

A LEADER OF LEADERS KEITH BARTZ

by Bob Funkhouser

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hen it came to leadership in the show horse industry, the late Keith Bartz was as decorated as CH Wing Commander or CH My My were in the ring. His vision and integrity allowed him to cross the halls and serve virtually every organization in the industry well at one time or another.

Bartz passed away Saturday, January 27 at the age of 84. The founder and former owner/trainer of Hollow Haven Farm, Chanhassen, Minnesota, had retired in Naples, Florida with his bride of many years, Carol.

The Wisconsin native was a horse owner at the age of 10 and soon gravitated to the American Saddlebred after being exposed to them on the local circuit. He was quoted as saying years ago, "It's that star quality which Saddlebreds have that first attracted me and still does."

As a business administration major at the University of Wisconsin he was head of the school's riding club and it was there that he met his future wife. Part of his duties included teaching lessons and Carol fell off during a lesson. The story goes that he filled out the accident report and remembering her name and phone number, later asked her out. Some four years later they were husband and wife.

Training horses on his own time, Bartz first tried the business world with Honeywell Corporation in Minnesota. It wasn't long before he had his corporate friends interested in horses and they were sending their children to his Hollow Haven Farm for lessons. It was tough juggling both and thankfully for the American Saddlebred industry Bartz eventually gave Hollow Haven Farm his full attention.

While in Minnesota, the Bartz family was instrumental in developing and guiding many top amateur and junior exhibitor combinations, in addition to developing future horsemen like Andy Freseth. During this time Bartz was also an ASHA judge licensed in 11 different divisions and he served as UPHA President in 1977 and '78.

October 4, 1977 Andy Freseth joined the family at Hollow Haven Farm. He was looking for a career as a horse trainer and to learn to ride a five-gaited horse in particular.



Surrounded by his daughter Cary (far left) and wife Carol (far right), Keith was presented with 2010 UPHA Larry Bacon Lifetime Achievement Award by Tammie Conatser.

"I went as an assistant trainer but I was actually an apprentice to Bob Jensen," said Freseth. "I went there for a six-month apprenticeship and 40-plus years later, I never left. I lived with Keith and Carol and Cary and Steve. When Bob left they asked me to stay on. It was my first opportunity to work for anybody training horses in a professional setting."

"Keith was extraordinarily smart, totally immersed in the business. He was so smart and could teach you so many things about life. He could really read people and communicate with people. Keith emphasized listening, whether that was to people or your horse. 'Pay attention to the horse, they will tell you,' he would say. He also would tell me, 'train with your brain. Don't just go out there in a circle.'

"And in all those association meetings he would be the one who would sit there and take it all in while everyone was going back and forth with their points. Then he would speak up, basically giving a summary of the conversation that had just taken place and always having a selfless comment to inject. He always said it simplistically. It might not have been the best thing for Hollow Haven Farm but if it was best for the industry as a whole, he was for it.

"Keith was a good listener and he was great at managing people. He was very fair, very honest. He taught me to say 'good morning' to the staff individually, every day. It's something I still do. He also was very good at knowing how much to give you. He never gave me more than I was ready for. He encouraged me to watch and learn from other people who knew more: Fritz Jordan, Ed Teater, Tom Walsh."

Freseth credits Bartz with teaching him financial responsibility and also instilling in him the belief of being a part of whatever it is you do.

"I would never be where I am today had he not given me the opportunity to own Hollow Haven Farm. I am who I am because of him. He was so motivational," said Freseth. "Keith could get one person to do the work of two people at half one person's pay. He got me to do it when I first started and it was willingly. He also told me that if I was going to belong to something, then I should participate. 'Don't join if you're not going to participate,' he would say."



The American Saddlebred Horse Museum will always be a big part of Bartz' legacy. He is pictured here (far left) at the dedication with Dale Duffy, Alvin Ruxer, Roz Harris and Bill Whittenburg.



Keith Bartz was recognized by several organizations on a number of occasions. Maryann Cronan presented him the 2010 ASHA Wing Commander Medal.



In 1978, as President of the UPHA, Bartz presented Helen Crabtree with the Horseman Of The Year Award, the first time it was awarded to a woman.

The former business major was sought after and lent his financial acumen to many of the equine organizations. In addition to UPHA President, he was the Executive Director of the American Saddlebred Museum for over 10 years, serving as the Director of Development while playing an instrumental role in the building of the Museum at the Kentucky Horse Park. With the United States Equestrian Federation (USEF) he served on the Board of Directors, Budget and Finance Committee and the Admin & Finance Working Group as well as Chair of the Licensed Official Committee and member of the American Saddlebred, Ethics, Compensation and Human Resources and Nominating Committees.

"Keith had the ability to cut through any discussion and present a solution or an alternative that made you wonder, 'why didn't I think of that?' He was a man of integrity, kept his word," said Judy Werner. "Keith had a great moral compass. As David O'Connor said when he heard about Keith's death, 'He was the rock we all stood on.'

"I always think you can tell a lot about someone by how they are treated by their former customers," added Werner. "At Lexington and Louisville you had better get to Keith and Carol weeks ahead if you wanted to join them for dinner. They were booked for breakfast, lunch and dinner by past customers from Hollow Haven Farm. I think that's a big statement regarding their integrity and transparency when it came to running their business."

Some of those who got their start at Hollow Haven or were there early in their careers, include the Scott Smith family, Tolley Graham Moore Graves, the Franklin Groves family, Judy Mordaunt, Priscilla Gise, Sari Levine, Alice Lear, Becky Taggart and Ann Brickzen, among others.

A strong communicator known for his fairness and integrity, Bartz was honored many times over for his contributions, including the 2003 USEF Walter B. Devereux Sportsmanship Award, the 2005 Sallie B. Wheeler Award and the 2013 USEF Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2010, the ASHA recognized Bartz with the Lifetime Achievement Award.

Werner and Freseth both had strong connections to the late leader and both unknowingly gave their friend the ultimate compliment with a conversation they had not long ago.

"I had something that was bothering me and Judy [Werner] happened to be standing close by," said Freseth. "I went over to her and proceeded to tell her my problem and she listened and listened. Then she looked at me and said, 'Andy, what would Keith have done?'"

Bartz will be long remembered by many, including his wife Carol, children Cary and Steve, and loving grandchildren. The family asks that any memorials be made to the American Saddlebred Museum Endowment Fund.