

It's A Family Affair at Sabino Equestrian Center

by Erica Faulkner

It's no surprise that the Tucson, Ariz., region is home to more than a million residents and host to more than seven million visitors a year. There's something magical about this place where the Santa Cruz and Rillito Rivers converge, where five mountain ranges form a protected valley, and where majestic saguaros stand guard on the desert floor while aspen and pine whisper high above them on the mountain peaks. Tucson, home to many, is also home to Sabino Equestrian Center. This top notch facility is owned by Tara Weber, who runs the daily operations with her daughter Kendall Weber. The facility welcomes Saddlebreds, Morgans and Hackneys to their training program, along with all types of riders from amateurs to junior exhibitors to your first time academy students.

Tara Weber was born in Akron, Ohio. Her grandfather was in charge of international trade for the well-known tire company, Goodyear. Tara grew up around horses, as her grandfather was a polo player and she recalls his family "always had a horse of some kind." Tara's grandfather passed down his love for horses and kept the family involved by purchasing a Hackney pony for Tara's mom. Gentleman Jim was the pony's name; however, he was anything but gentle. "He bit, kicked and was all around just a naughty pony. But he was still a very fond memory for my mother." Tara describes her father as a "city boy," pointing out that he had to learn about horses from her mother. He learned his lessons well and became a good horseman.

At nine years old Tara's family moved to Nashville, Tenn.. Her parents were involved with Arabian horses. They had a breeding operation and also were very involved in the driving classes at Arabian horse shows. They had horses in training with Larry Finch. Larry kept their show horses in top shape, while Tara and her family tended to the several horses they kept at home. As Tara says, "Having horses at home meant frozen water lines, lots of ticks and mosquitoes, and a whole lot of fun!"

Her first horse of her very own was named Daj Maramaj. Sharing a very special bond, Tara is happy to share memories of this mare and their friendship. "She was very needy," says Tara. "She was blind and required a lot of attention. I used to run through the fields with her nose in my back. My parents found out and were horrified. I never fell, thank God, because she would have just run over me!"

Tara spent her days working on the farm, assisted the local vet and spent many hours riding through the lush green grass fields and trickling creeks, and had a blast doing it. "I enjoyed riding,



Kendall showed CH Highpoint's Abba Zabba to wins all along the west coast. Today she still teaches the academy children at Sabino Equestrian Center.

but I really fell in love with driving," says Tara, "I loved to drive our horses everywhere down the country roads. Tennessee was beautiful and I was always outside enjoying nature with my horses." During her teenage years she also enjoyed cheerleading, and was involved in the sport from middle school all the way up to high school. The list of activities she was involved with in high school is lengthy and shows just how diverse her interests are. She was on the Student Council, Pep Club, Science Club, Art Club, Teen Board modeling, treasurer of her sorority and more.

Tara got older and her path led her to undergraduate school at Middle Tennessee State University. Here she received two bachelors' degrees (Speech and Language Pathology and

Special Education) and three minors (English, Psychology and Audiology) in four years. If that isn't a feat in itself, she also did all of it as an honor student. From there, Tara went on to graduate school and this was what prompted the move from Tennessee to Arizona.

She attended graduate school in Tucson at the University of Arizona for Speech and Language Pathology. She was in the National Honor Society, Associated Student Body, Women's Honor Society, Council for Exceptional Education, along with other associations, in her undergrad years. It is apparent that Tara is skilled in organizing her time and is very focused, it takes a unique person to handle all of these activities, and handle them well.



CH DF Tres Chic has been an outstanding ambassador for the Hackney pony on the West Coast. One of Kendall's favorite members of the barn, she credits him with helping grow the pony population on the West Coast circuit.



Kendall showed to CH What A Caper in the five gaited divisions all along the west coast. She won enough blues with the grand gelding to garner him his CH status.



CH CF Prowler's Keepsake is a favorite at Sabino Equestrian Center. He has garnered wins all over the West Coast in the pleasure driving divisions.

After grad school Tara and her then husband relocated to Florida to start their new jobs with Lasma South. "My husband at the time wanted to be the trainer. I was in charge of medications, payroll and public relations for the track. We actually were responsible for introducing the Arabian horse to the race track under Alec Cortellis and Armand Hammer. We imported horses from Russia for the track." While working for Lasma South, both Tara and her husband passed the Trainers test and spent a good while working there. "Some of my closest friends were made on the track," says Tara, "And many of them are still my friends today."

"I learned so much from my years at the track," claims Tara, "about grooming horses, day to day care, lameness and the health of horses, and the passion for racing." Tara speaks fondly of her time at the track, but more importantly recalls the time she spent with Armand Hammer (at one time the major stockholder in the Arm and Hammer products produced by the church and Dwight Co.) and the influence he had on her youth.

