

# FUTURE FORUM

## *The Up and Coming of Young Trainers*

by Leeann Mione

This is another segment in a Saddle Horse Report series featuring the stories of young trainers from across the country. There isn't a school for horse training outside of the "school of hard knocks" so it's interesting to follow the paths taken by these young professionals as they pay their dues in their quest for making a successful career out of their passion for horses.

This week we are featuring Erin McCracken who is the owner and trainer of Seraphim Stables in Augusta, New Jersey.

**Give us a breakdown of where it all began for you.**

**How did you get involved in horses and at what age?**

**ERIN:** My parents took me to an open house at Arabian Knights Farms in Willowbrook, Illinois when I was eight years old. I made my mom sit with me as close as we could to the horses with them trotting by almost on our feet.

It was that moment that I got up and signed myself up for lessons without even asking my parents. I took lessons with Van Robinson for a few years at Arabian Knights Farms and our first lease horse was a retired old gaited Saddlebred. I was sold!

I wanted a Saddlebred of my own and wanted to show. After much begging, my parents decided to buy my sister Kate and I our first horse. Melanie Feldges introduced us to Nealia Molback at the time and we purchased a western/hunt/saddle seat horse named Tropical Night. We brought "Topper" back to AKF where my sister and I did all his work and training with the assistance of Melanie.

We showed Topper for a season and decided to send him back to North Wind Stables for a tune up before Saint Louis National. My sister went on to win the Junior Western Pleasure Finals on him in 1994. At that point, we never left North Wind and then my dad went on to marry Nealia.

**What made you decide to become a professional trainer?**

**ERIN:** Once North Wind Stables moved east, I stayed in Illinois but still showed on the east coast when my work schedule allowed it. I could never really get away but I didn't want to be away. In 2006 I moved east to start working at North Wind Stables but things at that time didn't pan out like planned. I stayed on the east coast but went back to healthcare for my career. I was always being drawn back to the horses. I think I finally made it official in 2012 (give or take, I lose track of time) to become a professional trainer.

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

**ERIN:** I've been taught and trained by Nealia McCracken, Mayo Moctezuma and Tom Thorpe but all under the North Wind banner. Once I became family to Nealia, if she had other riders in the class with me she would get other trainers to help me warm up and help while I was in the class, so I've "lessoned" with other trainers but mostly while in the Midwest.

**Who are your role models/mentors? Why?**

**ERIN:** It's hard to pinpoint one person but I would say my family in general. I'm a very family-oriented person. I know I've been taught or given a lot of valuable advice/life lessons from all of them that I use in everyday life.



**What is your favorite thing about being a trainer?**

**ERIN:** Well that's an easy one; being with horses every day! I love to watch my riders succeed in and out of the show ring. When you've worked hard to put a team together and it finally clicks, it's very rewarding!

**What is the hardest thing about being a trainer?**

**ERIN:** I think the toughest part of my job is having to put a horse down or help a client with that decision to put their own horse down. I'm also a bit of a perfectionist, so when things don't go right, it makes my job harder because I won't let it go until it's right.

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

**ERIN:** Be prepared for long days and hard work! Be patient, kind and honest. Don't be afraid to ask questions and reach out to fellow trainers if you get stuck. Have someone you trust available who can help you with the business side of it when needed.

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

**ERIN:** To keep promoting the breed in a positive manner. We need more instructors in our industry to keep bringing in new clients. New clients equal more horses which leads to potentially bigger shows which leads to more money being brought into the industry. We all need to work together. I'm chair of the UPHA Chapter 15 and it's not easy to get fellow trainers to help or even attend meetings. If you're not involved in an organization, get involved! It takes a village and every one of you is part of that village.