

Santa Ynez Valley Star

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Center shows strength of growing equine community

Where else in the world other than in the Santa Ynez Valley would an ailing older woman donate her coveted equestrian estate to become a nonprofit riding center for all disciplines, and for the entire equine community?

The Santa Ynez Valley Equestrian Center was once the home of renowned breeder and trainer Jody Carsello. She raised and showed cutting horses in the early 1950s, and she helped to popularize the sport in California.

She was one of the top women cutting-horse trainers to compete against all men.

Jody owned Hollywood Rush, a son of Hollywood Gold, and Martin's Jessie by Jessie James, another famous cutting stallion. She also owned a direct daughter of Doc Bar, and many other brood mares of incredible lineage. Her breeding program was renowned across the country.

I knew Jody when I was very young, and she was both regal and terrifying. She did

have a reputation for a temper, you see. But she gave me horse books to read and taught me about breeds and bloodlines, and I asked lots of questions, so we became pals.

She was a true multi-cultural equestrienne, being a follower of the Spanish Riding School methods of dressage and haute e'cole later in life. She transitioned from breeding and raising prized cutting-horse bloodlines to becoming well known for her exceptional Andalusian horses, with royal pedigrees and impeccable training; she even had piaffe posts installed, and trained horses to work in-hand the classical way.

In 1993, Jody recognized a huge need in our growing horse community. There was no consistently available place for horse shows, clinics, 4-H Horsemastership Program meetings, and the like. The staunch libertarian that she was, there was also an ulterior motive: keep my money away from the government and within the community. So she proposed an idea to several community members, including now (and founding) Board President David Hunsicker, that her property be made into an equestrian center. The Santa Ynez Valley Equestrian Association was formed as a nonprofit group to receive the gift and to oversee the management of the facility and its membership.

Fast forward 23 years to 2016 and the facility boasts an impressive cadre of ame-



by
Jessica
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nities for its members: six arenas for a variety of disciplines, several barns, a "party barn" available to rent, a PA system, offices, a trail course, and room for much, much more. In 2015 there were more than 420 members, up 100 from the previous year. The group expects

even more in 2016.

As would make Jody incredibly happy, her former property has become quite multidisciplinary. The Santa Ynez Valley Therapeutic Riding group calls the center home. Buck Brannaman hosts a roping event once a year. Volunteers organize Hunter Jumper play days, carriage events and Western & Ranch Trail shows. The high school rodeo riders and the Valley Penners hold events as well. There are hopes that there will soon be Cowboy Action Shooting and Extreme Trail events. There is also action on starting a series of Poker Penning events, which is one of the fastest growing Western sports in the country right now.

"It's been a long road and there were many times we were upside down or on the brink of not making it. But that's in the past; we are doing extremely well now, things are happening, it's an exciting time," Hunsicker said. "We have amazing volunteers who work incredibly hard to make things happen. We have had generous donors to help us build

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infrastructure. So many people deserve recognition."

Jody's only daughter, Stephanie Carsello, still owns the last of Jody's Andalusian bloodlines, a champion mare named Vida de Arte. Stephanie was a prima ballerina in her time and was also a ballet instructor at the Fossemalle Dance Studio in Santa Ynez. She taught many, many students over the years, including me and this newspaper's owner and publisher, Raiza Giorgi.

Stephanie recently had a memorial display installed in honor of Jody in the Equestrian Center's party barn. It stands as an indelible mark of tribute from all of the center's members to Jody's memory and legacy.

We are truly blessed to have such a jewel in our community. It's something Jody would be quite happy to see. She wasn't easy to please, as anyone who knew her would attest, so saying that is, well, really saying something.

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FREE

7-10PM