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Equestrian community has long traditions

The Santa Ynez Valley has long been called "The Lexington of the West" because of the abundance of race-horse breeding farms and training facilities here, which truly gave Kentucky bluegrass breeders a run for their money. Racing stallions trained and stood here, and famous horse trainers such as multi-Kentucky Derby winner D. Wayne Lukas, have graced our not-so-bluegrass horse farms and racetracks. Lexington and Santa Ynez have been meccas for the racing world.

After springing up in the 1960s, the Arabian horse world to this day maintains a strong presence here, with champion farms such as Om El Arab and Day Dream Arabians, home to multiple world champion stallions and mares. World champion polo team members, reining and cutting world champions, a dressage Olympian, and a retired Hollywood stunt rider reside here (hat tipped to you, Audrey Griffin). A world-renowned, state of the art veterinary practice has been built here by locals Doug and Sue Herthel. Even "The Horse Whisperer," Monty Roberts, and his equine-sculptress wife Pat call Solvang home. We also are home to the world famous Rancheros Visitadores and the Sage Hens (a females-only response to the Rancheros' male-only annual ride).

The valley claims 52 breeds and dozens of disciplines that annually contribute multiple tens of millions of dollars to the local economy. There is even a nonprofit wild horse sanctuary hidden in the back hills of this beautiful area.

But our equestrian tradition goes further back than Arabians and Thoroughbreds, team penning and dude ranches. The early-California vaquero traditions so famous now worldwide (think Tom Dorrance and Ray Hunt) were honed by professional cowboys on our Spanish Land Grant Ranchos starting in the 1700s.



by
Jessica
Schley

Ironic though it may seem, our own local equestrian culture lost sight of much of those vaquero traditions for many decades. Speculation is that this was specifically due to the diversity of other equestrian disciplines that sprang up here. With so many fun things to do with horses, most forgot the old ways. Showing, competing, and making a buck took precedent.

Locals such as Bill Reynolds have revived some of that old tradition with his annual "Buck Branaman Pro-Am Roping" contest at our coveted Santa Ynez Valley Equestrian Center. It is truly a sight to see, watching men and women gather in their finest silk kerchiefs and hand-carved saddles to practice the refined art of the early California skills of the rancho. The valley's own Historical Museum and Carriage House also hosts an annual Vaquero show featuring traditional and antique bits, spurs and various equestrian haberdashery for all to admire, and for those with deep pockets to collect.

Our own Therapeutic Riding Center, not to be outdone, also hosts a fun annual fundraising event honoring the diversity of our equestrian history, often highlighting themes like "East meets West" with dressage riders and western riders trading horses for a ride to themed music. These annual events

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are the "see and be seen" and "who's who" for our community. Where else does a local charity for at-risk families run a Polo Classic fundraiser?

We honor and preserve our equestrian roots by passing on our time-honored equestrian traditions, keeping them alive from generation to generation. Although we have some wonderful community resources such as our coveted Equestrian Center, which we work hard every year to improve and keep open, we also have assets yet in need of preservation. Each year our local roadside bridle paths and riding trails are threatened with one more locked gate or raised speed limit. Even the heavyweight, high-profile Rancheros

lost part of their historical route to their camp a few years ago to a new landowner who was unsympathetic about the tradition and, moreover, justifiably afraid of oppressive California liability laws that are so unfriendly to landowners who allow equine activities on their property.

For the past few hundred years, we have built, honed and expanded our equestrian skills and community. Today, this generation, this century, it is time to reinforce, preserve and protect those same resources. Let's get started!

Chin up, heels down, and kick on!

Jessica Schley is a Santa Ynez Valley native with deep roots in the local equestrian and ranching cultures. Learn more at www.brokenarrowbranding.com.