

Julie Kaufman and Bob Hughes



By Sara Pizzuto

Julie Kaufman distinctly remembers the day she turned 14. It was on this day where she was legally granted a worker's permit and finally allowed to officially work in the barn where she so desperately wanted to be. She was given the job of a trail guide, tasked with taking vacationers for horseback rides along the marshes and beaches of Sea Island, Georgia. It was this job that would foreshadow the rest of Julie's career, eventually joining forces with Bob Hughes as prominent Saddlebred and Morgan horse trainers in Kentucky.

"Sea Island Stables was the reason I fell in love with horses," Julie said.

While at Sea Island Stables, Julie began taking lessons with Marvin, Dot, and Amy Long. The barn was home to Saddlebreds that the local children, including Julie, would take lessons on and show throughout Georgia.

"Most of us did not own our own horse but Mr. Long and Amy provided some wonderful horses for everyone to enjoy and learn on," Julie said. "They were wonderful people and amazing mentors."

Julie's job at Sea Island Stables cemented her love for horses, as she eventually chose to attend Stephens College to further her passion. While there, Julie was introduced to Ellen Beard, who she says was instrumental in directing her path.

"She is such a dedicated, knowledgeable horsewoman and I was so lucky to have learned so much from her," she said. "Ellen taught her students that the horses' care always came first



(top) Bob Hughes and Julie Kaufman's partnership began in 2015, when Bob brought his Morgans to Julie's Blue Willow Farm.

(center and left) Both Julie and Bob have had illustrious careers. Julie was honored with the UPHA Sallie B Wheeler Distinguished Award at the 2019 UPHA Convention.



no matter what. It was at Stephens that I realized I could actually turn my love and passion for horses into a profession."

In order to join this profession, Julie first needed to continue to gain knowledge from industry experts. Ellen Beard set Julie up with a job at Delovely Farm during the summer after her freshman year of college. Here, Julie worked alongside Raymond and Lillian Shively and Todd Miles. She even had the chance to show some of their horses.

Tom Galbreath's Castle Hills Farm in Versailles, Kentucky was Julie's next destination during the summer after her sophomore and junior years. Steve and Julia Joyce were training there as well and were incredibly influential in Julie's young career.

"It was a pleasure and a privilege to work for Steve and Julia," she said. "They provided me wonderful opportunities and I will always be grateful to them."

She returned to Castle Hills Farm full time upon graduation from Stephens College and began her career as a professional horsewoman. Along the way, she received guidance and additional education from Frank and Nancy McConnell, the Pettry family, Joe Elam, and Nelson Green.

The lessons learned and wisdom and knowledge that she received led Julie to her current position as trainer at Blue Willow Farm, located on 38 acres in Versailles, Kentucky. It is here where a mutual friend introduced her to Bob Hughes, eventually welcoming him to her team in 2015.

Bob's foray into horses began in the small town of St. Clair, Michigan. Shady Lane Farm was where Bob first learned to ride, following in the footsteps of his father who was a 4-H leader. As a teenager, Bob worked for Arabian horse trainer Tim Shea, as well as Saddlebred trainer Frank DePolito.

"I then worked back home and kind of did things for myself for a little while," Bob said. "Then I decided I needed to go somewhere else and then I went to work for Bob and Judy Whitney at Whitney Stables."

Bob eventually made his way to the West Coast, settling in California training at Rock Walker Stables alongside Rock Walker. Their industry-leading partnership lasted for 20 years before they decided to go their separate ways. Bob then developed Blackridge, continuing his own business for an additional 10 years in California.

It was in California where Bob began his breeding ventures, laying claim to the breeding rights of Morgan notables such as Mastroianni. Bob explained that "Ronnie" was the son of a cross that he had wanted to try for a while.

"I actually had Kim's Bellegante, who Mastroianni is out of, and I also had Mizrahi who he is by," Bob said. "Breeding them was just something that I really wanted to do. Some people thought that I was maybe crazy for doing it because they were half brother and sister. But that same year I bred The Noblest and

Faragamo as well. All three of those horses were studs and all three were world champions in the divisions they showed in."

Bob took his talents as both a breeder and a trainer to Kentucky. It was here where his path would soon cross with Julie Kaufman and her Blue Willow Farm.

"Bob was renting stalls in Versailles and I had some stalls available," Julie said. "Bob had one Saddlebred and the rest were Morgans. At first, Bob was just renting stalls from me but after asking his advice and getting his help working a few horses, it turned into more of a partnership. I have always loved the Morgans and I am so thrilled to be able to go to the Morgans shows too."

"Julie kind of needed someone to work horses and I kind of needed a bigger facility," Bob said. "They gave me a job offer that I just couldn't turn down and gave me everything I wanted."

Glenn T. Werry is a client of both Bob and Julie and said that their partnership was a positive move for both of them.

"It was kind of an organic thing that Bob's business was starting to grow in Kentucky and he needed to move to a different facility and then teamed up with Julie," Werry said.



(left) Park harness horses have been a favorite of Bob's to train. A highlight in his career came on the lines of Tomeri Symphony GCH, who was crowned the 2016 Park Harness World Champion.

(below left and right) Julie loves watching the successes of the students in her program. She is especially proud of Ava Greer and her three-gaited pony Revere.



Julie Kaufman Bob Hughes

"Trainers have so much on their plate that to be able to have a teammate that can do a lot of the administrative side with show coordination and customer communication and help each other fill some of those voids is really critical."

