

# Day of the Morgan 2017: A Look Back

By Sandy Sessink

I have been a “Morgan person” for a very long time. I have spent the better part of my life training and showing the breed I fell in love with 50 years ago. I’ve experienced the heart-pounding excitement of the highest level of competition.

But, my humble start in the breed was on a much more basic, grass roots level. I believe this is where we grow our most loyal Morgan people; from the seeds that are planted at the beginning of the relationship with the horses. It is an extremely rare Morgan person’s story that starts with a spotlight victory pass in Oklahoma City.

Fertilizing our grass roots and expanding the base from which to grow Morgan ownership, participation, and love was the objective of AMHA’s Day of the Morgan. The feature event was an open barn day, where exactly 100 stables opened their doors to the general public, giving people the opportunity to meet Morgan horses on a personal level for their first time. On October 28, 2017 people from Maine to California, and Florida to Michigan touched a horse for the very first time. A Morgan horse, of course. Some of them got a chance to climb on and ride one, or ride in a carriage. They got to see them in action and experience the joy in the air at a busy Morgan stable on a Saturday afternoon.

The success stories of the day were nothing short of inspirational. Without being able to list each and every stable’s results, I can hardly contain my excitement about a few that knocked it out of the park. Lori Beasley’s Morgan Valley Farm in Michigan had an amazing 400 visitors within a four hour period. One carload showed up 30 minutes early, and the last one pulled in five minutes before the end, with a jam-packed parking lot from

start to finish. 100 of those people signed liability waivers so that they could ride. And one little girl loved her short ride so much that when she had to get off, she got right back into line to ride again. SEVEN times! That’s a day she won’t soon forget!



**BOBBIN HOLLOW EQUESTRIAN CENTER**

(photo © Tami Johnson)

Mary Chris Foxworthy at Regency Oaks Farm in Michigan is a small, family stable that focuses on carriage driving. They had over 100 visitors with four of them interested in buying a Morgan on the spot!

Liz Thomas combined her Day of the Morgan open barn with a successful fundraising event for Friendship Animal Protective League, which helped to bring 100 people to Equestrian Elite in Ohio for an introduction to Morgan horses, as well as raising money for a great cause. They even found an adopting family for a puppy!

An older couple, who had recently moved from Vermont to Kansas read about the Day of the Morgan in the local newspaper. They had been Morgan owners in Vermont and were super excited to visit Cheryl Manahan at Wichita Riding Academy to reconnect with the breed they love. We’re excited, too!

Results are still being gathered with a survey available on the AMHA website. If you participated and you have not yet taken the survey, please do so as soon as possible. In addition to the amazing results Lori Beasley had with her 400 visitors, at least a dozen stables so far have reported attendance of over 100 people. Another ten barns had between 50 and 75 visitors. And, as you would expect with any event that covers as much territory as this, there were also barns that had disappointing numbers.

So, what made the difference between the high numbers and the less than expected results? In some cases, the local weather was

a factor. We did discover that participants who placed flyers and signage effectively and in large quantities were highly successful. Actually leaving stacks of flyers at restaurant checkout counters seemed to do the most good. One restaurant even called the stable who had left postcards promoting their event saying they had run out of cards and people were asking about it! A few stables placed paid ads in their local newspapers. Some participants asked their local papers to do a story on the event, and a few even ended up on the front page with pictures. As the event got closer and closer, I received lots of phone calls looking for help from people that wanted to be sure their stable was getting the most coverage they could. And, we were able to work on an effective plan in every case. You know what they say about the squeaky wheel.

Responses indicate, so far, that some participants were confused as to what was being done for publicity on the event. It was definitely a learning experience for me, with the unique circumstances of a national event with local participants. In addition to placing every individual barn on several different local online event calendars, I personally sent out 235 individualized press releases for every single participant to all the local newspapers they listed on their sign up forms (and some they didn't even know existed). I personally joined local community groups and Farm Bureaus in faraway cities so that I could post on their Facebook pages. I notified State Horse Councils, as well as the American Horse Council. I sent emails asking for help spreading the word to every one of the AMHA Club presidents. I sent listings and information to as many equine publications as I could find. *Saddle Up* magazine ran a full color ad for us, for free. And, to be honest, I don't even remember some of the many things I did, as I stumbled across ideas online.

We did our best to publicize the event both locally and nationally. Did we miss the target in some areas? Yes. Did the publicity work really well in other areas? Absolutely! Was it worth the effort? No question in my mind. If even a handful of families end up getting involved, and falling in love with Morgan horses the way we all did, it's a win for all of us. The Day of the Morgan event was more than just a promotional effort. It was also a celebration. It was a way of sharing what made us all fall in love with the breed in the first place. It created a common goal among our family of Morgan owners. The camaraderie, paired with the competition, created for

those who did not want to be outdone was healthy and fun.

It was also proof that we are all responsible for breed promotion. We can be most effective by extolling the virtues of Morgan horses on a widespread, but local and personal level. Successful training stables, the breeding farms that create World Champion after World Champion, even the most prosperous lesson stables are not without responsibility to help expand the grass roots. In fact, insuring our future is of utmost importance to those who have become accustomed to the success they currently enjoy. In so many ways the event was testimony to the meaning of the phrase, "you reap what you sow."

