



Wentz Stables

PASSING THE REINS THROUGH GENERATIONS

by Sara Pizzuto

Diane Wentz has experienced all of the many facets of the Saddlebred industry. She has witnessed her husband train champions, cheered wildly as her children rode down victory lane, and been at the helm of all organizational tasks associated with being a stables' office manager. However, nothing brings her greater pleasure than the way that the breed has touched her entire family.

"There isn't a horse at Louisville that's as exciting to me as watching my grandkids going around in the walk and trot class," Diane said.

The family's successful Wentz Stables began with husband Tom Wentz's introduction to the American Saddlebred in the early 1980s. Tom had had a history with horses, teaching lessons as a young Eagle Scout. He happened to drive past a

Saddlebred barn and soon after purchased his first gaited horse. This led to the development of Wentz Stables as a training barn for Saddlebred horses.

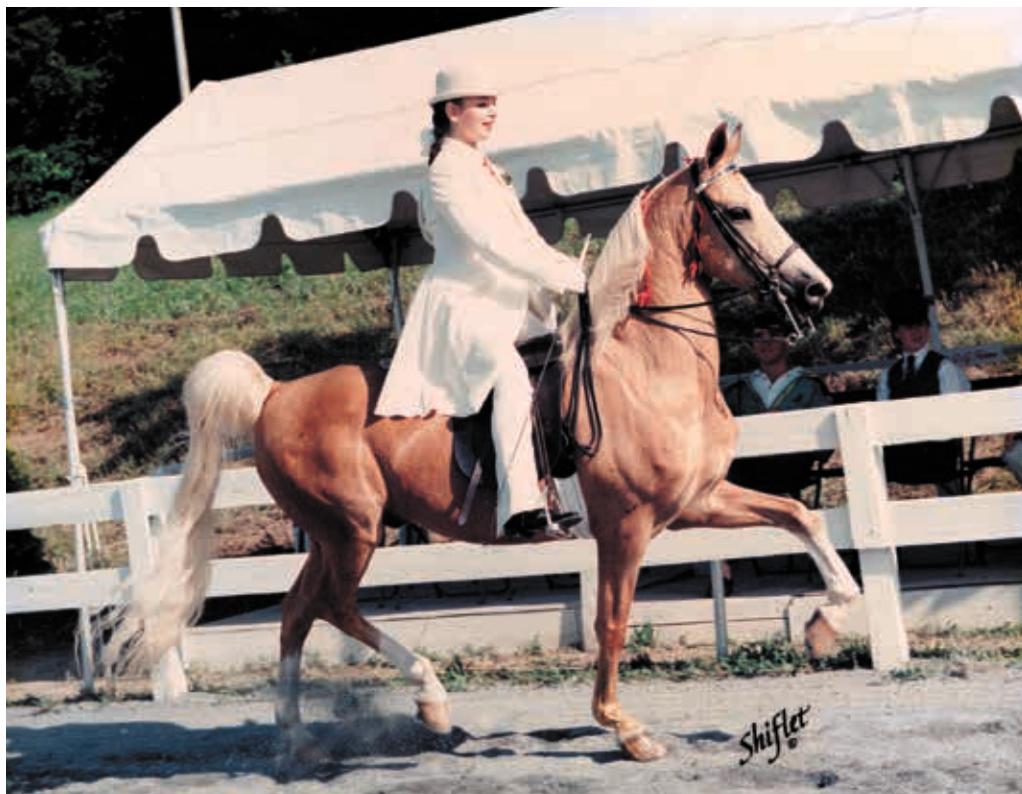
Wentz Stables is set on 30 acres overlooking the Blue Mountain in the Lehigh Valley.

It wasn't long after that Tom and Diane Wentz had their daughters Tara and Cassi involved as well. Head trainer Tom and Tara would make the trip to Tattersalls multiple times per year and return home

with four to five horses. Tara was always involved in the training of these horses and would often catch ride them for their clients.

"It gave her such a great versatile skill," Diane said. "Tom would sometimes buy 10 horses in a year and turn them over. Tara never had the same show horse for more than a year or two because once she mastered them, that was it. Tom got something else. This always added to her knowledge."

The Wentz's new training facility in the Lehigh Valley meant the welcomed addition of more family members to the team. Diane's sister and husband, Lori and Joe Sarnie, became the co-owners of Wentz Stables and joined the mix with daughters Kirby and Tiana Tapper. Both families lived together as one household in the barn's 4,000 sq. ft. second floor apartment. Tara, Cassi, Kirby and



Tara Wentz credits Stonewall's Top Brass as the horse that fueled her love for horses and instructing students.



Tom and Tara trained horses side by side before Tom retired. He is now in charge of shipping the barn's horses to and from horse shows.

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Assistant trainer Kirby Tapper has successfully piloted a variety of horses in her career. She is pictured here aboard Smokin' Joe Fraiser at Devon.



It's been a family affair since the beginning with (front row) Megan Adams, Tara Wentz, Kirby Tapper, Tiana Tapper, (back row) Diane Wentz, Cassi Wentz and Lori Sarnie making a great team.

Tiana grew up together, spending any available moment in the barn.

The girls were heavily involved with the day-to-day life at Wentz Stables from chores to teaching lessons. Diane explained that this gave the girls a true understanding of how to run a business.

"I always felt that if we were going to spend the money on good show horses for them, then where much is given, much is required," she said. "I expected a lot of that, so they were more than willing to do whatever was expected of them in the barn. It was a great way for them to grow up. They developed a good strong work ethic."

Their diligence in the barn led to great show ring accomplishments with a myriad of champion mounts.

"I always told the kids, when you are in first grade, you ride a first grade horse," Diane said. "If you want to keep being in first grade, you stay on that first grade horse. If you want to move up, you have to get to that fifth grade horse and the high school horse and then the college horse. And that's what made them so excited to work in the barn. They were always challenged by that next horse."

