

USDF Region 6 Hosts GMO Summit

By Peter Rothschild, USDF Region 6 Director

On Saturday morning, January 11th, the First Annual USDF Region 6 Leadership Summit, began at DevonWood Equestrian Centre. More than 30 participants from within the Region took part, representing GMOs, show facilities, regional governance, and various dressage related entities.

The program, organized by PNW High Performance Foundation, in conjunction with Region 6, was designed to define the “State of Dressage” as it currently exists and to create the future of what it could become. Several presenters and facilitators led the participants through exercises which allowed all to examine the current state, contemplate what they’d like it to be, envision ways to reach that goal and, perhaps most importantly, get ALL of the various groups working together.

Getting Things Off the Ground

Last spring, Heather Bunn, President of the PNW High Performance Foundation, contacted Peter Rothschild, USDF Region 6 Director, and asked if he would be interested in some sort of Regional Meeting. That started the process that became this Regional Summit. A steering committee was created—Kathryn Lewis, President of Equestrians’ Institute (a GMO based in the Puget Sound area) and Peter Rothschild co-chaired the working group. Nicol Hinde, trainer; Noah Rattner, DevonWood Equestrian Center; Christine Erikson, PNW H P F; Jen Verharen, facilitator; and Heather Bunn, PNW H P F, completed the membership of the steering committee. With numerous conference calls over the summer and fall, the committee created the program and found generous sponsors to support this endeavor.

Summit Day

The day started with introductions that highlighted the diversity of the Region representation and the similarities of purpose. Participants included representatives from GMOs—Bozeman Dressage Association, Central Oregon Dressage, Equestrians’ Institute, Idaho Dressage and Eventing Association, Lower Puget Sound Dressage Club, and Oregon Dressage Society. Representatives of a number of facilities participated, including Devonwood Equestrian Center (which hosted the program), Whidbey Equestrian Center, and Summervale, as well as several show managers/secretaries. Board members from Dressage Northwest attended, as did representatives from the Arabian Horse Association (AHA) Region 5 community. USDF Region 6 PM Delegates, the only officials elected by the Regional Membership, filled out the roster.

Discussion of the Current State of the Region

Once introductions were finished, the hard work started with “break-out sessions” examining several questions (under a strict timeline in order to maintain focus!):

- What is the purpose of your organization and/or goals of your show?
- Who are you serving?

- What problems do you solve for your customers (members/participants)?
- What are the demographics of your entity and what would you like it to be?
- What is working for your entity?
- What is not working for your entity? What is your biggest challenge?

As might be imagined, there were many answers to those questions and, not surprisingly, there tended to be agreement amongst the five different break-out groups as to answers to those questions. The various items were discussed at some length with the goal of identifying issues but not, at that time, to attempt to identify possible solutions.

The participants then had a chance to listen to three different presentations, “The Ideal Customer Experience” (presented by Nicol Hinde); “Recruiting, Retaining and Rewarding Volunteers” (presented by Sarah Broussard, from Rebecca Farms) and “Raising Funds to Help Dressage Riders and Organizations” (presented by Jodie Renk, SCES, a foundation which assists people in fundraising). All the participants were very receptive to the comments and ideas presented by these three.

Envisioning the Future and Developing Solutions

The day ended with two break-out sessions designed to assist the participants to “Envision the Future” and create goals for achieving that future. Jill Jago has a strategic consulting practice primarily working with architects, but she is also an Adult Amateur Dressage rider. Her session was very intriguing and helped all to clarify ideas for the future. The wrap-up session, with Jen Verharen of Cadence Coaching, did just that – wrapped up the session and gave everyone goals to accomplish by the end of 2020.

At 4:30, the Summit was over but, in reality, all agreed it was just beginning. The Committee is processing the information and will be issuing a report on the Summit in the near future and it is hoped that all concerned within the Region will review it and comment.

A Big Thank You to the GMO Summit Sponsors

This Summit, the first of what is hoped to be an annual affair, could not have happened without the support of generous sponsors, including our title sponsor, DevonWood Equestrian Center; Gold Sponsors Cadence Coaching, Dressage Northwest, Hilleberg Tents, Northwest Equine Veterinary Associates, and Southern California Equestrian Sports (SCES); Silver Sponsors Bickford Trailers, Paula Helm and Albion Saddlery, and Lower Puget Sound Dressage Club; and Bronze Sponsors Equestrians’ Institute, Pilchuck Veterinary Hospital and USDF.