

# Seldom Seen

## *on the map*

By Sadie Fowler

Located in Ruff Creek, Pennsylvania, Seldom Seen Farm has made its mark on the map of the horse industry, thanks to its focus on the beautiful American Saddlebred — and a really good lesson program that has brought the breed to the forefront to folks wanting to see more.

Led by trainer and instructor Amanda Pierce, the Seldom Seen facility includes 20 stalls and indoor and outdoor riding arenas that provide the perfect platform for the on average of 40 lessons Pierce gives each week as well as the 15 horses she trains. Recently, Pierce says she is grateful to her cousin, Kolby Smith, who has stepped up and started helping her with some of the training duties.

Seldom Seen Farm was built in the spring of 2009 and opened its doors for business in December of 2009. Initially, they only had 10 stalls and three horses in training, one of them being a lesson horse and the other two belonging to Pierce and her mother. Her riding students doubled as family members, so it goes without saying they've come a long way.

"It did not take long for the word to get out about our facility, and our lesson program started growing quickly," Pierce says. "Within the first year, I was up to giving 15 lessons a week, purchased a second lesson horse, and started to develop a small group of academy riders."

Outside the barn, which is technically owned by Pierce's parents Lloyd and Kim Blaker, Pierce also delights in her role as a wife to her husband of five years, Jason Pierce, and as a mom to her two beautiful daughters, Layla, who is four; and Avery, who is three.

### Deep roots

The land where Seldom Seen Farm is built was the home place of Pierce's mother, Kimberly Blaker. Pierce says when her grandparents were ready to



A tightknit family farm has turned into a successful training and teaching operation. Kolby Smith, Kim Blaker and Amanda and Avery Pierce were with Maggie Burnett following another championship ride at River Ridge.

downsize their beef cattle farm her parents were at the point in their lives that they were able to purchase part of the family farm.

"There was no question that it would be the perfect location for my mom's and my dream to build our own horse barn," she said. "The name of the farm was already established by my uncle when they had their cattle business so when the barn was complete it was only fitting to carry over the name Seldom Seen Farm to the horse barn. Since the farm is located at the very end of a little country dead end road the name is only fitting."

Even today, while driving down the barn lane one will still see a few head of beef cattle roaming the fields that Pierce's grandfather and uncle still farm.

Pierce laughs as she thinks back to not that long ago, when the barn was being built. She says she never thought in her wildest dreams that she'd become the farm's trainer and instructor so quickly, although it was always part of the master goal.

At the time, Pierce was in college where she was pursuing a career in elementary education. The original plan was to have a trainer come in and work for them while Pierce would start out as the assistant and help with some of the lessons. When things didn't work out as planned her mom gave her the option to either step up to the plate and take on the training duties or they would search for another trainer.

"It really didn't take me long to make that decision, so I ended my college career with only one more year needed to get my degree," she said. "I was nervous about this whole new endeavor but excited too."

### A way of life

Pierce's dream of opening Seldom Seen Farm comes as no surprise to anyone who knew her as a young girl. Horses have always been a part of her life; she started riding at age five with her first mount





The highlight of their young careers is Maggie Burnett winning the World's Champion of Champions Junior Exhibitor Five-Gaited 13 & Under roses with CH King's Carma this past year.

being a little black pony named Peggy Sue, which she showed on a local circuit.

"My mom and I traveled on our own with Peggy Sue and her quarter horse that she showed and we would do small weekend or one day shows," she said. "When my passion for showing started to grow stronger we began to look for a trainer."

They found one in Loretta Tekavick at Summerfield Farm. As years went by Pierce's skills developed and so did her interest. When she became a teenager she started to work at the barn as a stall cleaner and groom to help pay for some of her lessons and put towards the training bill.

She later rode under the direction of Jodi Bertagnolli at Heritage Stables, where she continued to work while in college. While with Bertagnolli, Pierce started working for Lakeview Farms in Washington, Pennsylvania where they broke and trained some of their babies.

"Working side by side with Jodi through this process helped me gain some of the knowledge I was able to carry forward to my own training program," she said. "I quickly learned that being the head trainer and instructor was not the easiest job out there but it was definitely my dream job. You never know what challenge you will face day-to-day because there are never two days exactly alike."

While Pierce enjoys the training part of her job she says her true passion is working with the kids — the highlight of her day is during the evening, when it's time to give lessons.

"It is a big accomplishment to me to be able to share the love of horses and the thrill of riding with the younger generation of youth," she said.

This past August she had one of the biggest dreams of any trainer's career come true when she directed Maggie Burnett and CH King's Carma to

world championship victory in the 13 and under gaited division. While Pierce described it as being a huge and exciting thrill, it meant more to her than she ever imagined.

"What really hit close to home was thinking about Maggie and her riding career," Pierce explained. "Maggie has been a student in my program for six



Cousins Amanda Pierce and Kolby Smith have joined forces at Seldom Seen Farm. Smith is pictured here aboard Kalarama's Mr. All American.

years; I am the only teacher she has ever known. This also holds true for several of my other riders as well; Kolby Smith, Amber Miltz, and Nora Burnett just to name a few. The fact that I have made those kids the riders that they are today from the start makes me feel more accomplished in my career than anything else and that so far, to date, is the biggest highlight of all."

## Lots of lessons

One of the biggest lessons that Pierce has learned from being a horse trainer so far is that you will never know everything even if you pretend that you do.

"Every day there are new challenges to face," she said. "You have to be able to cater to a horse or rider's specific needs no matter what it takes. There are no two horses or riders that are exactly alike so training and instructing techniques are always changing day to day. Training horses has been a bit of a trial and error process for me at times and I have had days where it seems like there were more errors than anything."