"Armand Hammer was such a great supporter of youth. He once told me that the heart of our country was in the youth, so he was a huge promoter of young people. He was especially fond of racing and considered that to be his heart, so he promoted the Arabian horse in racing. He would pick out horses in Russia to bring over to run."

Tara went on to say, "One of his horses was the famous race horse and breeding stallion Wiking. "Wiking was one of the few stallions to race, go home and breed, and then race again. I loved that stallion." Wiking was not the only top race horse that Tara was able to work with. "We also had Flaming Tronku. He is in a famous photographer's photo book on famous horses."

"Armand was so fun to talk to. He taught me so much about visual arts. He collected art for many years and he would talk to me about Barton the Impressionist and he loved Picasso. His collection travels the world and is one of the best collections. He just taught me so much and I really feel he was an important part of my life. He even taught me how entertain the clients at the track."

Eventually, Tara moved to New Jersey to work in the Arabian show horse industry. "This is where I got hooked on the show horses," says Tara, "I loved working the horses and getting to work with them in a show setting." While in New Jersey Tara became pregnant with her daughter Kendall. It was not long after that the family moved to Louisville, Ky. Just as is Tara's nature, she found ways to keep busy in Kentucky. She was very involved in the community as the chairperson for the zoo's fundraising ball Zoofari, a member of the zoo board, Chance School board member, member of the Young Women's Club, Junior League, board member for the Speed Museum Ball, Hardscuffle and Oxmoor Steeplechases and Kosair's Children Hospital among many other activities. While living in Kentucky, Tara became pregnant again and her son Patrick was born. Shortly after his birth Tara filed for divorce and moved back to Tucson, Ariz., to start a new life. Patrick was only three at the time and Kendall was seven.

Once back in Arizona and settled into a new home Tara went to work for her parents on their ranch. Sabino Equestrian Center was a massive operation at the time as it was home to about 106 horses. Tara trained horses and gave lessons as a way to help support her own daughter's riding. As Tara says, "Kendall would wake up crying about missing horses even before we moved back to Arizona at a time when we did not have the money for lessons. I decided that by golly, Kendall was going to have horses one way or another."

Tara did everything she could to make sure that her daughter stayed riding. Not unlike most single mothers Tara worked two jobs. Her days were spent working as a Speech Pathologist and her evenings were dedicated to working as many horses as she could. Kendall and Patrick grew up playing on the ranch. They both loved the outdoors,

Tara knew it was important to her daughter to be involved in horses and of course, Tara wanted the best for her daughter. Tara and Kendall made the trek over to California each month to ride with Barbara Beamer.

"My good friend Lance Bennett helped me to find a place for Kendall to ride." Tara continues, "We kept one horse in California for her to show



Tara Weber spent many years working at Lasma South in Florida. Here she is pictured with Tiki's Flaming Star, back in 1987.



Tara Weber at 16 years of age with her first horse Daj Maramj.

until she was 18." Kendall spent years riding with Barbara Beamer and experienced a lot of success under her direction. Eventually, it came time for Tara to spend more time in Arizona and the plans began for her to take over her parents' stable.

Sabino Equestrian Center has always been a thriving business and Tara is thankful for her parents involvement helping her get started in the horse industry. The start of Tara's life with the American Saddlebred had begun. Tara comments, "Our very first Saddlebred in Tucson was a western mare named Church Lady owned by the Minano family. "She came for a winter and spent the rest of her life with us." From here, more and more Saddlebreds came on board to the farm.

"When my parents retired I simply could not care for the 106 horses and work another job," says Tara, "So I took Sabino to a smaller scale of 40 horses and my parents sold the ranch and retired to Louisville. It was just recently that I purchased my own land and moved the ranch."

Tara has always kept herself busy. Even now, as she runs Sabino Equestrian Center, she still keeps active in her other job. She enjoys giving in-services and seminars all over the country about Autism and Traumatic Brain Injury, Inclusion and Behavior Management. She was on the governor's council for TBIs and has worked with the Department of Education in helping schools become compliant with state and federal laws.

As a family Tara, Kendall and Patrick travel together as often as possible. "We have snorkeled in Hawaii, went scuba diving in Grand Cayman, kayaked in Maine, sky diving, zip lined over the rainforest in the West Indies and much more. We have visited museums, attended ballets, operas and Broadway together. Patrick, as a photographer, has captured many moments. The arts are a very important part of all our lives."

