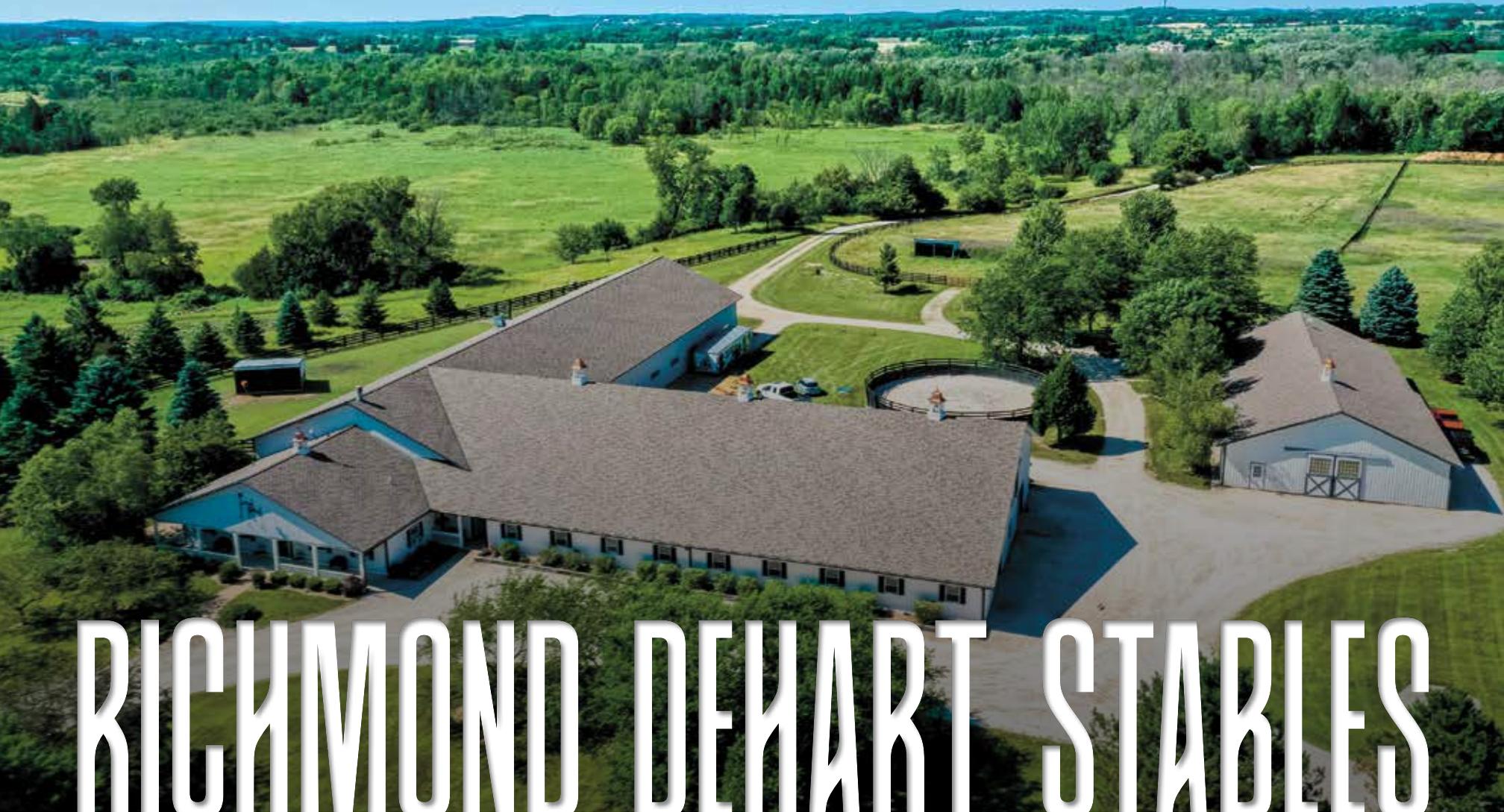


The pristine property in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin, was originally home to the Bonnie Byrne Stables, then Hollow Haven Farm, and now Richmond DeHart Stables.



