

The 2016 Year In Review Is Dedicated To DAVID L. HOWARD

BY BOB FUNKHOUSER



David L. Howard founded Saddle Horse Report in 1976 and built a highly successful publishing company (Dabora, Inc.) with his family.

Instead of a trainer dedication this year it seemed appropriate to make it a “professional” dedication as there was no one more professional than our late publisher, David L. Howard. His unexpected passing December 17 at the age of 72 left us all shocked and saddened as his drive and passion for family, business and life in general shone so brightly it was unfathomable that that light could ever be dimmed.

His path to publisher of Saddle Horse Report, Horse World Magazine, The Year In Review, Walking Horse Report and The Year In Walking Horses had modest beginnings to say the least. A journalism graduate of the University of Tennessee, an institution that was a source of great pride on many levels, led to an internship at The Voice, a magazine dedicated to the Tennessee Walking Horse industry. He became enthralled with the horses and the people and after five years with The Voice he had the vision to start his own publication, a weekly tabloid, the Walking Horse Report.

In his very first issue he set the tone for the standards that would stay with him and his employees throughout his career. “It is our intention to provide this industry with a factual and accurate news medium as well as a publication that is willing to

take a stand on the complex and demanding issues of our breed,” said Howard. “The time for neutrality has passed and the breed is at the crossroads. Those who truly love the breed must now decide what they are willing to do to change the existing situation before it drags the industry to its knees.”

How prophetic that statement was. He spent 40-some years encouraging those industry leaders to do the right thing as that was the core of his beliefs. It didn’t always make him popular in that breed, but he wasn’t there to be popular, he did what he did because he thought it was the right thing for the industry. Those same beliefs held true for his venture into the American Saddlebred, Hackney and Morgan breeds.

In 1976, Howard started Saddle Horse Report with the same weekly format, dedication to facts and addressing of industry issues. Saddle Horse Report was the first in the Saddlebred/Hackney/Morgan show horse world to print judges’ cards from shows, making that process more transparent. Editorials speaking out on issues, feature stories, tributes to great horses and players in the sport, and the most in-depth show coverage in the industry are what have made the Report the bible of the industry. He brought sound business practices and savvy to all that he did. In 1979, he purchased Horse World Magazine, adding the monthly slick to his arsenal of publications with quality second to none.

While the publications were the items he was most readily identifiable with, it was family that was first and foremost. Wife Mary, children Christy Howard Womack, Jennifer Howard Connelly and Jeffrey Howard, and grandchildren Holt, Brooke, David, Cole, Caroline, Jax, Blake and Sam were the center of his universe. Mary worked side by side with him for all these years and the children joined in the family businesses on their own timetables. They worked together, traveled together, played together and together made their community of Shelbyville, TN, a better place to live.

Blood relatives weren’t the only family that meant something to Howard. Those of us who have worked for him, several for 20 and 30-plus years, have been just as much a part of his life. His door was always open, whether it was work related or personal. He was there to pick us up and he was there to push us and challenge us to be the best we could be. As he said in the eulogy that he wrote for himself, “I always believed you had a responsibility to be a better person every day of your life and that is why you got out of bed.”

Everyone he had a relationship with, whether that be his children, a bank president, government official, company employee or a groom for one of his family’s horses, he held to the highest of standards. That was no different from what he demanded of himself every day and in every situation. His grit and desire to succeed was infectious. His demand for excellence was so evident that having him respect you or a piece of work you had done was an incredible feeling. His son Jeffrey said it well in his comments at the funeral service. “My dad loving you was one thing, him respecting you was a totally different level.”

Respect is something he believed you earned through honesty and hard work and he was pleased to achieve that in breeds that he didn’t grow up in. When he ventured into the American Saddlebred, Hackney and Morgan worlds he surrounded himself with strong, knowledgeable people, he asked lots of questions and he had a great feel for what made people in those breeds tick. Howard always had an affinity for the professionals of the industry, as they were what drove the bus. While owners came



The first staff of Saddle Horse Report included Peggy Richardson, Howard, Bill Carrington and Mary Jane Crowson.



This was the production and sales staff for Saddle Horse Report in the early '80s: David Howard, Patricia McHaffie, Donna Clanton, Elaine Stacy, unidentified, Steve Morrow, Janene Leonhirth, Barbara Norton, Theresa Daniels, Priscilla Thornberry, Bob Funkhouser and Tim Doll. Stacy, Morrow and Funkhouser are still a part of the Dabora family.



Family has always been the center of Howard's life as reflected in this picture from Christy and Rick Womack's wedding. TOP ROW: Brooke Connelly, Cole Connelly, Holt Parsons and David Parsons. BOTTOM ROW: Sam, Caroline, Russ and Jennifer Connelly, David Howard, Christy and Rick Womack, Mary Howard, Jeffrey, Mindee, Blake and Jax Howard.

and went, it was the trainers and officials who molded and carried out the business practices of show horses.

From early on he sought out to support the United Professional Horsemen's Association (UPHA) on many levels, including donating all of their advertising. Financially, he supported numerous auctions, including those his company helped organize for UPHA for many years. His advice to both that association and trainers individually was worth even more than the checks he wrote. "He was the type of guy that when he spoke, I listened," said past UPHA and American Saddlebred Registry President Chuck Herbert. For his years of service to the UPHA he was honored with the Sallie B. Wheeler Distinguished Service Award in 1990.