After going through this journey, I find myself awash in gratitude. Pennsylvania Morgan owner, Diane Garrow, was so incredibly helpful. When I was overwhelmed, she jumped in and took a big chunk of my to-do list off my hands. She maintained the super-useful interactive map and helped with the tedious job of local publicity. AMHA Executive Director, Carrie Mortensen and Chris Koliander were very helpful in the national office. I am so thankful to all of the participants, some of whom only did it because I begged. Lori Beasley was one of those! It took some pretty intense convincing to get her to jump on board, and look at what she accomplished in spite of her reluctance! I am so grateful to those that put such an impressive effort into making their event special. And, the horses! All those magnificent Morgans! Look at the pictures of all those wonderful horses, carrying inexperienced cargo and loving on all those people as if they knew exactly what their task was for the day. It simply melts my heart.

The takeaway from the Day of the Morgan 2017 can be told in one story. You might say it's a bit of a history lesson. In 1979, the Michigan Morgan Horse Association put on an open barn day event in which my training stable participated. We had a moderate number of visitors. We did demonstrations and served cookies and lemonade. Fast forward to 2017. As I was starting to get the wheels turning for this national event, I ran into a woman who told me something I hadn't realized. She reminded me that she attended our open barn in 1979. She said that day was the reason she became a Morgan person. And, she has been a Morgan person ever since. Who knows how many seeds we planted 38 years ago? And, if we can continue consistent breed promotion, who knows how many we can plant over the next 38 years! I'm all in! How about you?

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MORGANS**



**BOBBIN HOLLOW EQUESTRIAN CENTER**

(photos © Tami Johnson)

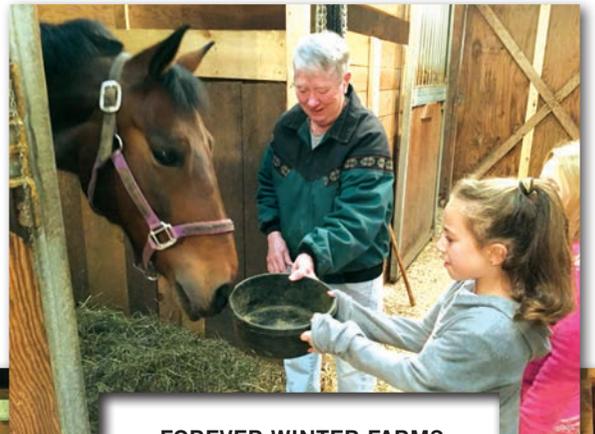




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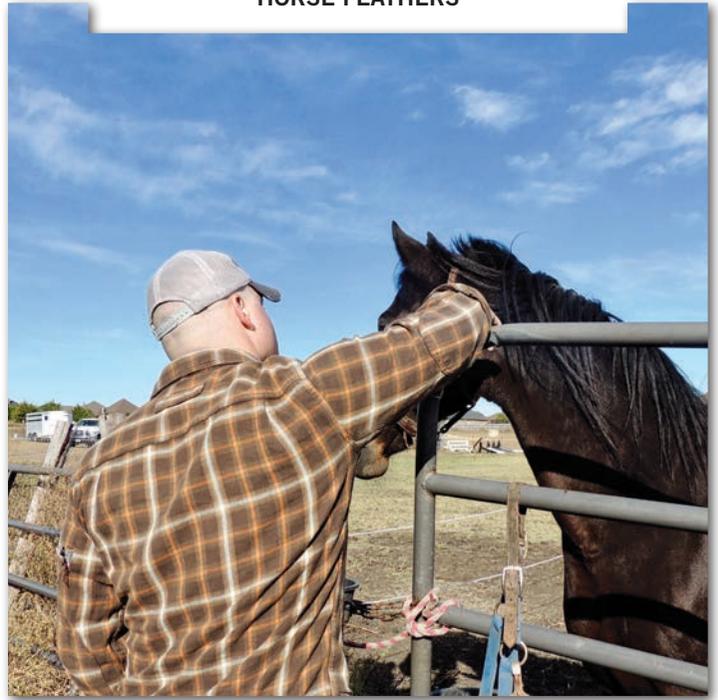




GUARDIAN MORGAN HORSE FARM



HORSE FEATHERS



GRAND FINALE





INDIAN CREEK MORGAN FARM



LORI SARGEANT, TINA PERILLO & HOOF AND PAW RESCUE



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POSSIBILITY STABLES



RODMAN STABLES

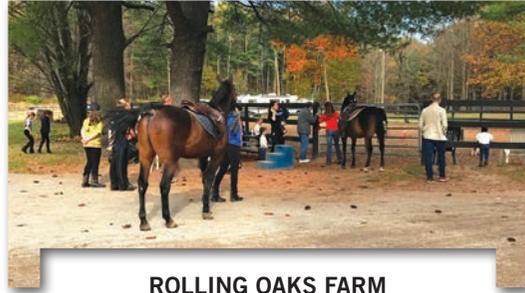


MAJESTIC FARMS





SILVER MESA MORGANS, NORTHWEST MORGANS & MORGAN HORSE ASSOCIATION OF OREGON



ROLLING OAKS FARM



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STONE LEDGE FARM



TIMBER CREEK STABLES

