

Texas Rose Horse Park: From Dream to Reality

"IF YOU BUILD IT, THEY WILL come." That oft-repeated mantra in the poignant baseball film *Field of Dreams* has become cliché in the years since the movie's premiere in 1989. But that same year, a young Texas horsewoman named Kimberly Brunson came of age—having long harbored a real-life vision that wasn't too different than the fictional one pursued by Kevin Costner's protagonist. Brunson's own hypothetical field of dreams, though, centered around the concept of a world-class equestrian facility in rural northeast Texas—to be developed on a scale and scope grander than any other existing such venues in her home state. If she built it, would they come?

That question was answered with a definite "yes" when the 1,700-acre Texas Rose Horse Park (TRHP) in Tyler—a hugely ambitious project painstakingly planned, designed, developed and built by members of the Brunson clan spanning three generations of ages—debuted in May with a series of three hunter/jumper shows (two rated AA by

Kimberly Brunson's dream is now up and running.

USEF). So many entries came in that a waiting list was created for the third event. The Brunsons built it...and indeed, they came.

Set amid gently rolling hills of native sandy soil, liberally dotted with towering pine trees and bordered by miles of handsome board fences, the TRHP has benefitted from Brunson's years of research into the best elements of show facilities from all over the U.S. and her solicitation of suggestions from myriad experts representing all factions of equestrian sports. And while

Brunson readily admits that the TRHP remains a work in progress, she's ecstatic to witness her life's mission in action, at last.

Brunson's realization that her dream had come true finally hit her full force, she said, when she saw two of her most treasured mentors—Dallas trainer/rider husband-and-wife team Mike McCormick and Tracy Fenney—driving through her front gate with a rig full of horses to



show. The moment prompted Brunson to reflect on her underlying inspiration for developing the TRHP.

"When I started showing as a teen," Brunson explained, "Texas was a thriving state to show in. I wanted to develop a great facility to bring great shows back to Texas, and to develop the equine industry so Texas would be a driving force. I also wanted to give students in Texas and surrounding states a competitive edge, and validity to have the ability to compete at national and world levels."



The opening of the Texas Rose Horse Park filled the need for a top horse show facility in that area of the country.



Emma Roberts and What-A-Bean made quite a splash when they won the Large Green Pony Hunter division.

The subconscious seed for such a place was planted early on. Brunson grew up on Wagon Wheel Ranch, established by her parents in 1977 at its original location in Coppell, TX. The operation later moved to its existing location in the Dallas-area town of Grapevine—about a 90-minute drive from the TRHP.

As an adult, Brunson's career choice of trainer was a natural progression—and she took it seriously, becoming certified at several levels. Today, Brunson still teaches a roster of students who have excelled in the national and world arenas of numerous horse-show disciplines. In fact, Brunson's own broad experience in a variety of disciplines and breeds has contributed to the TRHP's plan to host equestrian events of all kinds on its expansive grounds. Brunson's job at the TRHP is aided by Events & Operations Director Teresa Horn; Facility Manager Paul Streck and his associates, Mike and David Vaughn; and Allen Reinheimer, who developed most of the plans for the facility and supervised the development of the arena footing.

That footing is among the many elements that have earned praise from exhibitors, including Therese Peck of Dallas—who on May 27 captured both the champion and reserve champion titles in the Amateur Owner Hunter 18-35 division. "My horses liked the good footing and the big, open rings," Peck

declared. "And having more rings going at the same time is nice because it means you don't have to wait around all day. This place is so pretty; it almost has a kind of Kentucky feel to it. It's a very pleasant place to show, especially with all the trees."

Houston trainer Patty Roberts, whose daughter Emma was champion on her own What-A-Bean in the Large Green Pony Hunter division, agreed. "I think the footing in the rings and the well-laid-out courses contributed to Emma's pony doing well," Roberts said. "What I also like is that there are a lot of places to ride, the barns are well-ventilated, and the stalls are roomy. It should stay fairly cool here, even with Texas weather. It's going to be beautiful, and it's been a long time coming."

Not such a long time coming will be more improvements and additions to the TRHP. For now, the venue offers two outdoor hunter rings, two outdoor schooling rings, an outdoor jumper ring and an indoor arena. A 400' by 400' grass grand prix field will be ready in late 2008. There are three permanent stables that can hold up to a total of 314 horses, and the addition of three more barns will bring the permanent-stall capacity to 1,000. About 200 tent stalls were erected for the May shows, with grounds capacity for several hundred more. Also planned is a cross-country

course for three-day events, a dressage arena and an equestrian driving course. Brunson's ultimate wish, she said, is for the TRHP to one day host the USEF Pony Finals National Championships.

But for now, Brunson said, "This has been a lifelong dream and a new experience. We are constantly learning and adapting to make our facility the best it can be. We have had so many knowledgeable people guide us and help us like Patrick Rodes, Mike McCormick, Steve Braley, Pauline Cook, Dave Morse, Robert Barton, Jim and Joan Henson, Tucker Williams and many others we could not have done this without." Brunson discussed the challenges, which included "all the things we could not control, such as the weather—and the constant, exhausting work. But seeing all the people enjoying our facility makes it worth it."

As Southbound Shows Manager Rodes summarized: "Texas was way overdue for a really good horse show facility, and everyone sees the potential for that here. We've got a great facility to build on, and I think that's very exciting."

■ ANNE LANG



Therese Peck riding Above The Crowd in the Amateur Owner Hunter 18-35 division to the win on May 27.

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