

TRAINING, BOARDING & BUYING

East Bay Area hunter/jumper program soars from a horsemanship intensive foundation.

Hunter/jumper trainer Mimi Harwell believes it is important to get the details right. “Taking care of the horses, teaching the riders, and making sure the right homework is getting done will always pay off in positive results,” she says. She puts her philosophy into practice as owner and head trainer of Clean Flight Equestrian, located at the beautiful Sunny Hill Farm in the East Bay’s Walnut Creek.



The success of her clients reflects the wisdom of Mimi’s approach. Her team has earned

numerous championships at A and AA shows throughout Northern California, including those of Alice Martin and Dolly, the 2016 PCHA Low Children's Jumpers Champion and 2016 Zone 10 Horse of the Year Low Children's Jumpers.

As nice as show victories are, Mimi reiterates that it is horsemanship that is most important. "The horse is the foundation of the riding relationship. If you aren't watching the horse, aren't listening to the horse's needs, ensuring he is fit, healthy, and content, then you won't be successful."

Originally from Stanfordville, NY, Mimi started riding at the age of 4. As a junior, she rode hunters and jumpers on the A circuit under the tutelage of Olympian Michael Page. Michael had a very special influence on Mimi. "He always led by example," Mimi explains. "He polished his boots every day, groomed his own horses, and paid attention to the job at hand, whether in the saddle or teaching on the ground. Every year, he would ride all winter without stirrups." Mimi took these lessons to heart; like her mentor, she always strives to get better and to set a good example for her riders.

While attending Rice University in Houston, TX, Mimi captained the IHSA Hunt Seat team for two years and represented Rice at the Nationals' Cacchione Cup in 2008. That same summer, she travelled abroad to ride and show young horses for the Kennedy Equine Centre in Tralee, Ireland. After receiving her BA in Philosophy in 2009, Mimi moved to the Bay Area to work as an assistant and rider for Sue Lightner and then Joy Parker. When

Joy retired in late 2013, Mimi took the opportunity to found Clean Flight Equestrian.

At Clean Flight Equestrian, Mimi and her staff put the horse first, adapting her program to the individual needs of each horse. "My approach is very hands-on. It's very time intensive, but it's worth it. We always strive to do right by our horses, and that means knowing each horse well enough to hear what the horse is telling me." Mimi works closely with regional vets and bodyworkers, ensuring each horse is in optimum health. Her training regime focuses on the basics—conditioning, hill work, flat work, transitions, bending—but customized on a daily basis to each horse's current needs.

A Positive Approach

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Mimi gives her students the same personalized attention. “As an instructor, I have a very positive approach toward teaching. It’s about building up the rider, creating a supportive, fun environment where they can thrive, and then focusing on the basics. That lays the foundation everything else is built on. If the student isn’t getting something or isn’t doing something the way I want, it’s not their fault. It’s my job to change the way I’m teaching, so that they can understand better. It’s the same thing when training a horse: if they’re not picking something up, it’s up to me to explain it to them in a way they can understand.”



All of this is possible because of the facility at Sunny Hill Farm. “We’re lucky to be at Sunny Hill. Its peacefulness puts everyone in the right state of mind, and it has all of the amenities we could hope for.” Nestled in the shadow of Mount Diablo, Sunny Hill Farm is centrally located—a short drive from everywhere, but hidden away so it feels far from the city. The facility has three rings, two of which are covered, and nine turnouts. Barn owner Jen Grubb-Reed takes pride in maintaining the beautiful facility, and she is in constant conversation with Mimi about how to make the farm even better.

Mimi also works hard to foster a sense of camaraderie—within each horse and rider team, and among all of the riders at Clean Flight Equestrian. “For the training to succeed, it is important to make a place where people feel happy and welcome, where they know their trainer and their teammates all stand behind them. When we go to shows, each individual’s success is really felt and celebrated by the team. We’re all in this together.”

This unique, supportive environment has attracted a core of loyal riders eager to sing Mimi’s praises. “People often ask me why I drive all the way from San Francisco to Walnut Creek to

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ride,” Julie Kennedy volunteers. “The answer is simple: Mimi Harwell is an incredible trainer. I particularly appreciate Mimi’s keen insight into my learning needs and my horse’s well-being. She tailors every lesson to help us work toward our goals, and that has led to truly satisfying progress. And best of all, Mimi makes it really fun to be part of her team!”

Mimi’s show team is a natural extension of her teaching priorities. “We are successful because we’re bringing what we learned at home to the show. Our priorities are to continue to focus on the basics, to continue to do right by the horse and rider, and to support one another. Do that, and the ribbons come naturally.”

Mimi’s focus on details, on empathy and compassionate understanding, and on team building has created a group that is equal parts happy and successful. The final product is a fun and memorable show experience for everyone involved, and plenty of champion ribbons to go around.

For more information on Clean Flight Equestrian, visit www.CleanFlightEquestrian.com, e-mail mimi@CleanFlightEquestrian.com, or call Mimi Harwell at 845-548-4285.