

# OUR HORSES,

How the Hunter Development Incentive Fund is promoting and developing American-bred horses

By **Rachelle Wilhelm**

In its first year, the Hunter Development Incentive Fund is making headway in promoting American-bred horses and ensuring the future of the sport. Created to encourage the breeding of quality show hunters bred and foaled in North America, the HDIF provides incentives and rewards to make nominated stallions and their nominated offspring the most sought-after horses in their markets.

## How It Works

Young hunter development and hunter breeding will be spotlighted through HDIF classes at special member events. Each point earned at a USHJA-approved event by a HDIF-nominated horse will be worth year-end money, and enrolled horses will also be able to earn prize money at HDIF events.

The Breeders Committee sees the HDIF as advantageous for everyone involved by increasing the visibility and market for young hunters, providing more age-appropriate classes for young horses and an opportunity for potential breeders and buyers to see young horses in competition. The additional exposure will increase breeding contracts for nominated stallions. “Financial rewards to the breeders and owners at each show and year-end rewards with accompanying publicity fuel the excitement and enrollment,” says Breeders Committee chairman Tish Quirk. A longtime breeder of top hunters based in Carlsbad, California, Tish has worked extensively with committee mem-

bers and others in the industry to research and shape the program.

The HDIF accepted its first nomination in mid-2009 and continues to welcome the participation of breeders and horse owners across the United States and Canada. “We are very excited about the program and very happy with the progress we have made so far,” Tish reports. “The response has been very good from breeders—both stallion owners and mare owners as well as the owners of young horses—and show managers and potential sponsors alike.”

## Developing Young Horses

“My thought is that anything that promotes young horses is of course a good thing,” lifelong horseman and Breeders Committee vice-chair Richard Taylor says, sharing his thoughts on the HDIF. Richard operates Venture Stables in Montpelier Station, Virginia, where his primary focus is on breeding and selling pony hunters. He explains that along with promoting American-bred horses, the program’s primary purpose is to provide classes that are specifically designed to develop young hunters without putting too much stress or pressure on them while showcasing their ability.

“The HDIF competition classes are designed to gently develop young horses by introducing them to performance competition and building a solid foundation without any rush or pressure,” Tish adds. In 2010, HDIF events will include both hunter breeding and performance classes

for yearlings, 2-year-olds, 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds. Each event will include in-hand classes for yearlings through 3-year-olds and performance classes for 3- and 4-year-olds.

“The hunter breeding sections let the yearlings through 3-year-olds get comfortable with the show atmosphere, traveling and an introduction to time in the ring. The 3-year-olds have an under-saddle class and a hunter hack class. The hunter hacks will serve as a gentle introduction to jumps at the show with just two jumps in a trot-in-canter-out line,” Tish explains, citing the format as a return to old traditions when hunter hacks were frequently part of shows. “The 4-year-olds will have those two classes in addition to two classes over fences,” she continues. “In order to make it easy for young horses and those who might be at a growth stage that makes it difficult to engage well, simple lead changes will not be penalized in the 4-year-old classes.”

Next year, classes for 5-year-olds will be implemented, and in 2012, classes for 6-year-olds will be added. “The development of young horses through easily accomplished levels is similar to the progression through the levels that develop dressage horses,” Tish says. The benefits of exposing a young horse to the atmosphere of the show grounds are numerous, and an experience that the Breeders Committee feels will increase the likelihood of placing a young prospect in the right home. Teaching a young horse to trailer to shows and pay attention to its handler in the

# OUR FUTURE

## How to Participate in the HDIF

USHJA members have three opportunities to participate in the HDIF program: as stallion owners, the nominators of foals or the owners of competing horses. In its inaugural year, the USHJA is offering special limited-time discounts for stallion and horse owners. More information, as well as stallion and horse nomination forms, can be found on the HDIF page of [www.ushja.org](http://www.ushja.org).

### Owners of nominated stallions:

- Will earn 10 percent of a foal's lifetime monies.
- The annual fee paid by stallion owners will be based on the number of mares listed on the previous season's breeding report.
- Included in the nomination fee: The USHJA will place stallion and horse results, along with photos and biographies, online after each special member event in an effort to help breeders promote their horses.

### Foal/horse nominators:

- Will earn 10 percent of the nominated foal or horse's lifetime HDIF monies.
- In order to be eligible, the horse must be included on the stallion's breeding report for the respective year of the horse's conception.
- Age is determined by the age of the horse on January 1 of each competition year.

### Competing horse owners

- Will earn 80 percent of the horse's lifetime HDIF monies.
- The owner of a horse will be classified according to the USEF records at the end of the point-contesting period on September 15.
- After each special member event, the USHJA will post horse results, along with photos and biographies, online in an effort to help promote the horse's career.