# RICHMOND DEHART STABLES

## JOINS THE OCONOMOWOC SADDLEBRED SCENE

BY BOB FUNKHOUSER

At 18-years-old Jon Spheeris convinced his father to let him breed a mare, although the family's trainer at the time, Chat Nichols, told his father they didn't need a broodmare. Determined to make it happen, the young lad kept pushing his father until he gave in. That persistence led to him breeding Lofty Elaine, a Yekcohs daughter, to Vanity's Sensation of Crebilly and the resulting foal was Stonehedge Vanity. Some of you might recognize the name; she turned out to be the dam of world's champion CH Caramac, who in turn sired world's grand champions and world's champions for Callaway Hills for many years. He also produced, among others, the outstanding sire, Undulata's Nutcracker.

That experience stayed with Spheeris and inspired him to continue breeding American Saddlebreds several decades later. Besides the breeding game, he has had show horses with George Knight, Dale Milligan, Jim Koller, and Rick Wallen in addition to the aforementioned Chat Nichols.

This backstory is what brought him together with Richmond DeHart to establish a partner-

ship at what had been Hollow Haven Farm in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin. He originally bought and developed the Saddlebrook Subdivision with Bonnie Byrne and Nancy Leigh Fisher. Spheeris and Fisher also each built a house there and Byrne built a barn across the street. Upon Byrne's retirement from training, Andy and Lynda Freseth moved their operation from Minnesota to Oconomowoc and added on to the facility and built a lovely home on the property.

Fast forward to 2020 and the Freseths bought property in Versailles, Kentucky, and put their Wisconsin farm on the market with Spheeris and his Coldwell Banker Real Estate firm.

"We had a small farm that I was just fixing up and where I was going to take my broodmares, but I didn't have anyone to take care of them," said Spheeris. When I heard Richmond was looking for a place it seemed like the perfect opportunity for me, horse wise and business wise. I bought this place and sold the other farm. It's a beautiful property that Bonnie Byrne built and the Freseths improved it and maintained it beautifully.

"Richmond DeHart is a very talented, young horseman. I've had horses at a few places but have watched him show and work horses and was very impressed. I think he's one of the most talented young horsemen in the country.

"It worked out to have my mares here and I like to breed to the old blood. I bred to Sultan's Santana and he has been dead for 30 years."

Spheeris is setting himself up to be as successful as possible by putting together a most impressive list of mares. He acquired world's champion Tory Burch (Designed x Harlem's Santa Fe by Harlem Town) and this year is breeding her to Tango's Parting Kiss, CF First Night Out, and Merchant Prince. Another mare is Callaway's Northern Fling (Callaway's Blue Norther x Callaway's Hot Type by Jamestown), the dam of world's champion of champions Hi-Fling. She is being bred to Tango's Parting Kiss who sired Hi-Fling.

Another Stonehedge Saddlebreds LLC mare is Crystal's American Idol, a Nutcracker daughter out of world's champion CH Crystal Illusion (by Sultan's Santana). She is being bred to Callaway's

Northern Kiss, Callaway's Blue Norther, Top Of The Mark, and Tango's Parting Kiss. Next year she will be bred to CF First Night Out, Merchant Prince, and Mountainview's Heir To Fortune. Also in the broodmare band are Stonehedge Naughty Martha (Sultan's Santana x Carefuleigh by CH Caramac) who is being bred to Designed and A Passion For Success (Undulata's Heir Apparent x CH The Border Star by CH Talk Of The Town) who is currently being used as a surrogate mare.

Now that the breeding program has a nice home Spheeris is looking forward to seeing the training program develop under DeHart's guidance. The young trainer is thrilled about the opportunity to work out of such a great facility and be a part of the history there in Wisconsin.