The new Sabino Equestrian Center is still in Tuscon, Ariz., but has moved from its original location to a new and improved facility more tailored for the needs of a show barn. The facility has 35 stalls available for training horses. The stalls are a mix of barn stalls and outside mare motels, all with automatic waterers. The facility has a round pen and a large arena that are both lit to enable the horses be worked at night or for lessons to be held at night if needed. And if that

isn't enough, the facility is also located next to the Pantano Wash Trail which allows for great trail access for the customers of Sabino Equestrian Center. Although Tara has led a busy life she has always made sure she gave plenty of time and attention to her children. Patrick is a good horseman and even though he enjoys the horses he has a different career path than that of his sister Kendall. He is always willing to help as needed. Kendall grew up always wanting to ride and wanting to be involved with every horse she could. Talented enough to ride independently at the early age of two-and-a-half, it seemed only fitting that as she grew up she became partners with her mom in the running of Sabino Equestrian Center.

Kendall spent her early years riding with Jo Cornell. Kendall explains, "Jo was the only instructor willing to teach someone as young as me to ride. My mother actually lied about my age and told Jo that I was a year older then I really was."

Tara chimes in on the story, "Kendall loved her pacifiers, and I knew that if Jo saw them she would know how young she was. So I always made Kendall get rid of the pacifiers before we got to the barn. I always had to tell her 'Kendall, you can either have the pacifiers or you can ride,' and she would throw out the pacifiers every time." Kendall spent many years riding with Jo, and other trainers, giving her the strong foundation in horsemanship that she still uses today.

Kendall attended University of Arizona and earned her Bachelors of Science in Veterinary Medicine. However, she did not continue on to Vet school, but instead took some time to herself. Eventually she returned to school, and she received her Masters of Business Administration from the University of Phoenix in 2015. With a strong educational background and a strong foundation built in the horse industry it seemed to make the most sense for Kendall to start focusing all her attention to the growing Sabino Equestrian Center. It is also of note that Kendall enjoyed going on the track as an adult and riding with the vets and learning about track life for the horses just as her mother did.

The facility is home to Saddlebreds, Morgans and Hackneys and although Kendall enjoys working with all horses the American



Kendall Weber and her champion dogs Fancy, Glory and Lily.



Patrick and Kendall always enjoy friendly competition with one another. Here Patrick shows Warwick Castle against Kendall on CH What A Caper in a five-gaited pleasure class.



Kendall at age 13 on Sonny, one of her favorite ponies.

Saddlebred and the Hackney pony are the two breeds she likes the most. "The American Saddlebred and the Hackney are just so willing and extremely intelligent," Kendall explains. "They, like the Morgans, are people pleasers and they just seem to want to work hard for their owners."

Kendall says her favorite part of the daily routine is the constant change that's part of it. "I really enjoy the predictability with no predictability," says Kendall. "Currently I have an idea of what to expect at work, but with horses there really is no such thing as a normal day. I really enjoy the medicine part of my job as well. Being able to treat the horses quickly so they can get well soon and resume work is something I love."

Kendall has joined forces with her mom to help grow Sabino Equestrian Center, as well as the academy division, on the West Coast. Tara speaks highly of the academy division and the need for it as does Kendall. As Kendall states, "My mom actually convinced Arizona and the West Coast to start an academy division in this part of the country. I think academy adds a lot to any lesson program and to the industry."

Kendall continues, "How are people supposed to know if they really want to show and want a horse without some kind of entry level showing? Most people are not willing to jump into show horse ownership without knowing if they will really enjoy the competition side." Kendall feels strongly that the academy division is important for the growth of our industry. Academy riders get a chance to experience what it is like to have a relationship with a horse before making a huge commitment. This is part of the reason that Kendall also enjoys working closely with her customers to help them see for themselves how special a relationship with a horse can be and to help develop a bond between horse and rider.

"I love giving lessons and seeing the progress and the bonds that are created between horse and rider. Being able to change a parent's mind that their child needs a horse, is a great feeling." Kendall started riding at the age of 2 1/2 years old in the academy division, and continued showing in this division until she was six.

Kendall started out as an academy rider herself until the ripe age of six. However, over the years she continued to progress and move up through the ranks. The list of achievements in the show ring is lengthy. However, a few special memories do come to mind for Kendall when reminiscing about her show ring career. One horse that truly stands out is CH Highpoint's Abba Zabba.

"We had purchased CH Highpoint's Abba Zabba from Jim Cherry in 2004." Jim felt Kendall was the only match for Abba. "He was just known for being a hot horse and I was young." However, Kendall likes a challenge and always rises to the occasion. "I fell in love with Abba. We worked hard, but still ended up coming face to face with a major challenge. He had to endure colic surgery, which you can imagine was a lot for him to come back from. But we were able to put all the pieces together and head down the chute to the green shavings at Louisville a year later, in 2007, to be named the Adult Country Pleasure Reserve World's Champion in section two."

Abba Zabba also survived a rattlesnake bite on his face which almost killed him. "He is all heart," said Kendall. Kendall's memories with Abba are not all from the show ring. "I really trust and love this horse," she says, "I love being able to put a five-year-old on him and turn them loose. He just takes care of everyone."

