



***Building the base and promoting WestCoastBestCoast are priorities in the New Year.***

As the new decade begins, we chatted with leaders in the hunter/jumper, eventing and dressage worlds about their biggest concerns for their disciplines. Hunter/jumper advocate Kathy Hobstetter and eventing's Lisa Sabo weigh in here, while Dressage News & Views columnist Nan Meek and California Dressage Society president Ellen Corob address top concerns (this issue).

---



**Kathy Hobstetter: USHJA Zone 10 co-chair & founder Equestrian Sport Advocates.**

### **1. Building the Base**

Our sport on the West Coast can't be only about the big multi-ring shows. We are losing the base of our sport by being focused on how many rings, how many divisions and how many horses can be fit into one show. In the process, it's taken away focus on the grass roots – on growing the base of our sport and the beautiful shows where riders can begin their competitive education. Our specialty, unique, marvelous horse shows and managers are dropping by the wayside one by one.

Managers, trainers, owners and exhibitors can take action by deciding on personal priorities.

Not everybody has to fit into a premier show barn or show – not everybody can afford that, especially new riders just getting into showing. There's great personal satisfaction to be had in being the instructor that taught that beginner who just got their first ribbon, or jumped their first jump. Helping build the base and being sure growth starts at the bottom is the heart of competition and the base of any healthy sport. It is important we have a wide group of professionals (instructors) and lesson barns focusing on the ladder with which people ascend our sport. The ground and education on which that ladder stands is of vital importance to the future.

### **2. Nurturing Young Professionals**

We need to focus on what the next generation of professionals is going to do and on how we can build professionals who are hard core horsemen, not just winners. My fear is the sport is becoming so focused on winning, that we are a little short on creating horsemen and real trainers.

There are some bright spots. USEF Youth Chef d'Equipe DiAnn Langer is developing a rider pipeline, and Julie Winkel's Horse Industry Training School at Maplewood Farms in Nevada are vital to sport and horseman development. I also like the idea implemented by Chenoa McElvain, and Rancho Corazon in New Mexico, with their summer scholarship opportunity for young riders to learn the ropes through hands-on experience.

Ideas like these need to be expanded and supported and discussed in-depth with experienced professionals giving back to the sport. Established professionals should be open to giving back by either developing a program of their own or being part of an existing one, rather than being critical of them, which is often the case.

### **3. Mentoring**

This point is intertwined with the above point about helping professionals and individuals at all levels of horse sports, but we need to support it across the board: with trainers, show managers, breeders, barn managers and those involved in all aspects of the equestrian business. There should be an intricate, detailed program for mentoring people in a way that tangibly prepares the mentee. Too often, internships and working student positions become free or cheap labor for the mentor's business, instead of stepping-stones to a viable career in our industry.

### **4. Customer Service**

I personally believe everybody should be a restaurant wait person for two years - to understand the concept that the customer is always right, even when they're not! Professionals don't always recognize the right of the customer to ask questions, be interested and ask for education and help. At the same time, the biggest part of customer service is educating our clients, helping them understand: why it's so expensive, why footing is important, why the programs funded by show fees matter; why preventative veterinary care is critical, etc.

### **5. Safety**

Not enough attention is paid to safety in general, and especially on some show grounds. There's a lack of attention to the preventative measures to address problem things that can happen. For example, there is typically no protocol for load-in and load-out days at most shows. People drive where they want, park their trailers wherever it's convenient, with no thought to what or who they're blocking. Even if there were such protocols, possibly trainers would likely

not heed them. That's not only rude: it's dangerous.

Dogs are another example. I understand it's fun to have your pet at the show grounds, but they don't always belong at the show, especially off the leash. It is only my opinion, but family dogs have no business at shows. And all dogs need to be leashed and attached to their owner.



**Lisa Sabo: Area VI Eventing; owner Sabo Eventing & the Newport Mesa Riding School**

Embarking on her second year as chair of US Eventing's Area VI (California & Hawaii), Lisa says the membership's focus should be on promoting the region by emphasizing why the West Coast is indeed the "Best Coast."

There is plenty to promote!

### **1. The Best Weather**

Yes, it gets hot sometimes, but we never have the humidity that other places have. Horses do well in our weather. We should especially be promoting our Spring calendar of events, when the weather is horrible everywhere else and our events are beautiful.

### **2. Good Competition**

We have good competitions at all levels and a virtually year-round schedule. They are great places for professionals to bring their amateur riders, juniors and young horses, along with their top horses. We are light on entries in the top divisions, but even so, the internationally focused riders we do have are increasingly acknowledging that going East is no longer mandatory as a means of preparing for team consideration. USEF eventing chef d'equipe Eric Duvander loves the West Coast and is regularly visiting to coach and evaluate our riders for all levels of the international pipeline.

Look at the recently-released USEF Training Lists: Tamie Smith and Frankie Thieriot Stutes remain on the Pre-Elite List. And the Federation's 2020 Eventing 25 Program includes Area VI-ers Mia Farley, Mallory Hogan, Sophie Hulme, Kaylawna Smith-Cook and Maddy Temkin. Tamie and Mai Baum did all their Pan American Games team gold medal prep here in Area VI. So did Andrea Baxter and Indy 500 for their great run at Burghley up against the world's best.

### **3. Good Footing**

Our organizing teams have done a great job improving the footing. The Horse Park at Woodside and Shepard Ranch, for example, have "aggravators" that make the track soft without ripping it up. We are sometimes criticized for not having more grass tracks, which are the norm back East. They look pretty, but that can be a very hard surface. Our organizers and course builders have really worked hard and invested a lot in creating and maintaining good footing. They've really become experts at it and we now have some of the best footing in the country.

### **4. Best Trainers**

Area VI has more trainers certified by US Eventing's Instructor Certification Program than any other area. And it shows. If you watch Preliminary riders at an Area VI event, 90% of them ride super well.

I firmly believe we have the best trainers and training programs anywhere in the country. It's the result of a rising tide effect that is lifting all boats. For many years, people like my husband Brian Sabo, Yves Sauvignon, Derek and Bea DiGrazia and Dana Lynd-Pugh developed many students who became trainers themselves. Now in some cases, it's their children.

### **5. Friendliest Atmosphere**

There's a real team atmosphere out here. The eventing community in general is known for this, but it's very pronounced in Area VI. We lend a hand whenever a fellow competitor needs it and root each other on in a way that's unique to our region. While we are a close-knit community, we also welcome those who travel from afar to be part of it and embrace them as our own. Like Galway Downs CCI4\*-L winner Sara Mittlieder, who travelled from Idaho this past fall for a big career win that preceded her receipt of a Rebecca Broussard Travel Grant at the recent USEA Awards Banquet. Horses and riders from Arizona and throughout the Northwest are regulars at our competitions and we'd like to spread our reach to the Midwest and the South. Along with advancing our skills and experience out here, we are having a great time!

#WestCoastBestCoast all the way!