

Anna Marie KNIPP

BY SARA PIZZUTO

Anna Marie Knipp has long been a strong force in the equine world, fueled by her deep passion and pride for both the American Saddlebred and Hackney Pony breeds. Her talents in the show ring, her efforts to promote the industry, and her achievements as one of the main faces associated with her High Spirits Farm have made her a prominent member in this community of show horse competitors. Knipp and her High Spirits contingency continue to rise to new heights since the appointment of trainers Jim and Fay Lowry at the command of her Missouri based farm. Her extraordinary 2019 show season and her tireless work to benefit the

industry have now been honored with this Year In Review dedication.

Knipp's introduction to horses began by choice of her mother, who was raised on a farm in Missouri. Her family used horses that by chance happened to be American Saddlebreds as a means to count cattle. Each year, Knipp and her mother would attend the local horse show to watch the competition. Her mother urged her to begin riding lessons so that she would be able to properly understand what was happening in the show ring. This led to an extensive show career for Knipp beginning at the young age of 10.

That love of horses continued with her throughout her young adult life. Her High Spirits Farm began as only a title before it was ever a farm and was brought about after the death of her father.

"When I graduated from college we always had one or two show horses and my dad had died," she said. "So the attorney said, 'If you want to do this you need to get serious about it and set it up as a business.' So my mother named the

horse business High Spirits Farm. After that we ended up buying property where the horses have always been and High Spirits Farm in 1984 became a true piece of property."

The farm, nestled in Ashland, Missouri, features property in two neighboring locations for a total of 550 acres. It serves as a true working farm, growing both crops and hay and is home to show horses, broodmares, colts, and a group of retired horses. One of the locations is in fact part of the Tom Bass plantation and holds the exact home in which Bass was born as well as a fireplace that he built.

Many members of the High Spirits Farm team reside on this property giving them easy access to the horses in their care. This team, comprised of Jim and Fay Lowry at the helm, have formed what has been a remarkable partnership for all associated with High Spirits.

"That was probably the best thing that's ever happened to me in the horse business," Knipp said of bringing the Lowrys onboard.



One of three High Spirits entries to wear the roses at Louisville this year, Best Show In Vegas was a most pleasant surprise for Knipp and the Lowrys. Rock Creek (pictured) was one of nine victory passes on this undefeated season for the world's champion of champion, national champion and UPHA Amateur Fine Harness Horse of the Year.

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Having given back to many facets of the sport over the years, recently Knipp has hosted local charitable events at her farm, showcasing the American Saddlebred in the process. Horsepower With Heart was this year's event.



After a long hiatus from the Hackney division, Knipp returned to the breed this fall with the purchase of world's champion Crystal Creek's Knight Rider. Delivered to High Spirits shortly before the UPHA/American Royal, he went on to win the UPHA Harness Pony Classic Grand Championship with Lowry on the lines.



High Spirits Farm is a part of legendary Missouri American Saddlebred lore and Knipp is proud to continue that heritage.



What a team Anna Marie Knipp and Jim and Fay Lowry have made at High Spirits Farm.



While Knipp enjoyed much success riding early in her career, driving is what she became drawn to. In addition to a long list of Hackney stars, she'll forever be associated with the great world's and national champion It's Dan The Man.

Knipp's friendship with both Jim and Fay Lowry began on a whim, through her purchase of the Morgan park superstar Playmor's I'm A Star Too. The Morgan had been in training with the Lowrys' then Lowry Stables. After Knipp's purchase, an agreement had been made where Jim Lowry would put I'm A Star Too into the ring for Knipp at the 2016 Morgan Grand National. During that time Knipp was undergoing some staff changes at her High Spirits Farm simultaneously as Jim and Fay Lowry had quietly made the decision to put their Illinois farm on the market and relocate. Knipp and the Lowrys made a quick pit stop at the St. Louis National Charity Horse Show prior to the Morgan Grand National for a last minute showing for Playmor's I'm A Star Too. It was at this show where Knipp asked Jim

Lowry if he would recommend anyone that she could hire to run her training barn.

"She made the comment at St. Louis if I knew anyone that would be interested in the job to let her know," Lowry said. "I took two steps, I stopped and I turned around and said, 'I would be interested' and she said, 'You're kidding.' and within two weeks we had the whole thing hammered out and rolled with it."

