



Indian Creek Farm

THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE TRAINER OF THE YEAR

BY SARA PIZZUTO

For decades, Indian Creek Farm has been at the forefront of Morgan supremacy with their champion show horses. If you were to delve into the inner workings of this training establishment, you would find a team of staff that work together diligently to develop the breed's best. Head trainer Shanna Gish along with her assistants Maynor Diaz, Shea Zepke, and Mallory Stacy Sciaraffa concluded their 2020 show year with a myriad of world titled competitors. It was this remarkable show season culminating in incredible achievements that helped Gish and Indian Creek Farm earn your approval, being voted the People's Choice Trainer Of The Year.

Shanna Gish first climbed into the saddle as a toddler-riding with her grandfather on his ranches in western Oklahoma. Her ranch rides evolved into local weekend shows with POA's. As fate would have it, Gish's father met a woman, Marlene Petersen, in Tulsa who raised Morgans and thus began her introduction to this breed.

"Dad bought our first Morgan for \$750, and she was an unbroken 3-year-old," Gish said. "We broke her to ride by me sitting on her and my Dad leading her around. I was only 7. Beginner's luck I guess that we didn't get me killed but she was a great horse, Queens Ransom, who went on to be my first Morgan show horse and my first to show at The Morgan Grand National under the training and guidance of Jonalyn (Evans) Gwinup."

Gish was fortunate enough to learn and show Morgans during her

junior exhibitor career under the continued direction of Gwinup as well as Tom Harkins, Chet Sole and Stan & Paulette Bodnar. She next attended the University of Kansas all while continuing her involvement with the breed.



The Indian Creek Farm training team added The People's Choice Trainer Of The Year honors to a highly successful 2020 show season. (Left to right) Shea Zepke, Shanna Gish, Maynor Diaz and Mallory Sciaraffa joined Tomeri The Regalest GCH and Renee McLean following their world titled ride.

Upon graduation, Gish and a classmate moved to Chicago and started an ad agency, Gallop Communications, that specialized in the equine industry. Among their first clients were Merriehill Farm, Indian Creek Farm, Springmill Morgans, and Lowry Stables. It was through her work with these barns that Gish realized a career change was needed.

"The thing was that even through all of that work, all I wanted to do was be in the barn with the horses and my trainers at the time, Stan and Paulette Bodnar," she said.

"They reinforced my work ethic and love of young horses and gave me so many opportunities. We would do all of our work at night, so I could be at Merriehill during the day and go to shows. Indian Creek and Kurt Hufferd were clients at the time and in late 1996, they gave me the opportunity and nudge that I needed to make the jump into training and instructing professionally. I am fortunate enough to be here 25 years later."

With the help of Jonalyn Gwinup, Tom Harkins, Chet Sowle, Helen Crabtree, and Stan and Paulette Bodnar, Gish was able to hone her craft. However, she credits Kurt Hufferd, her former fellow trainer at Indian Creek for most positively influencing her training career.

"He told me day in and day out that I was good enough to train successfully," Gish said. "I don't think that I would have made that leap without him. Kurt gave me theory and methods to train the young horses and gave me the opportunity to take a young horse from scratch and teach it a skill that they would have forever. It is hard enough to maintain a broke horse or one that someone else has started but to take one that you raised and bring it along is a very satisfying and rewarding process all of its own. I am still learning and learning never stops for me"

Gish has since taken on head training responsibilities at the helm of the Quilhot's Indiana based Indian Creek Farm. She is joined by Maynor Diaz, who has long been an integral part of the Indian Creek Farm for over 20 years. Diaz assists in all aspects of the farm and is one

of the assistant trainers. His efforts and achievements were recognized in center ring at the 2020 Morgan Grand National as he received the UPHA Caretaker's Award.

Assistant trainer Shea Zepke is yet another valued member of the Indian Creek staff, also receiving the nod as the People's Choice Reserve Assistant Trainer Of The Year. Zepke explained that she joined the team at Indian Creek in 2015 initially to solely ride the colts. However her roles at the barn have since evolved. In addition to Zepke, Mallory Stacy Sciaraffa is yet another assistant trainer and instructor that has been one of the most recent additions to the team. Sciaraffa amassed an impressive show record as a winning junior exhibitor and amateur competitor before beginning her career as an assistant trainer. Sciaraffa mentioned that she loves the diversity of Indian Creek as it allows her and the other team members the ability to immerse



Many of the Indian Creek Farm clients joined the training team to celebrate their success at the 2020 Grand National and World Champion Morgan Horse Show. There are always plenty of good times had where the Indian Creek Farm banner is hung.

themselves in all facets of the equine industry.

"There are so many moving parts to the farm—colts, amateurs, kids, lessons, breeding and foaling, and managing the farm," she said. "I love that you get a taste of everything. I feel like Shanna, Maynor, Shea, and I all have different strengths and that really allows us to have such a diverse group of horses here. We really see ourselves as one big family and team and we all work together really well."

Together, Gish, Diaz, Zepke, and Sciaraffa are responsible for the success of the top show horses that call Indian Creek their home. Many of these horses are a product of not only the Indian Creek breeding program, but the Springmill Morgans, Stoney Point Farm, and Fairwind Farm programs that raise young horses under the Indian Creek banner. Gish explained that she initially became interested in breeding after watching Paulette and Stan Bodnar breed, raise, and train their young horses.

