



HIGH TAIL ACRES

The Family Tradition Continues

BY SARA PIZZUTO

When asked about her daughters and their work in the equine industry, Dawn DelTorchio is quick to mention a famous Ray Bradbury quote.

“The quote ‘Love what you do and do what you love’ fully embodies them,” she said.

It is this passion for horses and for the horse business that has cemented the family’s High Tail Acres as one of New England’s premiere training facilities, specializing in American Saddlebreds, Morgan Horses, and Hackney Ponies. Skip and Dawn DelTorchio, along with their three daughters, Deidre Henry, Deana Tate, and Darla Wright, are at the helm of this Massachusetts based establishment that has been thriving since it opened its doors to the public in 1997.

Before High Tail Acres was in existence, a young Dawn DelTorchio grew

High Tail Acres has long been a family affair and that tradition continues with Abigail Tate, the 2019 NEHC Saddle Seat Medal Finals Grand Champion and the daughter of Deana Tate (second from right). She was joined by (l-r) matriarch Dawn DelTorchio, Deidre Henry and Darla Wright. »





The love of Hackney ponies and American Saddlebreds by Dawn DelTorchio led to the founding of High Tail Acres. She is pictured here with Model Of Excellence.

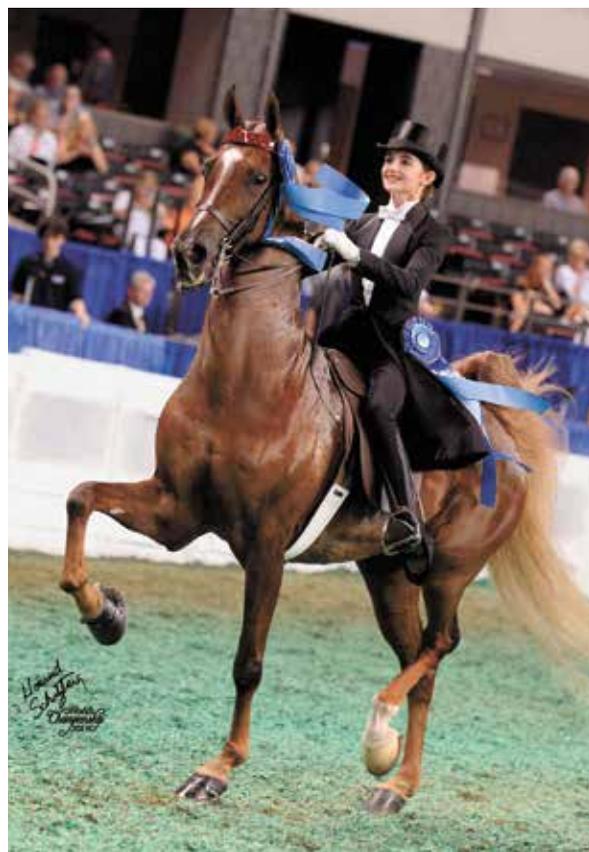


Pictured here with the fine harness champion, Undulata's Legends Of The Fall, Deidre Henry is the eldest of the three daughters who work with their mom to make High Tail Acres a diverse training and lesson facility.

up around the American Saddlebreds alongside her parents Norma and Harold Reader. It was at Northgate Farm in Ipswich, Massachusetts where Dawn was first introduced to this breed.

"My dad fell in love with the beauty of the American Saddlebred," she said. "On his weekly milk delivery to Northgate he would stop and watch a three-year-old Saddlebred being trained. This horse would soon change our lives forever."

Dawn's grandmother would soon purchase the horse named Adaiose for Dawn's sister Dale. Around that same time, Dawn's mom and dad bought the feisty little Hackney, Rare Edition. It wasn't long before both those horses made the move to Dawn's family's home in Gloucester, Massachusetts, for the family to train themselves.