"So I told Jim what I was used to doing and he said that works for me," Knipp said. "He talked to Fay about it the next morning on his way to his mother's funeral. We both jointly wrote a letter to the respective people that he had in his barn and that had continued to stay with me and said, 'This is what we are doing. The horses are all going to switch out after November the 1st, and

that's what's going to happen.' Jim and Fay were a perfect fit and Jim Lowry's first day of work was the day my mother died. The day he made the decision to come was the day he was going to his mother's funeral and the day he walked through my front door was the day my mother died. That's how bizarre all this was. But everything has been crazy wonderful. They have become the family I didn't have."

Jim and Fay Lowry arrived at High Spirits Farm sight unseen in late 2016, after only viewing the farm in pictures. With them came much of their Lowry Stables staff and assistants as well as many of their existing clients and horses. Allison Cantrell, who worked for the Lowrys at their Lowry Stables is now in charge of the lesson



Playmor's I'm A Star Too is the horse that brought Anna Marie and Jim and Fay together. Her first Morgan, I'm A Star Too was the 2016 Ladies Park Harness World Champion and ladies gelding qualifying winner.

Quickly becoming the queen of High Spirits Farm, Katharine The Great is a two-time world's champion of champions, three-time world's champion and two-time national champion in the show pleasure driving division. Caretaker Alejandro Jimenez and assistant Faye Wuesthofen accompanied Knipp and the beautiful Undulata's Nutcracker daughter following their 2019 Louisville qualifier.

program at High Spirits Farm and oversees the broodmares and colt barns.

"It was like a marriage because I had people they didn't know and they had people I didn't know," Knipp said. "Everybody got together. We molded that together and it's amazing. It's absolutely amazing. That group was introduced and they became very close. It was truly a blend of two families."

High Spirits Farm has since reached immense success under the newly minted partnership of Jim and Fay Lowry and Anna Marie Knipp. The 2019 show season featured many of Knipp's talented show stars achieving world and national titles under the guidance of Jim Lowry.

UPHA Show Pleasure Driving Horse of the Year, Katharine The Great is one of those outstanding individuals that is a product of the efforts of the High Spirits team. With Knipp on the lines, Katharine The Great has been crowned

the Adult Show Pleasure Driving World's Champion of Champions for the past two consecutive years, as well as garnering two show pleasure driving national championships both in 2018 and 2019 at the American Royal.

"Katharine is probably one of those once in a lifetime kind of horses, physically and mentally," Jim Lowry said. "She is just so correct and beautiful and exotic and all that. For as physically pretty and correct as she is, mentally she is just the same. She has a carriage about her. I've never had anything like her and I've never been around anything like her that just day in and day out every day, even walking is exceptional. We do our best to just kind of stay out of her way and not mess her up."

While Katharine The Great consistently performed well for Knipp and Lowry, Best Show In Vegas, the reigning Amateur Fine Harness World's Champion of Champions and national

champion, took a bit more time to reach his peak. Jim Lowry explained that he lacked consistency—showing well at one show, before showing less than his best during his next outing. The High Spirits team made a few changes during the American Royal in 2018, which produced an excellent result last year.

"We are probably prouder of Vegas than anybody," Lowry said. "We had always worked him a particular way and we kind of just did the total opposite for that show just to see what would happen and he was really good. We just continued to work him that way that summer and he fired every time we took him out and he was fantastic from the first class to the last class. He was just an extremely pleasant surprise. It's always been there. He's been that way. We've seen moments of him being great but we just couldn't get it on a regular basis but this summer every-



Louisville 2019 was a week of roses and tricolors for both Knipp (c) and other High Spirits customers. The talented crew included (l-r) Faye Wuesthofen, Adele Werner, Abby Mutrux, Jim and Fay Lowry, and Allison Cantrell.

thing came together and he was wonderful every time she showed him. That was a lot of fun.”

Knipp explained that Lowry has the ability to fix any horse for her to drive. She said that they are on the same wavelength, which is likely a contributing factor to the great success they have had together.

“Jim is very intense,” she said. “He knows me very well and I know him very well. We think similarly. When you are that in tune with somebody you give it your all. He will be very direct with me. He doesn’t leave anything on the table. If I’m not practicing enough or if I’m not holding up my end, he has no hesitation to tell me about it and I respect his opinion.”

Knipp’s full faith in both Jim and Fay Lowry led to her purchase of the now two-time reigning Fine Harness World’s Grand Champion Madeira’s Code Red. It was Fay Lowry who suggested that Knipp purchase the entry after watching Paul Cates campaign him. Code Red came home to High Spirits in 2017 shortly before Jim Lowry broke his back. Lowry drove him at one show the following year before winning his first of two world’s grand championship titles with the chestnut in the fine harness division.

