



Hard-working Region 8 Maclay Medal winner inspires a little help from her friends.

by Kim F. Miller

"You need to talk to Emma Pacyna."

Georgy Maskrey-Segesman got that message from a few friends and fellow equestrian professionals about a year ago. She operates a sporthorse sales and leasing program at her family's Whitethorne Ranch in Moorpark and was on the lookout for a working student suited to making the most of the opportunity.

Georgy knew of the Pacyna family for several years. Led by mom Michelle Pacyna, the family's Fieldstone Riding Club is just a few miles from Whitethorne. And, Emma's older sister Zoey rode with Karen Healey as a junior, when Karen's business was based at Whitethorne, and Karen had helped both girls periodically over the years.

Emma's riding abilities had already caught Georgy's eye. "She has such a beautiful position – the quintessentially American forward style of riding. It's a very East Coast look, elastic in her elbows and she follows the horse so well off the ground." As the sponsor of the Whitethorne American Tradition of Excellence Equitation Challenge, Georgy is a dedicated advocate of the style, following in the footsteps of mentors Karen and George Morris.

When friend Melissa Jones offered to set up a meeting with the Pacynas, Georgy was on board. Emma signed on as a working student, arriving at the HITS Thermal circuit early this year with several horses to campaign in the equitation divisions and help prepare for Whitethorne's professional rider Savannah Jenkins.



She soon impressed Georgy to the point that the relationship now includes sponsoring 17 year old Emma through the final 18 months of her junior career. This includes a specific goal: earning an athletic scholarship to attend college and compete on a National Collegiate Equestrian Association team. "It's always been my dream to ride in college," says Emma, who hopes to become a veterinarian.

There's a gravitational pull surrounding young people who help themselves, and Emma's solar system is growing. Along with coaching and providing multiple horses for Emma to school at home and compete, Georgy helps with related costs. Savannah, an NCEA rider for Baylor University, offers support and advice and Karen provides pro bono coaching. Others are rooting for Emma as a hard working kid of normal economic means with talent and dreams in an unusually expensive sport.

Not Spoiled

"It's so nice to do this with someone that's not spoiled," Georgy reflects. For Karen, Emma is the latest of several talented, hard working young riders she's been happy to help over the years.

Emma's character has been shaped by her parents, Michelle and Mark, and growing up in the family business at Fieldstone. The working student role is nothing new, including the experience of doing such a good job with a sales horse that it gets sold.

“My mom has always had sales horses, so I’m used to it now,” Emma confirms. “Plus it’s fun because you get to ride a bunch of different horses and have the experience of building up a connection with them.” Hands-on horsemanship is a Fieldstone priority, so grooming, stall mucking, tack cleaning and whatever else needs doing are a normal day’s duties for Emma.

Now a senior in high school, she’s been an independent study student since ninth grade and loves the schedule flexibility that allows. When the Whitethorne position entailed grooming for Savannah while she was campaigning Grand Prix horses at Spruce Meadows in Canada, Emma packed her homework and made the long haul with Georgy, Savannah and the horses.

They’ll do the same for many more big shows, but “not on a billionaire’s budget,” Georgy clarifies. Emma’s fearless attitude toward hard work is a perfect fit for the program’s do-it-yourself approach to hauling, mucking, grooming, etc., and her demeanor is the cherry on top. “She always has a smile, she’s wickedly funny and she rolls with the punches,” Georgy shares.



An Eastern Sensation

As the plan to attract the attention of top NCEA coaches took shape, Georgy decided a trip to the East Coast circuit was in order. Not to go after the big ribbons, but to check out the competition. “It was my first time going back East and it was meant more as a practice run,” Emma explains.

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It turned out to be a little more than that. At the prestigious Devon Horse Show in May, Emma scored a 90 in the WIHS class for overall fifth amidst the nation's top juniors. At the Upperville Colt & Horse Show in June, she won the USET Talent Search, the jumper phase of the WIHS Classic and the Vermont Horse Show Association/EMO Insurance Agency Hunter Seat Medal class.

Emma admits to being a tad intimidated by the quality of competition, though that didn't affect her riding. Beautiful green scenery and chances to watch Olympic show jumpers Beezie Madden and McLain Ward compete in person were bonuses.

The much better than expected results should help in the recruiting process. "When she won the USET at Upperville, I almost had a heart attack," laughs Georgy. With USET Talent Search Finals East and Maclay Finals winner McKayla Langmeier behind her on winner's podium for one of those wins, Emma is no longer flying under the radar.

Back home in Southern California, Emma logged a big win of the Region 8 Maclay Finals in mid-September. These recent outings set up a confident return to the East Coast this month to tackle parts of the intensely competitive Indoors circuit. She and the Whitethorne crew head east for the Taylor Harris Medal Finals, the USHJA Jumping Seat Medal Finals – East, and the USEF Pessoa Hunt Seat Finals. The Maclay National Finals, at the National Horse Show in Kentucky, complete her ambitious fall itinerary on Nov. 4.



Gifts Gratefully Received

Casalino was Emma's main equitation partner at Devon and Upperville. Not surprisingly, he's since been sold. Going forward, however, Emma can count on having her Maclay Regionals partner, Constantinos, a 7 year old former jumper, for the duration of her junior career. It's one of many gifts Emma is grateful for. "It's great to have the chance to create a bond with him and really get to know him this year and next."

“I turned down a half a million dollar offer for this horse,” Georgy acknowledges. “It may be a mistake, but he is not for sale. Yes, this is a business for me but, at the end of the day, this is my sport and I want to play!” Promoting a California kid to national prominence is another motivation. “We’re as good as the East Coast and I want to prove it.”

Plus, there’s the pure fun and excitement of being a team, or “a perfect storm of brilliance,” as Georgy calls it. “It’s not about me as a trainer, it’s about our collaboration – with Savannah and Karen and Emma. It’s success for all of us. That’s the dream.”

There’s a lot riding on Emma’s success and she hopes to deliver in a way that fulfills her own dreams and those of her team. Fieldstone’s veterinarians Maia Aerni, DVM and Marta Grandstedt, DVM, are among the many to whom she is grateful. Emma’s been a keen observer of their care over the years and cites that exposure as her motivation to join their profession. Last year, one of Fieldstone’s horses had kissing spine and Emma loved learning the back stretches and other techniques that helped him stay comfortable. She hopes to ride all her life, but says that “finding ways to keep horses comfortable and enjoying their lives” seems the most compelling career path.

Along with Georgy, Savannah and Karen, Michelle Pacyna gets credit and appreciation. “I have to thank my mom for allowing me to have this opportunity and teaching me everything up to point that I got this opportunity.” Sister Zoey gets a shout-out, too, as she’s happily picked up extra work at Fieldstone when Emma can’t spend her afternoons at the family training barn because she’s on the road competing.

Fieldstone has done its share of good deeds for young equestrians over the years, so Emma getting some help has a pay-it-forward feel. Georgy’s desire to support her is inspired by support she received from Tom Blackiston as a young rider. And, also by the generosity and support of her parents and mentors in the sport.

Emma goes East just as recruiting inquiries are coming in and college applications await completion. Wherever the college quest ends, the journey is already as good at the destination for this inspiring team.