"It really gave me a new perspective from my junior exhibitor days," she said. "I loved the foals and the different bloodlines and how they came together under their guidance. It was magical to me and something that I wanted to be more a part of."

When Gish joined Indian Creek, she teamed up with Kurt Hufferd to revamp the already established Indian Creek breeding program. They chose to concentrate on the mare side of the pedigree using Cache and Long Acres Broadway as the cornerstones of that program. Eventually John and Patti Huse's Springmill Morgans and Pat and Bill Shean's, Stoney Point Morgans became an integral part of the Indian Creek family. Gish said that all breeders are focused on breeding for quality and performance.

"We do our best to select mares and stallions that are known to produce good show horses and that will have quality and trainability no matter the division," she said. "I think that we are able to produce horses with good size as young horses and they are developed well physically and mentally. We are really trying to raise and train horses that will be good citizens for the rest of their lives. To have good lives, they all need a purpose and a job. We are of course breeding for show horses but they aren't all going to turn out to be exactly what we envisioned. It doesn't matter, it is up to us to find their niche and get them headed in that direction."

Gish is quick to emphasize that all members of the Indian Creek team are responsible for the care and development of the young horses. The farm has become well known for its winning junior horses, many of which earned world titles in 2020 at the Morgan Grand National. Gish was on the lines of Indian Creek Seahorse Sam, the Four-Year-Old Pleasure Driving World Champion as

well as Indian Creek Highland Park, the Two-Year-Old Pleasure Driving World Champion and the Futurity Pleasure Driving Two-Year-Old Reserve World Champion. She piloted ICA Daredevil to be named the Two-Year-Old Park Harness Reserve World Champion while Megan Buckley drove Indian Creek Electra, the Futurity Classic Pleasure Driving Reserve World Champion. Gish said that being able to raise many of the junior horses as foals has been invaluable to their development in the show ring.



Shanna Gish credits the entire team for the ongoing success of Indian Creek Farm. The ability to be with the horses from their first breath to their first world championship is not lost on Gish who is pictured here with Maynor Diaz and Indian Creek Highland Park.

"I am able to be with them when they take their first breath, their first step and their first drink," she said. "The trust and relationship with each of them all feeds into their success. Our staff is with them every step of the way so when it is time for them to go to work, get on a trailer for the first time or to debut at a show, we know them so well that we can anticipate strengths and weakness way ahead of time. In addition to that, we have probably worked their mothers and sometimes their fathers and most likely full siblings."

Shea Zepke was aboard Hollywood Cary Grant to score the yellow ribbon in the Futurity Three-Year-Old English Pleasure World Championship last season. She explained that starting the young colts under saddle has been one of her favorite roles at Indian Creek.

"I really enjoy the process of bringing them along and getting them going and watching them be successful in whatever division they are going into and also being able to take some of those colts myself and finish them out," she said. "It is the most amazing part about my job."

From young horses, to young riders, and a myriad of amateur mounts as well, Indian Creek truly succeeded in all division while in Oklahoma

last season. They celebrated the 2020 walk/trot world champion pair of Madeline Thomas Higgins and Pinecreek's Second Vision all the way up to the Amateur English Pleasure Reserve World Champion Tomeri The Regalest GCH ridden by Renee McLean. Mallory Stacy Sciaraffa met her mother Taddy Stacy in the winner's enclosure as the Amateur Masters Park Saddle World Champion aboard DRF Charlemagne GCH, while Shanna Gish rode MJS Black Velvet to the reserve honors in the Ladies Park Saddle World Championship. Gish said that much goes into the equation of pairing her riders with a new show ring partner.

"I think the first step is really getting to know your rider/driver," she said. "Know their tendencies and what they really want in a horse partner. Then we try to go out and find the best horse that we can within our budget. Sometimes we can find it from within our own show string or maybe it is a horse that we have always wanted for someone. I have had the best luck not getting in a hurry to buy or find a horse. I love the 'know it when I see it' moments and those have been our best combinations."

Regardless of the division, whether in harness or under saddle, Indian Creek has established a reputation as a leading training establishment in the industry. Their talents in the show ring are exemplary, their lessons and instructions are outstanding, and their clients are always satisfied with their horse show experiences. Gish stressed that her team of assistants coupled with Indian Creek's caretakers and lesson program staff comprised of Gladys Diaz, Kayla Shultz, Ariel Wolfe, Olivia Winn, Ambrosia Vasquez and Eber Diaz all help to make Indian Creek a thriving establishment.

"All of this would not be possible without our amazing staff," she said. "We have been able to bring together and develop some top horsemen and women at Indian Creek, and it really is a dream team in my eyes."

What started as a childhood love for horses has developed into a career of record achievements for Shanna Gish. That first Morgan that Gish's father purchased on a whim was the catalyst for decades of success.

"If I had not found my passion, I have no idea where I would be now," she said. "Training horses was never a 'goal' for me at a young age but having them in my life in some way was. My passion for them and sharing my experiences with others is what steered me toward training and teaching professionally. It was a natural fit. I never looked back or away from the Morgans. They gave me my passion and the opportunity to make a living doing what I love. I owe it to this breed to stay with them as long as I am able."