



BETSY STEIN

BY SARAH LESSLER

DEDICATED TO HORSE WELFARE

T LYNN COAKLEY

The EQUUS Foundation, a name that has become widely known in the equine community, is recognized in the industry as one of the most influential equestrian charities in the country. Their mission is to protect America's horses from peril and strengthen the bond between horses and people. As founder and president, Lynn Coakley has created a non-profit network that has saved countless horses' lives and aided in helping them find new roles and loving homes. She is a determined woman who has had a unique influence in the equestrian world.

Lynn grew up riding at the Fairfield County Hunt Club, (FCHC) in Westport, Connecticut, as did her mother, and eventually, her two daughters. As her daughters began to show an interest in riding, Lynn moved to a house that backed directly up to the hunt club. The two young girls had an enviable childhood: getting off the school bus and tacking up horses in their backyard barn to walk over for lessons with legendary hunter-pony trainer Emerson Burr. Together they enjoyed taking care of the horses, and they both went on to have successful competitive riding careers.

It was after Lynn's daughters headed off to college that the EQUUS Foundation became a vision. Lynn asked herself, "My kids are gone; what do I do with the horses next?" and began researching options. Lynn learned that tens of thousands of horses are sent to auctions where owners are led to believe that their horses could find good homes. But many horses risk being purchased by a kill buyer to be sent across borders to slaughter. This reality was unacceptable to Lynn and jump-started her journey into finding alternative careers and homes for horses. In

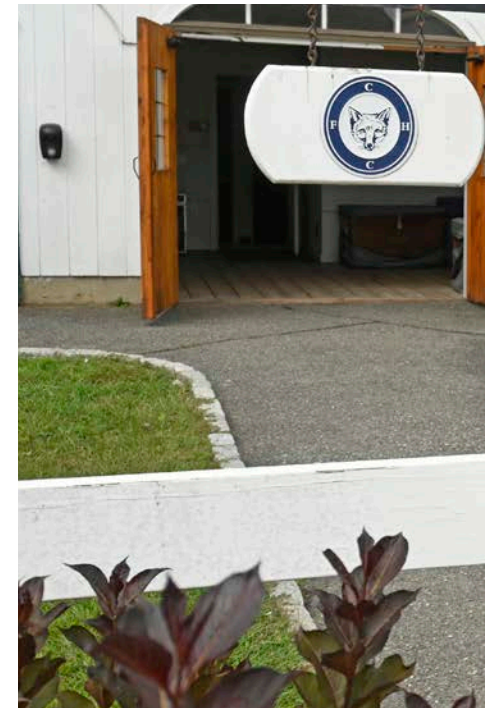
response, she wanted to raise funds to allocate for organizations giving horses careers outside of competition.

The EQUUS Foundation began in 2003. Lynn explains, "When my children started riding, and I also got back into riding, I accepted the volunteer chairmanship of the Fairfield June Benefit Horse Show. Under my leadership and with the support of the FCHC board, Emerson Burr, and Billy Glass (the show manager at the time), we established the first Fairfield Grand Prix and arranged to have a luncheon in association with the event that could benefit a charity," adds Lynn.

There were several different charities involved in the first few years, and recognizing that there was the potential of raising a significant amount of funds, the EQUUS Foundation was established to be able to receive the donations and disburse grants to multiple charities instead of just one. "We completed our first year of operation and awarded our first grants in August 2003 to the ASPCA Lucky Fund, which later became the ASPCA Equine Fund, the Bridgeport Police Mounted Unit, Green Chimneys Children's Services & School, High Hopes



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Above: Lynn Coakley and Valerie Angeli.
Opposite: 1.2. (Clockwise from upper left) The Fairfield Hunt Club clubhouse. **3.** Emerson Burr was Fairfield County Hunt Club's stable manager for over 50 years. Burr died in 2001. **4.** EQUUS Foundation Equestrian Idols (left to right) Brian Lookabill, Ki-Juan Minors, Patricia Griffith, and Taylor Blauweiss Hughes. **5.** Frank Madden awarded 1st Prize at the EQUUS Foundation's 1st Fete Cheval in Wellington; (Left to right) Mason Phelps, Lynn Coakley, Frank Madden, Sue Ashe, and Jenny Belknap Kees. **6.** (Left to right) Lynn Coakley, Catherine Herman, and Jenny Belknap Kees at the 2020 Winter in Wellington event; **SAVE THE DATE:** Sunday Evening, March 12, for the 2023 Winter in Wellington 20th Anniversary Celebration.

Therapeutic Riding, The Hole in the Wall Gang Fund, H.O.R.S.E. of Connecticut, Pegasus Therapeutic Riding, and US Equestrian Federation Emerson Burr Horsemanship Award," says Lynn.