"Being very naïve, but with a thirst to get it 'right,' we were encouraged and supported by our vet and professional horse trainer Dr. 'Bob' Orcutt and his assistant Pat Tataronis," Dawn said. "I remember trainers such as Carl Swedberg, Eddie Carbin, David LaSalle, Poke Barham, Alice and Todd Rodenbush, Irene York and others in both the Saddlebred and Hackney world offering suggestions, assisting us at shows and genuinely supporting us in our new endeavor. We joined the horse breed organizations, followed the NEHC show circuit, became actively involved with breed organizations and learned a lot through trial and error. We became the definition of amateur owner trainers."

Soon, the family outgrew their one acre farm in Gloucester and moved to a new location in Newbury in October of 1973. The new 17 acre property came to be known as High Tail Acres-named by Dawn's parents. Dawn, Skip, and their daughters moved into a newly built house on the farm in 1976.

"Our biggest supporters were my mom and dad," Dawn said. They opened a Blue Seal Feeds dealership store at the farm in 1980. I remember them saying, 'You can do anything you put your mind to.'"

Along with her husband Skip, Dawn began training their horses and ponies and instructing their daughters Deidre, Deana, and Darla. Dawn explained that each of their girls were riding, driving and showing as young as 4 years old.

"They enjoyed great show ring success throughout their junior exhibitor careers receiving numerous year end high score awards. thus establishing a positive reputation over the years," she said. "My policy was no lessons until homework was completed, so oftentimes their lessons were outdoors under the spotlight in all kinds of weather. No indoor back in those days."

« Deana Tate's daughter, Abigail, has grown up to be a highly successful catch rider aboard American Saddlebreds, Morgans and Hackneys, in addition to garnering several equitation honors, such as the 2015 World's Champion 11 & Under Saddle Seat Equitation title and the 2016 UPHA Junior Challenge Cup Reserve National Championship.

Sunday evenings were dedicated to family dinner, with conversations that often led to their dreams of owning a facility that offered outside training, instruction and showing.

"Finally, I said 'Let's just do it. I do not want to regret not doing it,'" Dawn said. "Everyone was on board. That began the process of getting funding, hiring a contractor and presenting our design, getting permits, and for me, going back to school to take entrepreneur and business classes."

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They broke ground on the property on August 4, 1996, with High Tail Acres opening to the public at the beginning of 1997. Since its inception, the facility has become renowned for its successful show horses and riders, developing a reputation of success throughout New England. It is a family affair with each member of the family assuming an essential role in the daily operations of the farm. Dawn is charged with administration work as well as assisting the lesson students, while her husband Skip focuses on the hay, grain and sawdust orders and deliveries and the always necessary ring drag. Dawn refers her three daughters as the "life line" to High Tail Acres.

Oldest daughter Deidre Henry is one of the trainers at High Tail Acres. She is also tasked with coordinating appointments with the vet and massage therapist as well as handling the buying,

selling, and advertising of horses. She explained that becoming a horse trainer was her “calling.”

“I couldn’t see myself doing anything else,” she said. “I would stay up late at shows as a kid watching trainers work horses and I would learn a lot from watching and observing.”

Deidre had valuable internships with other equestrian professionals while studying at the Stockbridge School at UMass Amherst. She credits her time spent at the Covino’s Iron Horse Farm, Lawrence Carss Stables and Dar-Col Stables as being incredibly beneficial for her career.

“Working and learning for these three barns was an invaluable experience that I would not trade for anything,” she said. “Each one had something different to share.”

Sister Darla Wright also works with Deidre on the training of the show horses at High Tail Acres. She additionally instructs and manages the lesson program as well as the barn’s horsemanship program. Like her older sister, Darla knew that a career in the equine industry was right for her. She spent her final semester at William Woods working with Hoppy Bennett at Undulata Farm.

“Had we not been so busy at home in New England I may have stayed longer at Hoppy’s,” she said. “He gave me huge opportunities working with young stock, breaking young horses to ride and drive as well as presenting horses to potential buyers.”

Darla explained that she and Deidre successfully work together when training a client’s horse in order for that horse to thrive in its respective division.