Zabba will be 23 this year and he is still alive and kicking at Sabino Equestrian Center where he gives lessons and shows in the academy division. "Abba taught me more life lessons than I can even list," says Kendall. "He taught me patience, kindness, to not judge a book by its cover, passion, and more. And it is so rewarding to see him passing the same things on to the kids he is teaching."

It seems that Kendall truly is drawn to the challenging horses, as is the case with one of her other favorites CH What A Caper. This horse has been a stellar show star on the west coast most of his life. Kendall eventually took over the reins years ago and enjoyed much success in the show ring with this grand horse. He earned his CH under Kendall and they won blues in the five-gaited show pleasure division as well as the open five gaited divisions. Always sharing her horses with others in need, this special horse also carried Patrick Weber to some good ribbons, as well as other riders at Sabino Equestrian Center. It seems as though once Kendall gets her hands on a horse it has a home for life. CH What A Caper is still alive and well at Sabino, and he even was showing right up until the young age of 26.

CH Highpoint's Abba Zabba and CH What A Caper are not the only prominent horses in Kendall's life, CH DF Tres Chic, although a pony not a horse, is another that comes to mind when Kendall recalls some of her favorite memories in the horse industry. "He is just such a great pony. He has carried numerous kids around in the show ring." Kendall continues to describe the importance of this pony to the road pony scene on the west

Jo Cornell prepares Kendall for an academy class back in 1991.



coast, "The West Coast has always been low on road ponies and CH DF Tres Chic has helped to grow interest in the division." Kendall speaks highly of this special pony and how he has been such a positive impact on people's opinions of ponies. "He is such a good ambassador of the breed that his show ring presence just helped to convince others to purchase ponies. As is true to Kendall's nature she has let anyone wanting to drive a road pony jump in and take him for a spin. For years, he was the only one in the road pony classes, and now there are other top ponies on the west coast." Tres also earned his CH under Kendall.

Tara and Kendall also welcome Morgan horses to their string. One of the favorites at the barn, as well as one of Kendall's personal favorites, is Samuel Dawson. This talented Morgan is 26 years young this year and recently made his debut in the road horse division last year at California Futurity. "He used to show as a pleasure driving horse about eight years ago and was the state champion for about 10 years," says Kendall. "I have to be honest, I actually hated showing him because he hated walking so much. There was not a road horse division back then, or park classes, so we had to go pleasure." Kendall and Samuel Dawson have won numerous titles and he is still going strong today.

A large part of what Tara and Kendall emphasize at their facility is the appreciation for the bond between horse and rider. A very special black gelding, CF Prowler's Keepsake, aka Cole, happens to be a dynamite example of this. Kendall fondly describes him as "The black horse that everyone wants." His personality is one of a kind, she states, "He is a sassy boy. He still thinks he is three, however he is not, he is 24." Amy Vickers-Smith owns this handsome gelding, and even though he is hot and all show horse he has developed a keen attachment to his owner. According to Tara and Kendall he chose her and he also chose his trainers. "We really feel that horses will pick their owners and trainers. There are so many times when we have gone to look at a horse where we were told that it would not

be a fit for our rider. However, it ends up being a perfect match." As was the case with Amy and "Cole".

"Cole accepts her as his owner," says Tara, "but he doesn't let her do much else to him. He accepts me and Kendall to groom him and train him, but for his owner her job is to drive him and show him." He has his quirks but just with Tara and Kendall giving him a chance and approaching his training with an open mind they have been able to perfectly match him to his division and to his owner.

This has proven to be a theme that runs through the woodwork at Sabino Equestrian Center. Tara and Kendall have developed a knack for working with the horse the others might consider difficult. "They [the horses] pick their own owners. Horses really do have personalities and they will let you know what they want if you listen." This type of understanding and patience that both Tara and Kendall possess is a large part of why they experience so much success.

Tara hopes that someday Kendall will take over the barn completely. "I hope to retire sometime soon from the barn and from my other job," said Tara. Kendall is sure to continue the successes of Sabino Equestrian Center as she helps to promote and grow the farm and the industry as a whole. "We have come so far and have so much support from some other great trainers such as Bobby Ruxer, Lance Bennett, Jimmy Robertson and Ralph Grahman. These trainers believed in us when others did not."

Outside of the horses Kendall can also be found competing with her dogs in the agility arena. "Amy Vickers-Smith introduced me to dog agility and yes, my three girls, Chihuahuas named Lily, Fancy and Glory, run agility trials and they all have earned titles."

It is evident that Kendall will excel at anything she does. She makes a one-of-a-kind team with her mom and they provide an atmosphere that is unique and inviting. This family is sure to leave a lasting legacy in the show horse world. With their strong contributions to so many divisions and their love and respect for the breeds they work with the Weber family will be a name on the minds of many for years to come.