For the first years of the foundation, they localized their awareness and giving to Fairfield and Westchester counties. "The FCHC played a pivotal role in the EQUUS Foundation," Lynn states. But Lynn's vision grew and her sights were set broader. There were equine organizations across the nation that needed funding and horses needing a new life after sport. Lynn remarked that she learned that horses are work animals by watching her horses in the backyard. "Our horses liked having jobs and would get bored if they couldn't do them," she says.

The time had come to take the EQUUS Foundation to Wellington, Florida. The foundation put on two major fund-raising events. The Fete Cheval brought top show jumpers like McLain Ward, Kent Farrington, Beezie Madden, and others to the International Ring at WEF to compete in gymkhana games using horses from local rescues and lesson programs. Another major event was Equestrian Idol, where riders could showcase their other talents in front of crowds, and a panel of champion show-jumping athletes served as the judges. These events cultivated an opportunity for the top riders across the country, and the local Wellington community, to come together to raise money and awareness of what rescue horses could do and become.

By 2010 the EQUUS Foundation had awarded over \$1.5 million in donations to equine charities, and Lynn's dreams for her foundation continued to grow. However, she could not have anticipated receiving a bequest from a single donor of approximately \$500,000 in 2014, which let the foundation rebrand and

strategize. "It allowed us to cultivate real donors and not have to rely solely on event revenue," Lynn said.

"Since 2014, under the leadership of Jenny Belknap Kees, the Chair of the EQUUS Foundation since its founding, and Catherine Herman, who has served as Vice Chair since 2006, we established new programs like Next Chapters and Safe Landings aimed at ensuring the safety and dignity of horses throughout their lives," said Lynn. "This Fall marks the start of our 20th Anniversary year. We have set an ambitious goal to raise \$2 million to double our investment in equine charities making a difference in the lives of America's horses and double our endowment. We are committed to reducing the number of horses sent across our borders for slaughter with the goal to reduce the number to *zero*. None should be subjected to inhumane death and the fate that awaits them—especially because there are solutions within our reach. In addition to competitive and recreational programs involving horses, programs providing equine-assisted therapeutic services offer endless opportunities for careers for horses in transition. Horses have the amazing ability to inspire, empower and heal."



Above: A sunny day in late August for the annual Hampton Classic Adoption Day sponsored by Georgina Bloomberg, EQUUS Foundation EQUUSStar and top international equestrian. The day was dedicated to finding homes for adoptable horses, dogs, and cats. Over 300 attendees came to cheer on adoptable horses and learn more from Gerda's Equine Rescue, Vermont; New England Equine Rescue, Massachusetts; Omega Horse Rescue, Pennsylvania; Retired Racehorse Project, Maryland; Return to Freedom Wild Horse Sanctuary, California; and Rising Starr Horse Rescue, Connecticut.

Opposite: (Clockwise from upper left) 1. Georgina Bloomberg, her son, Jasper, and his adopted mini-pony, Teddy. 2. Brianne Goutal's Mickey Blue Eyes that she rescued for her daughter, Clea. 3. Adoptable minis from Omega Horse Rescue pictured with Omega representatives, Shanette Cohen, Valerie Angeli, and Renata Solomou. 4. Serena Marron with Bumble from New England Equine Rescue. 5. Adoptable horses and representatives from Rising Starr Rescue. 6. The HEART Equine Ambulance.

The elevation of the EQUUS Foundation's image also included bringing on partnerships with the equestrian industries' top-performing riders, horses, and owners. The foundation's alliances include EQUUSStars, Athletes, Equine Ambassadors, and other national equine organizations—all of which are committed to the welfare of horses, whether they are athletes, companions, teachers, or healers. The EQUUS Foundation's unique Guardian program offers equine charities a rigorous and comprehensive screening application to qualify for funding. The Guardianship program ensures that organizations meet the EQUUS Foundation's guidelines for equine welfare and public accountability to qualify for EQUUS Foundation grants. Donors can also give directly to the Guardian charities listed on the EQUUS Foundation Equine Welfare Network.

When asked about some of the foundation's most cherished feel-good stories, Lynn offered many to choose from. She

and Valerie Angeli, the vice president of engagement for the EQUUS Foundation, lit up when talking about Georgina Bloomberg's son, Jasper, and his adopted mini-pony, Teddy. They described Teddy as a "scruffy, full-of-manure mess from the auction" when he was adopted, but with good grooming and proper nourishment, he transformed into a tiny champion. Jasper instantly fell in love with Teddy, and the rescue pony taught him how to ride. Another amazing success story of an adopted rescue horse is Brianne Goutal's Mickey Blue Eyes. Brianne rescued Mickey for her daughter, Clea, and trained him herself. He has become a huge part of their family, hanging out in their house and winning ribbons at the Hampton

Classic. Both Georgina and Brianne serve as EQUUS Foundation EQUUSStars, along with actress Beth Behrs, Clementine Goutal, and Jessica Springsteen.

Valerie says, "There is a champion in almost every horse if you give them the chance." Adds Lynn, "We prove that everyday."

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