The American Saddlebred Horse Association (ASHA) was another organization to benefit from his talents and generosity, serving as its Treasurer from 2003 through 2008.

"During my tenure as President I couldn't have had a closer friend, ally or supporter of the American Saddlebred Horse Association," said Fred Sarver. "His work ethic and integrity were outstanding. He was just rock solid without a chink in his armor. If there was a situation he believed in he fought for what he thought was right and never backed up."

"There was also a side of David Howard that some people didn't see or didn't know about. He was very generous and that was with his time, friendship and resources. He was greatly appreciated by his friends."

"David Howard had an instinct for business and finances that made him perfect for the job of ASHA Treasurer, however, it was his advice and council that I remember most about him," added former ASHA President Judy Werner. "He was a great sounding board and listener and his advice was always short, concise and on target!"

Howard not only entrenched himself in the show horse world through his publications and service to its organizations, he also became an owner and took even greater joy watching his daughter Christy and grandsons Holt and David show. Although it was a little out of his comfort zone, he too made a few show ring appearances driving Callaway's Feature Story and the Hackney pony Sugar Free. Through the years the family had horses with Redd Crabtree, Donna Moore, Tom Moore, Castle Hills Farm, Pat and Julie (Kaufman) McConnell, Jimmy Miller and Mike Barlow.

At the end of the day, the life of David L. Howard was a good one indeed. It was just as good for those whom he surrounded himself with as long as they were willing to give what he gave. He expected, no, demanded nothing less, both personally and professionally. Sometimes those expectations seemed impossible to fulfill, but more often than not you walked away a better person and with a greater appreciation of the man he was.

"My dad exemplified many qualities that I admired," said Jeffrey Howard. "He was a hard worker, he was a fighter, he cared deeply about family, he was demanding, and settled for nothing less than your best."

"As a businessman, our dad showed us that hard work, discipline and doing the right thing was a way to achieve success that would allow you to overcome other shortcomings that you may have. I will always remember what he said, 'If you want to be successful, find your competitor and drive by his office on your



Howard spent many hours behind his desk, often the first to arrive and the last to leave.

way to work and if he is already there, the next day you better wake up 30 minutes earlier. And on your way home, drive by his office and if he is still there, turn around and go back to the office.’

“He left a legacy that will live on in the lives of those that crossed paths with him professionally that may be greater than any other impact he had.”

“I am so blessed to have spent most of my career learning from my father,” added Saddle Horse Report Publisher Christy Howard Womack. “I find myself every day quoting lessons he taught me and referring to his wisdom relative to journalism, business and integrity. He was such a strong man of character and integrity, and his work ethic was second to none. He had a way of getting the very best out of you - making you become the very best version of yourself. He was tough. He asked for your best all the time. He believed in rewarding good behavior and punishing bad behavior. He was equally good at both. But if there’s a greatest blessing he left me with, it was the knowledge that he loved me fiercely. I was more than a daughter to him. I was more than the future of his business. And he was my everything. I miss him every day but I can hear his words and feel his support every day as well.

“Dad was a visionary. He read voraciously and he was taking classes in subjects he wanted to know more about his entire life. He believed you had to be a lifetime learner. I’ll never forget when the internet was new and databases were just becoming understood. He applied his love for baseball and the statistics of the sport to

our sport. He insisted that we start harvesting the data from the results and putting them into a database where they could become a research tool beginning in 1997. The impact of that decision and that vision is staggering when you consider the difference in today’s ability to research a horse’s lineage and their collective performance in the show ring. He believed in staying true to tradition, and in always doing the right thing, but in also being innovative and open to new ideas. One of the most valuable things he taught me was to gather facts before making any decisions - good decisions come from good facts. Today as my son Holt is trying to make the decision about his career coming out of college, when he’s not sure what he wants to do, I remind him that Granddad would say that he didn’t have enough facts yet - just keep gathering good facts. Good decisions will follow.”



Callaway's *Headline News* was one of the first American Saddlebreds owned by the Howard family. She was in training with good friend Redd Crabtree.



Taking every opportunity to promote the show horse world, Howard arranged for several years for American Saddlebreds, Hackneys and roadsters to be exhibited at the Tennessee Walking Horse Celebration in front of 30,000 spectators. This presentation was with Raymond Shively and World's Grand Champion *Invincible Summer*.



Ponies became a part of the Howard show string. He is pictured with Anna Marie Knipp, *Sugar Free*, Christy Howard Womack and Jimmy Miller. Howard and daughter Christy shared drives with the champion pony.



In 1990, Bob Funkhouser was honored to present Howard with the UPHA Distinguished Service Award.



One of the highlights of the family's show ring days was Christy winning the Adult Country Pleasure Championship at Lexington with Callaway's *Cassandra*.

Good decisions were made for many years and the legacy of David L. Howard will live on through the people he taught how to gather information and make those decisions. And yes, we will all be challenged to be better people every day because of him.



Howard wanted to experience what his customers did in the show ring, so he learned to drive and show Callaway's *Feature Story*.