"A mutual friend of ours, Kathy Gutenkunst, the former owner of Lexington Lights, introduced us a little over a year ago and we worked out a deal that is good for both of us," said DeHart. "Right now I'm working about 20 head. The focus of Richmond DeHart Stables is to get established in the area and see where I fit into the Oconomowoc puzzle. Not sure if everyone knows, but Oconomowoc and the surrounding area is well populated with American Saddlebreds. There are five other training/lesson/breeding farms within a 15-mile radius.

"I am lucky to have moved into a barn that was built by a Saddlebred person. It's a beautiful 32-stall barn on approximately 36 acres with a five-stall broodmare barn. Andy and Lynda [Freseth] moved out on a Monday and I moved in the next day.

"I'm still getting my feel for everything but we plan on going to May Classic in Milwaukee, Midwest Charity, Oshkosh Charity, ASAW

Summerfun, then on to Louisville. We'll see what happens after that."

DeHart is a second generation horseman who not only worked for his father, but also spent time apprenticing with some of Kentucky's finest. He is already well known for his gaited horses, including Reserve World's Champion Five-Gaited Mare Lexington Lights, who was third with DeHart in the 2020 Five-Gaited World's Grand Championship in his first attempt at the big stake.

"Growing up with Wyatt DeHart as my dad was a blessing," said the younger DeHart. "He knew early that I wanted to do something with horses but he never pushed me to do it. Actually, probably more of the opposite, he wanted me to do more school and figure out if I was sure. I heard a lot growing up, not just from dad but a lot of horse trainers, that there are a lot of things in life easier than being a horse trainer but the only thing that brings me more joy than working a horse is being with my two beautiful children, Aurora and Belle.

"As soon as I was able, dad would throw me on anything from ponies to breaking colts and eventually show horses. I got a lot of opportunity to make mistakes and he would never get mad. He just tried to help me understand every horse is different. We still talk almost every day and he is my best friend and mentor.

"I graduated from high school six months early and went to work at Tre` Lee's at the young age of 17. I did a little colt breaking and got to take care of some really nice horses. Tre` did things I had never seen before and is still one of the most talented people I have ever been around. He and his family took me in when I was just a kid and treated me like family. They are great people and I will always think of them as my close friends.

"After two years there I worked for Carl Fischer and Peter Palmer at Meadowlake. This was my first experience working my own string of horses. Peter gave me about 15 head and just turned me loose. I made a lot of mistakes but it allowed me to learn how every horse is an individual and you can't rush things. Peter was good to me and helped me learn a lot about the business part of the industry.

"Then I worked for Brian Chappell for two years at Roselane Farm. This was by far an experience of a lifetime. At one time we had more than 75 broodmares, 50 yearlings, and an abundance of training horses. We always had more than enough to do but that wouldn't stop Brian from giving me a 30-minute explanation on a question I had about a horse or training technique. He is one of the best horsemen I've ever been around and is a great teacher. He loves to teach and to watch his students learn and grow and succeed. We were a great team and sold a lot of very nice horses in that two-year stint. It was a great time and I will always be very thankful to Brian for turning me into a horseman, instead of a horse trainer."

With a solid foundation and a knowledgeable partner who has spent a lifetime in the American Saddlebred world, DeHart is excited about this new chapter in his life. He just got home from his first show (Des Moines) as the Richmond DeHart Stables and with that success has his sights set on what lies ahead. He'll continue to work hard and use the lessons he learned from the talented horsemen who shared their wisdom with him. Grateful for those experiences and the opportunity he now has, it's just a matter of time before Richmond DeHart Stables becomes a vital part of this historic Wisconsin American Saddlebred community.



The indoor arena has been the work place for many a world's champions and now DeHart will have his shot at it.



The facilities at the Richmond DeHart Stables are second to none thanks to the vision and care of previous American Saddlebred trainers.



The young trainer has attracted much attention with his Reserve World's Champion Five-Gaited Mare, Lexington Lights.