## 2010 Nominated Stallions

As of press time, the stallions listed below have been nominated to the HDIF. Additional applications are being processed. For a complete listing of HDIF nominated stallions, visit [www.ushja.org](http://www.ushja.org).

**Alesi, Chaleon, Conifer, Fleetwood's Bolero, Glenn Livit, Hennessey, Ironrule, Just The Best, Lacoste, More Than Luck, Nob Hill, Pik Ravenclaw, Pikadero, Ragtime, Richard, Spell Bound, Tavistock, Willemoes.**



*This foal, bred by China Blue Farm in Santa Ynez, California, is destined for in-hand showing this year.*

ring will pay dividends in its under-saddle career. Despite the many distractions of the show grounds, the horse learns to cope with the pressures of showing.

The classes are designed to encourage participation across the board from the amateur who wants to ride his own horse to the breeders and owners who prefer to leave the training and showing to the professionals. “Young horses will flourish in this program,” Richard says, “and if you can raise a competitive horse, you will have no problem selling it.”

## Greater Opportunities

In the eyes of the Breeders Committee, there are many incentives to joining the HDIF including more opportunities to showcase American-bred young horses and the breeding programs that produced them. The HDIF is a multi-show series of events that offers breeders and owners the chance to show and promote their young horses for a longer period of time. “The intention of the program is to give you multiple opportunities to show your horse throughout the year and even on a given day,” Richard says. “That increases your opportunity to appeal to prospective buyers and show your horse before multiple judges, which means that more opinions will be had.”

With classes designed to showcase a young horse’s ability, Tish says that it will be easier for interested buyers to see a group of young hunters in locations across the country. “The USHJA will publicize the successful young horses and their bloodlines, making the young hunters and the bloodlines that produced them more visible,” she says, which will help American breeders promote their horses.

“American breeders have not done a very good job of advertising and marketing their horses,” Richard states. “I think that has allowed for the huge influx of foreign-bred horses into this country.” Richard maintains, as does Tish, that the best hunters are in the United States. And how could they not be, Tish wonders, when American breeders are breeding specifically to produce exactly the horses that will excel in the hunter ring. “After

all, show hunters, as we know them, originated and developed in America,” she says.

## Supporting American-Made

The Breeders Committee is adamant that prospective owners can buy as good a horse in this country today as they can anywhere in the world, a sentiment that Richard stands firmly behind. However, he concedes that American breeders are at a disadvantage compared to their foreign counterparts. “It’s harder to raise a horse that you can sell for a reasonable price in this country compared to others because all costs associated with agriculture have gone through the roof,” he says, listing the costs of feed, real estate and fuel among others as contributing factors to the rising cost of raising horses. “In other countries, where many people are buying their horses, the breeding and raising of horses is governed by the country’s department of agriculture. It’s much cheaper over there and they can raise them in great numbers,” he explains.

But Tish is quick to point out that buying American-bred horses certainly comes with its advantages, saying that horses bred and born in America do not incur the costs and risks of international travel and quarantine costs and stresses. “The ability to talk to the breeders and trainers of young horses and to see

first-hand the programs that produce the young horses can be a positive influence on several levels,” Tish explains. “As American breeders receive more support from American buyers, the American breeding programs will grow and produce even more of the horses bred specifically for the American riders and trainers and their success in the show ring.”

## Gaining Momentum

The possibilities that lie ahead for the HDIF’s future are unlimited. “We are thrilled with the enthusiasm and support that has welcomed the HDIF,” Tish says. “Stallion owners are nominating their stallions, young horse owners are calling to be sure that the sires of their horses are nominated so that they will be able to participate. Major show managers are supportive and are applying to host special events and sponsors are offering their support and backing.

“The basic rule is that a new program of this kind requires three years to become well established. By all measures, we are well ahead of schedule,” she says. “Just as the High Performance International Hunter Derbies have brought great excitement to the hunter world, the HDIF brings excitement and growth to the breeding and development of young hunters in America.”

## 2010 HDIF Special Member Events

Listed are the approved shows hosting HDIF special member events throughout 2010. Additional events are pending—check [www.ushja.org](http://www.ushja.org) regularly for an updated schedule. Interested show managers are encouraged to apply to host a special member event.

April 21	RMI Mid-Florida I	Ocala, FL
May 6	RMI Spring Break	Alpharetta, GA
May 12	St. Christopher’s Horse Show	Quentin, PA
May 19-23	Fieldstone Spring Festival	Halifax, MA
June 16-20	Blenheim June Classic II	San Juan Capistrano, CA
June 24-25	Atlanta Summer II	Conyers, GA
July 9-10	Suffolk Classic	Stonybrook, NY
July 9-11	July Theme Show	Del Mar, CA
July 20	The GO Show	Oklahoma City, OK
July 21-25	Showpark Summer Festival	Del Mar, CA
November 11	Washington Emerald Classic	Auburn, WA