Tara credits one of those horses, Stonewall's Top Brass, as having a large influence on her riding career.

"I just thought he was the most amazing thing in the world," she said. "He was a palomino Saddlebred who really taught me how to ride at a young age. I showed him and then I would bring him home and trail ride him. I would do all kinds of crazy stuff with him."

Tara sold Top Brass to a customer in the barn that had a young family. She taught the young girls



Tara's son Bobby Goosley represents the third generation in the Wentz family to ride and show horses.

how to ride him, which truly ignited her passion for teaching and instructing riders.

However, Tara decided to go off to college to pursue other opportunities. Though she continued to work for Wentz Stables, she enrolled at Kutztown University of Pennsylvania, with the plan of later going on to law school. She split her time after grad-

uation between a law firm and the barn and soon realized that the lawyer life wasn't for her and the barn was where she was happiest.

"I realized I hated being in the office," she said. "I would watch the clock all day and I knew it wasn't for me and I just loved being in the barn. That's when I really knew that becoming a trainer wasn't just the only option that I had and what I had always known, but that it was really a choice that I had made."

It was a decision that delighted Diane.

"I cried like a baby when my kids' junior exhibitor years were done because I thought they were going to go to college and maybe do something else," she said. "But they didn't. They all came back and said, 'This is what we want to do,' and I couldn't be happier. I was so glad when the girls followed in our footsteps to continue with the breed and I feel very excited by them."

Tara joined her father, training in tandem at Wentz Stables. She explained that working alongside Tom was a special experience and great opportunity. Their mutual love, patience, and understanding of their horses brought them closer.

Tom slowly began to retire and focus solely on trailering the horses to and from horse shows. He eventually turned the training reins completely over to Tara.

"I always looked up to my dad tremendously when I was younger, but he always gave me the opportunity to do things in my own way," she said. "Both of my parents have given me the opportunity to make my own way and learn and figure out things and encouraged me to experiment. Without doing that, you would never really and truly develop your craft and be good at it."

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With her parents' support, Tara is now responsible for the daily training operations at Wentz Stables. She works busy days alongside assistant trainer and cousin Kirby Tapper. An average day consists of Tara and Kirby working 35 out of the 50 horses stabled at Wentz Stables. While the duo splits up the work evenly, Kirby enjoys longlining the many show horses in training. She says that she finds working them on the ground to be incredibly beneficial for their development.

Tara and Kirby's combined training efforts are in high gear as Wentz Stables now prepares for the start of their 2019 show season. Tara has high hopes for all members of her show string, including the fine harness entry Absolutely Amazing. Dr. Glenn Moyer's horse attracts positive feedback at every show he attends. She is also quick to mention Patrick McMurtrie, who will be switching to the equitation division this year aboard He's Daisy's Duke, and Smokin' Joe Fraiser who will once again show in the three-gaited park classes with Skylar Gorr.

These riders all take lessons with both Tara and Kirby as well as academy instructor Tiana Tapper. They teach between 60-80 lessons per week, with Tiana heading up all lesson programs and the farm's 10 academy horses.

"We try to spread the lessons out amongst each other so that everyone gets a nice diversity with the instruction," Tara said. "Sometimes how I explain something will be different than how Kirby or Tiana would explain it and our students really benefit from hearing it said in a different way. But we all work together so much that we are really trying to achieve the same goal."

Tiana agrees and says that the entire family works well together.

"We share ideas and we bounce things off of each other and we all kind of take on our own role in the program," she said. "We each specialize in our own things and we each bring something unique and different to the table and together we have a really good package going on."

Tiana explained that she finds joy in watching the improvement of students who first arrive to Wentz Stables having never been on a horse and without any horse knowledge.

"That first time when the kids are off the lunge line and kind of doing it by themselves is cool for me to see," she said. "They feel so good about what they did. I love seeing them so accomplished and happy. They usually have a huge smile on their face when they are done."

Many of the riders in the farm's academy program compete at local academy shows in the area. Wentz Stables recently hosted an academy tournament and brought together all of their beginner and advanced show riders in an effort to show academy students what the horse show experience looks like.

Tiana is also responsible for the camps at Wentz Stables, as the farm offers camp once a month in addition to their summer camps. While in camp, students learn horse breeds, color, and anatomy, as well as the usage of different pieces of



Wentz Stables is responsible for the training of many successful show horses including fine harness star Absolutely Amazing.



Tara's daughter Alexa Goosley has graduated from academy and will show in the walk and trot division this year.

riding equipment. Camps also include lunge line and group lessons.

Tara's own children are now among the young riders who enjoy time spent in the barn. It is an exciting time for the entire family, as more and more family members have been bitten by the horse show bug. Tara's daughter Alexa will make her walk and trot debut this year. She will be aboard Callaway's Hollywood Lights for her first show out of academy. Tara's son Bobby will also show in the leadline division.

"I remember that we would lead horses around as little tiny kids," Kirby said. "It's great now that I am older to see Tara's kids do the same thing."

It is evident that the key to the immense success of Wentz Stables has been the shared love of family and the American Saddlebred breed that started at such an early age.

"I would never have this opportunity if I didn't grow up with my family already doing this and being around it my whole life," Kirby said. "It's almost indescribable. Looking on the outside, people that come in, it's different when you grow up in it already. It's like you have a whole different outlook of it. I love the horses so much. They are really special."

For Diane, it's another generation to support and encourage in the ring, just as she had done for her girls growing up.

"My grandkids are riding and I hope it continues that way," she said. "I love watching my grandkids. It's so exciting to watch them grow. It's still a family affair and when I see them in the ring it's like it's starting all over again."