“Although she and I have some horses that we only work, we are always offering insight into improving each other’s horses,” Darla said. “Often times one of us is the ground person while working horses, whether it’s earing them up or adjusting the curb chain, etc. We have small numbers right now so we groom and tack up our own string of horses. We actually prefer to work hands on with the horses in the stall allowing us to learn all of their idiosyncrasies and their personalities. We work closely with our farrier as well as our horses massage therapist and our vets to ensure that are horses are working to the best of their ability.”



Nancy Reed has been a longtime customer and a staple of both the show pleasure driving and fine harness divisions.

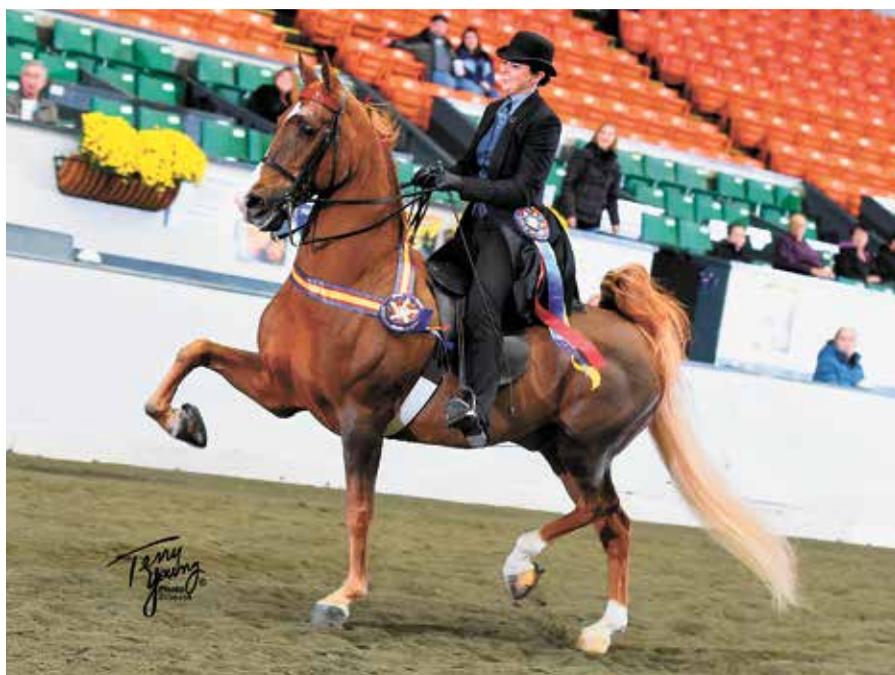
With Deidre and Darla at the helm of the farm’s training operations, sister Deana Tate is charged with teaching lessons in the farm’s renowned lesson and academy program as well as being the caretaker for the boarder’s horses. While in college at Northern Essex Community College she too worked for Dar-Col Stables like Deidre, as well as Chrislar Farm to hone her skills. Deana teaches lessons five days a week and is invaluable when it comes to the progress of the students under her guidance.

“I love to see the riders’ thirst for knowledge,” she said. “Most are like sponges and they will retain what they’ve learned and carry it over to their next lesson, which is an instructors dream. Some don’t

want to show or compete and they love to enjoy the horses’ company and pleasure ride, which is for some more of a therapy session. Both are very rewarding for an instructor.”

Along with Deana, Dawn is quick to mention Eryn Eaton, who instructs any beginner student that walks through the doors of High Tail Acres.

“She has a great way about her that puts the new students at ease and keeps their attention,” Dawn said. “She teaches the basics of riding, giving the students a great foundation in preparation for their lessons with Darla and Deana. Eryn has been involved with us since she was a student riding, driving and showing during her junior exhibitor



Darla Wright and her most challenging project, Kalarama’s Hollywood Lights, put it all together for this UPHA 14 Spring Premiere Three-Gaited Park Grand Championship.



