involved in their own day-to-day activities that

they may not be aware of what others are doing or what services are offered, Wampler said. He believes the evolution of the council will be an educational process. Benefits from the council have already begun to surface in the form of a directory, said Traci Missun, Agricultural and Natural Resources Extension Agent for Oldham County. The comprehensive directory is the result of an equine forum held at the John Black Community Center last year in November.

The directory lists equine businesses and services and is “a good resource for people just moving here,” said Missun.

Included is information such as where to purchase hay or who is the local farrier. A final push is under way now to complete this free directory, which will be available in print and online at the council’s website, www.oldhamequinecouncil.org.



Photo by Helen McKinney

Many in the county may not be aware of what becomes of abandoned horses or that there are several therapeutic riding programs, such as Exceptional Equitation in La Grange. Some equine council board members were not even aware of services and programs offered in Oldham County that could benefit them.

Missun, like Wampler, thinks the council is something the county has needed for a long time. “It allows people with different interests to get together to learn more and network.” As an extension agent, it will provide Missun with an “opportunity to serve more of the county.”

Mary Lowry, executive director of the Oldham County Equine Council, poses with a horse at Flying Cross Farms, one of the farms she manages near Alta Vista Farm on Hwy. 42 in Oldham County.

As chairperson of the council, Lowry has recruited a board that represents a diverse cross-section of Oldham County equine interests. A sampling of these interests include thoroughbreds, saddlebreds, morgans, fox hunters, trail riders, polo players and farms that offer boarding and lessons.

One area the council hopes to increase is that of trail riding. Most riders have to go out of the state to find a trail system, said Wampler.

Board member Brett Donner, also founder and president of the Kentucky Trail Riders Association, is interested in a 257-acre tract of land owned by the Kentucky State Reformatory in La Grange. Donner has written a proposal to State Sen. Ernie Harris requesting “the Kentucky Trail Riders Association would totally fund and design a safe,

low maintenance, low erosion trail system on that tract of land, open to the public,” he said.

Motorized vehicles would not be permitted – only hikers, bicyclists and equestrians. “All we asked for in return is an easement for public access and no motorized vehicle access.” The Kentucky Trail Riders Association was begun last year with 106 charter members. To expand this idea across the county, Lowry would like for the riding trails on her 45-acre farm to join with trails on neighboring farms. Originally from Maryland, her great-grandfather owned a farm called Alta Vista. “I’m a strong proponent of green space,” said Lowry, who manages several farms.

Donner said what Oldham County and Kentucky in general lacks is “recognition and support for the expansion of all recreational equestrian facilities.” Oldham Countians leave the state to ride “not because we don’t want to ride at home, but because other states are equestrian friendly.”

Another point the Equine Council seeks to address is in aiding the Oldham County Fair

Association in developing a master plan for an Equestrian Center to be constructed on 75 acres transferred to Oldham County Fiscal Court by the state Department of Corrections. The 257-acre tract Donner is interested in is landlocked behind the land on Dawkins Road that has been proposed for a new fairgrounds.

Amenities Lowry would like to see included in the Equestrian Center are outdoor and indoor arenas, ample parking (especially for horse trailers), camping areas, restrooms, stalls and a number of rings. She said that after the 2010 World Games at the Kentucky Horse Park, “It will be more difficult to book space there. There will be a huge demand for quality facilities after that.”

A well-built Equestrian Center in Oldham County could offer much for the equestrian industry, while increasing tourism for the county. “The trickle down effect is huge,” Lowry said.

She pointed out that those who might use the facility could boarder horses in Oldham



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**– Oldham Ahead
Executive Director
Doug Wampler**

County and be encouraged to eat, shop and stay in local hotels to attend an event at the Equestrian Center.

Such a facility would benefit future generations as well. Local 4-H Clubs often meet in stables, homes and at the Extension Office. “An Equestrian Center and trail options would certainly provide many new opportunities for 4-H members that have not been available in Oldham County for some time,” said Kelly Woods, Oldham County 4-H Agent.

There are five 4-H Horse Clubs in the county led by volunteers who are parents or other adults who love children and horses. “We are very fortunate to have such dedicated and caring volunteers to work with our 4-H members,” said Woods.

The equine industry is hugely important in Oldham County, said Lowry. “It is an importance that is often overlooked.”

The most up to date agricultural census was taken in 2002. Wampler said not enough data was available to currently compute accurate equine numbers.

An economic impact equine survey of the horse industry was initiated in February to determine the quantity of horses in the county. Ken Heppermann was asked by the council to conduct the survey and hopes to have some rough draft figures by the beginning of September.

Hepperman, who owns Equine Business Resources, LLC in Goshen, also owns thoroughbreds and is familiar with the equine industry. He said the purpose of the survey is to “identify the number of horses in Oldham County and show that the horse industry provides much support to the economic development of the county and Kentucky.” Equine Business Resources, LLC is a full-service consulting company. Hepperman has conducted feasibility studies, market surveys, business plans and thoroughbred racing syndicates.



Photo provided

Stephanie Roethke rides her horse, Gray B., at York Stables in Oldham County.

The survey figures can be presented to the legislature in the future and used for tourist brochures, said Hepperman. Trying to identify all horse owners in Oldham County is no small job. He came up with a list of

450 different names in the industry that he mailed a survey to including vets, blacksmiths, and anyone remotely associated with the industry.

It may be some time before the full impact of the industry is known in the county, but the Equine Council believes they are on the right track. Lowry said the recent Vision project “established the fact this is needed. It (the equine industry) does exist. We want to know the importance of it.”

• *The Oldham County Extension Office will be conducting the 2007 Regional Horse College from 6 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. on Tuesdays, Sept. 18 through Nov. 13. For more information contact Traci Missum at (502) 222-9453. For more information on the Equine Council, contact Mary Lowry at (502) 228-9539, (502) 552-1477, or visit: www.oldhamequinecouncil.org. The next meeting of the Oldham County Equine Council will be at 6:30 on Oct. 9 at the Oldham County Extension Office, 1815 N. Hwy. 393, Buckner, Ky.*