“Code Red is funny,” Lowry said. “I call him very ‘blue collar.’ He doesn’t light any fires here at home. But he is a big horse and gets to a horse show and gets dressed up and gets prettied up and he knows the difference and he puffs up like 10 times as big as he normally is. He comes to the party



Knipp has spent a lifetime loving the show ring and the many great friends she has made through the sport. Ponies played a major role in her history, especially with her longtime life partner, Jimmy Miller. She is pictured with I’m In Heaven, the 2007 World’s Champion Amateur Junior Hackney Pleasure Driving Pony and UPHA Pleasure Driving Pony Classic Grand Champion. Miller passed away the following year.

clude their 2019 season. The pony is now being prepped for Knipp to debut with this year.

“This is a great pony and the Nichols are wonderful people,” Lowry said. “I am thrilled that Anna Marie is back in the ponies. The plan is to show him amateur and to hopefully show him amateur soon. He is super nice and a total solid citizen. She ought to be able to jump right in with him.”

When Knipp is not at a horse show, she works to promote the equine industry at her farm. High Spirits played host to a public event last summer entitled Horsepower With Heart to benefit the local hospital with the American Saddlebreds on display.

“The people came back and said, ‘We want to see more of the horses,’” she said. “They keep track of them on Facebook. I get a lot of good feeling even from people outside the horse business and that’s what makes you want to do it. I love the breed. I think they are beautiful and they are so athletic and I come from a community that has a big saddle horse history to it so the people where I live appreciate them.”

Knipp herself is also appreciative of the breeds that she has dedicated much of her life to and the people that she has met through her horses.

“I just can’t say enough about Jim and Fay Lowry,” she said. “They are quality people. Their staff is quality people. The people that they have as

and he is extremely athletic and powerful. But at home, he might be out there and working and you probably wouldn’t even turn your head.”

Knipp said that it is an indescribable feeling to own a horse with two consecutive world’s grand championship wins.

“I’m still in shock,” she said. “It was just one of those things that you could not believe it was happening to you and then to repeat it validated it. Jim is very competitive and has a lot of experience driving so I think he is extra good in a big class driving a harness horse. There is nothing to describe it. I never ever dreamed of winning a Saturday night class.”

Lowry’s winning ways continued with yet another of Knipp’s harness entries—although this time his success came along the lines of a Hackney Pony. Knipp had long been associated with the Hackney Pony breed, largely due in part to her significant other Jimmy Miller. However, she took a hiatus from showing ponies following his death in 2008. She had been toying with the idea of returning to the pony business in 2019 and had seen a picture of Crystal Creek’s Knight Raider in an issue of the Saddle Horse Report. Both she and Lowry had a strong friendship with the pony’s then owners Carl and Kathryn Nichols. She ended up purchasing the entry in the fall, as he arrived to High Spirits Farm less than a week before he was sent to compete at the American Royal. Lowry drove Knight Raider to be named the UPHA Harness Pony Classic Grand Champion in Kansas City to con-



Jim Lowry and Madeira’s Code Red were in the spotlight for their second consecutive World’s Grand Champion Fine Harness performance for High Spirits Farm. They also repeated as stallion/gelding world’s champions, national champions, and UPHA Open Fine Harness Horse of the Year.

clients in the barn, both that have history with me and with them are all just first class. Everything is a group effort and I think that makes it more special.”

That special atmosphere at High Spirits Farm plays a key factor in the success of not just Knipp’s horses but the other High Spirits clients as well. Their 2019 show season included top wins from Madeleine Oliver with HS I’m A Dreamer in the five-gaited division as well as a world’s champion of champion title with CH Take It From The Top in the country pleasure ranks. Perfect Elizabeth and Nora Wade reigned supreme in the junior exhibitor three-gaited 13 and under division in what was only their first season together. Gabriella Snyder was named an equitation world’s champion aboard Reedann’s Why Not, and Grace Markel made her Louisville debut teamed with the three-gaited pony Lighter Than Heir.

It is these accomplished horses and their respective owners and riders as well as the High Spirits Farm training team that have kept Knipp in the business for decades. Her success in this industry is not only due in part to her own personal talents, but to the lasting friendships she has formed.

“I have ridden forever and it’s a very important part of my life,” she said. “I am an only child. I don’t really have any true family and the horse business has really filled that in my world. I couldn’t think of better people to have as family.”