Little Acre Dancia is one of the Morgan stars at High Tail Acres. She has won several Western Pleasure Championships with Darla Wright aboard.



High Tail Acres is known for producing top riders that start in their Academy program and end up in the show ring. Deana, Darla, and Deidre are pictured with Khanh Creedon who came through the program and in 2019, her first year showing in a suit, won the Walk and Trot Saddle Seat Equitation Championships and qualifiers at Syracuse International and Greater Boston and this year has made victory passes in the Pleasure Equitation division at UPHA 14 Summer Classic and ASAM Summer Spectacular.



Although now "adulting," Deidre's son, Conor Henry, grew up showing at High Tail Acres and was a big part of the operation.

years. She has been teaching since graduating from college. She is like a daughter to me."

Those riders training in this highly praised lesson program have gone on to earn multiple world's and national titles all under the guidance of High Tail Acres. Darla explained that both the show and academy riders ride in at least one private lesson as well as one group lesson each week, which allows them to achieve success in the show ring.

"It goes without saying that I am so proud of her. Abi is all about 'Do the work and the rest will fall into place.'"

"The privates allow us to work on something specific to the rider whether it's working on strength, cardio or something specific they are working on with their show horse," she said. "Groups are all about strategy and having the riders work on placement in the show ring. We also do a lot of patterns for all the riders as they develop a better understanding of the importance of good clean transitions and how our body weight and position correlate with a good presentation of their horses."

The show riders additionally receive instruction from all members of the High Tail Acres team during their lessons.

"We all tend to offer instruction in a slightly different manner, which allows our students to really understand what we want from them while riding or driving their horses," Darla said.

"The best feeling for me is to see our riders' accomplishments and their reaction to them," Deana said. "Whether it be a successful blue ribbon, coming up on the correct diagonal without looking, achieving a smooth transition into the canter or keeping their horse in a collected canter, each has their own personal goal and it's so rewarding for me to witness them succeed."

One of those riders, Abigail Tate, is Deana's daughter and a direct product of the High Tail acres program. Abigail is continuing her family's legacy

in this industry, sharing in her mother's passion for horses. She has cemented herself as one of the top junior exhibitors in the country known for her innate ability to expertly pilot any horse she is on, as well as for garnering world's and national titles in the equitation ranks. She represents yet another generation of this family to reach the pinnacles of success in this sport.

"Abigail has been a huge integral part to all of our students here as well," Deana said. "She instructs with a purpose and in a way the kids can relate and they follow through and achieve so much in one lesson. It's awesome to watch. When she is showing a horse or catch riding a horse her feel and communication with that horse is so inspiring. I'm so very proud of all that she is and I love that we share our horses with each other. I am so blessed she calls me 'Mom.'"

Dawn added that Abi has been invaluable during the present Covid-19 situation.

"Although she has always practically lived in the barn, she has taken on a leadership role, especially with the lesson horses and students and our horsemanship programs," Dawn said. "It goes without saying that I am so proud of her. Abi is all about 'Do the work and the rest will fall into place.'"

With a team of consummate and talented professionals, a tremendously strong family tradition, a passion for the industry, and a new generation of horsemen and women on the rise, it is clear that High Tail Acres will continue to serve as a top training facility in the years to come. It is the family legacy and rapport amongst her daughters that means the most to Dawn.

"I silently watch the three of them with the horses, the students, the customers," she said. "They have such different personalities, thus affording us the unique opportunity to team work at its best. They don't always agree, but they respect each other's opinions. They bring their all to the table and are deeply invested in the success of our horses and students. They approach everything head on. They are dedicated to this sport and participating in it with integrity and pride. They continue to persevere, even when the going gets tough. They innovate, problem solve and work hard."

Their tight knit family grouping and their ability to rely on each other's expertise and opinions have allowed them to indeed "do what they love" and do it successfully too.



The family atmosphere at High Tail Acres has been its signature as have Hackney ponies. Abigail Tate is aboard Syracuse International Road Pony Under Saddle Champion Keeping The Faith.