Pierce says she tries to leave the barn each night with the attitude that tomorrow is a new day, and things will always work out in the end.

"No matter what kind of a training day that I might be having, when my first student walks into the barn, I put a smile on my face and embrace them with a positive attitude," she said.

## Visible friendships

As a trainer in the Saddlebred industry, Pierce has had the pleasure of meeting some great people and establishing some strong friendships along the way.



Right up there at the top she credits close friends Wes and Sena Bowling of Taylor Creek Stables with helping her succeed along the way.

As Seldom Seen's business continued to grow and they were in the market for customer horses, Pierce says Wes and Sena welcomed them with open arms and the friendship started from that moment on.

"I attribute a lot of my success in and out of the show ring to Wes and Sena because they were always there to help in any way that they could," Pierce said. "When I needed training advice, business advice, or just a person to vent to they were the ones I could always count on."

Pierce and her crew from Seldom Seen spent many hours on the road as they traveled back and forth to Michigan one whole winter so that a few of their riders could even compete in Taylor Creek Stables' winter tournament series.

"During our time there I enjoyed listening to Ms. Sena give instructions to her students and mine," she said. "I was able to take some of her techniques back to try on my own students. The friendship between them and myself and their clients and mine is wonderful; you will always hear Taylor Creek riders and Seldom Seen riders cheering for each other on the rail."

The memories made with them will be ever lasting and for that, Pierce says she is grateful.

## Family friendly

One of the best parts of having their own farm is the family involvement they experience.

"My mom, Kim, works a full-time job at our other family business but you will find her at the barn every night hanging out and socializing with our clients," Pierce said. "She is also the horse shopper of the barn. She is the one that always has her



Amanda's daughters, Layla and Avery have been bitten by the family bug as well.



Amanda (far right) and Kolby (back center) with a group of enthusiastic students who participated in the Seldom Seen winter tournament series. Amanda enjoys introducing and developing new riders for the American Saddlebred world.

eye out for the perfect horse for someone in the barn....which usually seems to be for herself."

Then there is her dad, Lloyd, whom Pierce describes as being the handy man. You will never see him at a horse show but Pierce says he stops in for random visits at the barn quite often. He is also the one that puts in the time in the hayfield in the summer, along with the help of my uncle, brother, and cousins.

Pierce is quite to credit her husband for helping her succeed as well. She says she wouldn't be able to do it without Jason.

"He is supportive of the long hours spent at the barn giving lessons and the many weeks away traveling throughout the summer," she said. "You will also see him behind the wheel of our 15 horse semi delivering our horses to the shows. Jason is not only supportive of my love for horses but now for our daughters' love for horses as well. He plays the role of horse show dad pretty well too as he is always there to watch our girls show their ponies, Sugar and Black Betty in leadline."

Pierce's brother J.F. and his wife Brandy are also a big part of the barn family, and Pierce says she's grateful they have let her share her love of horses with their children as well.

Another big part of the glue that holds it all together is Pierce's cousin, Kolby Smith, who is really turning into a great horseman as he's stepped up to assist with some of the training duties.

"He has a really strong passion for the horses and it reflects in the work that he puts into them," she said. "Being a busy horse show mom would also not be possible without the help of my aunt and Kolby's mom, Tammy Smith."





Amanda and Kolby with Megan McDowell and her show pleasure horse, Top Don.

“MeMe,” as Pierce’s girls call her, travels to the horse shows with them and serves as the horse show nanny. She is also the number one meal planner, making sure they are well fed in the hustle and bustle of the horse show and other activities that go on around the barn.

Not only does Pierce have a great family, but she says her barn family is also terrific, providing icing on the cake.

“One of the greatest aspects of being a part of Seldom Seen Farm is that we all have become one big family,” she said. “We welcome everyone into our barn with open arms.”

In fact, Pierce says their motto at Seldom Seen is “Come in as friends and leave as family.”

## Looking ahead

As she looks ahead, Pierce says her main goal for the future of Seldom Seen is for Pierce to slide into the exclusive role of instructor while her cousin Smith steps up to the full-time role of head trainer.

“I hope that Kolby’s passion for the horses and my passion of teaching continue to build our program even bigger and stronger than we already have,” she said. “I had the opportunity to live every horse trainer’s dream this past year with being crowned a World’s Champion of Champions title and I hope some day Kolby has that opportunity as well.”

Most trainers will agree, it’s not easy to balance the tough job of training horses with family life, but somehow Pierce is able to manage it all and make it



Making time for family, especially husband Jason and their two daughters, is extremely important for Amanda as she and Kolby continue to grow Seldom Seen Farm.

work with, what seems like, ease. She admits that she’s learned a few strategies over the years to make it run as smooth as possible.

For example, Pierce tries to keep her schedule open at least two nights a week so that she is able to do things with Jason and their girls.

“My husband and his family farm 1900 acres of land and run 500 head of beef cattle that I also enjoy helping out with,” she said. “My favorite time of the year on the cattle farm is when the calves start hitting the ground.”

Indeed, they all stay very busy between the horse farm and the cattle farm but Pierce says she can’t imagine a better life to be raising their daughters into.

“We don’t usually get a lot of husband and wife time while trying to manage everything but ... Sometimes it’s the simple things that make life so great,” she said.

## Above all else

Pierce has learned countless things over the course of her short but mighty career. Above all else, she’s realized the importance of carving out time for herself and her family.

“The absolute biggest thing that I have learned so far is that even though you get caught up in the business of trying to make your career a success you still have to make time for you and your family,” she said.

Another huge lesson she’s learned is that, in order to succeed, one must be willing and not afraid to reach out and ask others for help when need be.

“I don’t know everything there is to know about horse training nor will I ever, but I am not afraid to ask others so that I can continue to strengthen my knowledge of the business,” she said.