The partnership that Bob and Julie have developed is now responsible for training both Morgans and Saddlebreds. While Bob's Morgans continue to show under the Blackridge banner, all of their show horses call Blue Willow Farm their home. The daily operations of the barn begin quite early as Bob insists on feeding every morning.

"He wants to make sure all the horses are getting the proper amount, certain supplements, etc.," Julie said.

Bob then fills out his work chart, while Julie catches up with office work. They then collectively start to work the 27 horses that are in training, with half being Morgans and half being Saddlebreds. One of those horses in training is Tomeri Symphony GCH. Bob's name has been cemented in history with a myriad of world champion harness horses. However, the Open Park Harness World Championship title was something that eluded him for many years, until 2016. Tomeri Symphony GCH was the mare that helped Bob achieve his dream of earning the garland of roses as the Park Harness World Champion.

"I love harness horses, I always have," Bob said. "It's just kind of something that I am good at. So it's just something that I end up doing more than the others."

Teri Brisco, the owner and breeder of Tomeri Symphony GCH, explained that she and her husband Tom knew that Symphony was special from birth.

"When she was born, she looked just like a harness horse," Teri said. "She's a great mare, she's a sweet mare, and she's got everything that the Morgan has to offer. I have loved showing park harness horses but never dreamed that she could win the open Park Harness World Championship and be the first mare to win it in 30 years. We were just so excited. Bob loves her and she loves Bob. He is an artist when it comes to a harness horse, an absolute artist."

Dressed Up GCH is another one of the park harness horses in training in Kentucky. The stallion left Oklahoma last year as the

Amateur Park Harness World Champion. Glenn T. Werry is the driver of this talented horse who explained that the idea to purchase Dressed Up was presented to his family at the 2014 Jubilee Regional.

"I was talking to Bob on the way to the show and he said, 'I just saw a horse that you have to buy,'" Werry said. "We bought him about a week later and we have owned him ever since. He is a true joy and privilege to own and get to show, and we feel very fortunate that Bob has brought him along. One of the reasons that we appreciate Bob so much is not only his old school horsemanship, but we appreciate his standard of care and his attention to detail. Those are things that we value highly. He has gone above and beyond our expectations in all of those categories"

Dressed Up GCH serves double duty as both a show horse in full time training as well as a breeding stallion. Glenn T. Werry said that Bob's vast knowledge isn't isolated to just training. His successful history with breeding horses has been an instrumental component of Dressed Up GCH's breeding career.

"He has trained so many generations of the horses' parents," Werry said. "The generational familiarity has been really, really important for him to educate us on what we think will work with Dressed Up."



Dressed Up GCH left Oklahoma City last year as the Amateur Park Harness World Champion for Donegal Hills Farm. The talented stallion's breeding career is also in the capable hands of Bob Hughes.



Glenn T. Werry has known both Julie and Bob for many years. He feels as though their partnership has been a positive move for everyone.



Teri Brisco and her family have enjoyed a long and successful history with Bob Hughes. Their Tomeri breeding program has produced many world champion Morgan horses.



Under the direction of Julie and Bob, the Tom and Teri Brisco bred Tomeri Swingtime GCH achieved success at the Morgan Grand National with both Griffin Day in 2017 and Addison Johnson in 2018.



Bob and Julie's partnership includes a training program as well as a lesson program that introduces Saddlebreds and Morgans to the locals.



While she prefers coaching from the rail, Julie has also enjoyed great success in the show ring in several divisions. She is pictured here with the multi-titled road pony, Buckwheat.

Bob furthered this point by explaining that both Dressed Up GCH and Tomeri Symphony GCH have ties to his breeding program.

"Ironically, Dressed Up is by a stud, Mizrahi, that I used to own, and Symphony is by a stud, SLB DaVinci, that I used to have also and out of a mare, Med E Oka French Rivera, that I bought for the Briscos years and years ago," Bob said. "With their breeding, I have had pretty much all of their dams and sires throughout the years. They are just wonderful horses."

These successful horses are all a product of the dedication that Bob and Julie instill in their training program. In addition to this booming operation, Julie has implemented a strong lesson program run by Andrea Steponaitis.

"Andrea has been with me for 15 years and she is amazing," Julie said. "She does the work of 3 people. She is one of the hardest working people I know. Her work ethic is second to none. There is nothing she can't do."

Andrea teaches about 75 lessons a week in the Blue Willow lesson program. She works with a variety of students and enjoys taking them to nearby academy shows and helping them through the process of first time horse ownership. Additionally, lessons are also offered through the Woodford County Parks and Recreations program, where Andrea and Julie introduce both Saddlebreds and Morgans to the locals.

"A highlight for me every show season is watching a student that started in our program from day one, that had never been on a horse, learn to ride and progress, fall in love with it, get their own show horses and go to their first horse show and see their joy and sense of accomplishment," Julie said. "I love the process. To know you helped create that is the best feeling in the world. That never gets old."

Whether the focus is training, breeding, or lessons, it is evident that both Julie Kaufman and Bob Hughes have the knowledge needed to help their clients excel in these divisions.

"When you go to the farm, they treat you not like a client but like a member of the family," Teri Brisco added. "Julie will do anything for you. There are a lot of things that clients typically have to do themselves, but not with Julie. You need a golf cart? Julie will get you a golf cart. They will do anything and I appreciate that immensely."

The partnership of Julie Kaufman and Bob Hughes combines both of their talents into an exceptional barn for both Saddlebreds and Morgans.