

FUTURE FORUM

The Up and Coming of Young Trainers

By Britni Kovalenko

Horse training is one of the toughest jobs one can undertake. You are not only spending all your days on the back of a horse trying to educate a 1,000-pound animal, you need to be a businessman, a competent bookkeeper, and a public relations director knowing how to promote your business and how to proficiently communicate with your clients. All of this goes on while also taking care of everything around the farm, making sure all is in good working order. A diligent trainer should also participate with the organization of horse shows, because without horse shows, what is a show trainer working towards?

Your job is more problem solving and less ribbon winning, but in the end, it is all worth it to spend your life doing what you love and sharing that love with the people around you. The icing on the cake is introducing the love of horses to even more people. Nothing can beat the joys of the giggles of someone's first time attempting to trot

a horse, the rewarding smile from a rider nailing their pattern, the cheers from an owner when their horse does well, and even the rewarding feeling at the end of the night, when the barn is silent and all you hear is happy horses munching on hay.

While the horse industry may be on a slight pause with the COVID-19 pandemic with cancellations of horse shows, no lessons, no camps, nothing that provides the extra money to supplement trainers' everyday income, those things will be back. While it could be a time where a lot of people become disheartened, it is also a good time to start thinking about the future of the industry. Looking around, one can wonder what hands our future is going to be in. Who is going to be the next up and coming competent group of professionals?

That's where Future Forum – The Up and Coming of Young Trainers has come to light. The idea

is to share stories, truths, tips and encouragement from today's young trainers. How they got to where they are, what is their favorite part of training, what are the challenges. This is not just to encourage the younger generation to be part of the industry, but for the industry as a whole to know we do have a bright and successful future.

In the weeks to come, we will share these profiles of young trainers and their journey to help lead our industry to a healthy and thriving future.

Leading our mini-series Future Forum – The Up and Coming of Young Trainers is the Morgan and Saddlebred trainer, Merin Maggi. Maggi is the owner and trainer of Maggi Stables in Hollister, California. After apprenticing at a few barns and being an assistant trainer at another, Maggi opened her own training barn in her home state at the age of 21.

Give us a breakdown of where it all began for you. How did you get involved in horses and at what age?

MAGGI: My grandparents had a cabin in the mountains for family vacations. There is a historic town nearby called, Columbia, set in the gold rush era of the 1850s. Part of the fun was taking a "trail" ride around the old west town. After a few visits, I was hooked and fell in love with a big quarter horse named Skippy. The tour guide mentioned he was for sale and by the next weekend my mom borrowed a horse trailer and we owned our very first horse!

What made you decide to become a professional trainer?

MAGGI: When I was a teenager, I was a bit of a control freak when it came to my horses. I would spend my days at the barn, but I swore I would not make a career out of training horses. I wanted to go to school to be a psychologist, but somewhere along the way I couldn't stay away from the barn long enough to pursue anything else! – I wouldn't change a thing.

Have you worked under any other trainers? If so, who?

MAGGI: I lived in the barn as a kid, so I consider those formidable years my apprenticeships. I started with Susie Morgan at Triton Morgan Horses and then transitioned to Cathy Grimes Training Stables during my junior exhibitor years. I was blessed to get a lot of saddle time on a variety of horses. When I realized I wanted to pursue training as a career, I decided I needed to find an assistant job and I wanted it to be educational. I was very fortunate to be able to take a job with David Rand in Maine. It was the best opportunity any young professional could have, as you learned how a large operation with the top horses in America operates.

Who are your role models/mentors? Why?

MAGGI: I have a long list of trainers/people I look up to. The show world is full of generous professionals, willing to help out when needed. From the trainers I worked for to Bob Kellert, Gerry Rushton and Stacy Hennessy, Craig Clapp, and most recently Jim Cherry, he has been instrumental in adding Saddlebreds to my string.

What is your favorite thing about being a trainer?

MAGGI: The horses and the people! There is nothing better than a quiet day at the barn, the sun shining, and working horses outside! Some of my happiest memories are Saturdays at the barn with clients though. We really are a family and have a great time! I think that applies to the show world too, we are an industry that takes care of each other and genuinely like spending time together. I don't think you get that at an office job.

What is the hardest thing about being a trainer?

MAGGI: We win and lose with our clients. The disappointments are tough. We dedicate our lives to our horses and our clients and when things don't go well, you can't just go home and turn it off. You always strive to improve and you start to problem solve to make things that may have not gone well better.

What advice do you have for the younger generation who have their eyes set on becoming horse trainers?

MAGGI: Don't get frustrated! Patience is key in this business and every time you feel like you have put the time in, there is someone else working harder! Plus, don't be afraid to ask for help! It's amazing how willing everyone in this industry is to share their knowledge.

What do you think is essential for the industry to focus on to ensure its success?

MAGGI: Working together to promote ourselves to the public. We need more people like Steve Handy and Helen Roy who are creating and running programs and marketing focused on continuing to bring the industry as a whole together, as well as bringing new people to the breeds. Participating in events like the horse expos can also help promote our breed. Also, building relationships within the industry to work together to create a healthy environment. That extends between professionals and amateurs, we need each other for this sport to thrive and survive.

