

## **CONVENTION REPORT 2015**

**Tulsa OK**

**By Nancy Sawyer**

First, I'd like to thank Region X and MAHA for the privilege of being part of this great group and being able to attend the national convention this year.

I personally appreciated the venue offered by the Hyatt Regency. The proximity of the hotel to the airport, plus easily accessed shuttle service made the trip so much more relaxing. The rooms were comfortable and quiet, and all services offered were above par.

As my primary discipline is sport horse, I attended all sport horse and dressage committee break out sessions offered. I also attended the equine stress/research and education committee meetings and of course the three General Sessions.

The AHA President Cynthia Richardson did a nice job of presenting the President's state of the Association Address. She covered process mapping (current business state, future state) and the progress on remodeling AHA offices and updating the website. I appreciated the break down and clarification of spending. Her primary focus was, as in 2014, TEAM AHA, with the emphasis on connecting, collaborating and creating addressed to emphasize always doing the right thing, getting involved on any level, mentoring and outreach.

I appreciate her emphasis on the reminder to always do the right thing, which brings to the fore front how easy it's been in the past to become complacent in our treatment and observation of treatment of our beautiful Arabians, and take the attitude of "that's the way it's always been" rather than step up to the plate and address ongoing abuse issues.

I've seen slow (extremely slow it seems) progress on the topic of abuse, whether physical or emotional. I personally admit to accepting abuse when first introduced to the Arabian halter ring in early 1970's. I remember being shocked, feeling uncomfortable but finally accepting that this is the way things were done. In reality, we as a culture have accepted mistreatment of animals in general, and are finally addressing abuse as inappropriate and unacceptable. This has at least taken abuse to behind the scenes. I appreciate the re-introduction of the yellow warning card and an emphasis on using it for the purpose it is intended. I noticed more discussion about why the warning card isn't currently issued (handler/rider intimidation). This brings to mind how difficult change is in general, the horse world just being one area. My hope is that we'll eventually go beyond just giving lip service to the importance of dealing with our issues up front rather than the customary closed doors. While I've personally felt uncomfortable when speaking on a topic in a forum~primarily because seldom am I backed up or encouraged, what I'm seeing more and more of is that individuals will approach me after the meeting, stating that they appreciate me speaking up but, I note, not feeling comfortable backing me up 'in public'. Until more people do speak up, stewards will not correct and judges won't penalize. The

few, powerful, outspoken minority who 'rule the roost' will (finally) not find an audience or finances to support them and have their power diminished.

My personal goal, on the topic of trying to make a difference where I might, is to attempt to improve the relationship between the Pleasure Ring and Sport Horse arena. This requires ditching the 'us' or 'them' vocabulary, getting to know individuals who perhaps don't seem like us, and actually going outside of our comfort zone to be more inclusive. A few of us have addressed the Part Arab and Purebred Arabian issue and divisiveness. We all love our horses, especially our Arabians, so why aren't we a whole rather than two part of the same whole?

Beyond that, I sense not only a misunderstanding of other disciplines (sport horse vs pleasure horse) but an actual dislike of the difference and the person representing the difference. I've attempted to form a relationship with both 'sides', and am learning that much of the 'us versus them' attitude stems from simply not knowing, from gossiping, from criticizing rather than trying to understand and support. As more individuals try another discipline i.e. dressage entering a pleasure ring class (sport horse under saddle is becoming more popular for both) or pleasure riders trying dressage I see a real sense of acceptance among all parties. With the time and money spent on our horses and showing we can little afford to continue divisive behavior. Let's increase awareness and support of who/what isn't within our comfort zone, mentoring those who are learning and supporting those who are trying to understand and improve.

There was so much more to Convention, and I just touched on a few points, but my hope is that we'll begin understanding more, accepting what isn't right less, and come together as the group who love, respect and care for our horses and each other.

Respectfully submitted,  
Nancy Sawyer MAHA