

Oct/Nov 2025



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President's Message

Greetings All!

As we set the clocks back and watch the last leaves fall, I find myself reflecting on what a beautiful season it's been. I hope you've all been enjoying autumn with your equine companions—whether out on the trail or in the ring.

We just wrapped up our final clinic of the year with Lisa Schmidt at Belle Free Farm. Stay tuned for next year's clinic schedule—we have some exciting plans! From bodywork and groundwork with your horse to riding clinics for all levels, there's something for everyone. We're also hoping to host a Working Equitation Clinic in addition to our regular schooling and virtual shows.

Now is the time to submit your scores for our Year-End Awards on the CDA website between 11/1–12/1. Mark your calendars for the CDA Year-End Awards Banquet, to be held Sunday, January 25, 2026, at 3:00 PM at Lakeview Lodge in Bethany. Tickets are \$20 per person. In addition to awards, we'll have a silent auction, raffle baskets, and—of course—wonderful company!

Our Member Spotlight this issue is Emily Lula, owner and trainer at Chestnut Grove Equestrian Center in Bethlehem, CT. Enjoy the article from our youth contributor, Willow Riston, who shares her D4K 2025 experience.

Memberships for 2026 have been sent out and details are also on our website. Sign up now for early bird pricing. Each membership includes a printed copy of our omnibus, or you can opt for an electronic version. This year, we're excited to include the new Eventing Dressage tests and Western Dressage tests. If you are interested in omnibus sponsorship, info is located on our website. We appreciate your support!

Wishing you all a joyful holiday season, and I look forward to seeing everyone at our banquet in January.

Warm regards,
Val Blasi



Save the Date for Year End Awards Dinner
January 25, 2026, 3pm at the Lakeview Lodge in Bethany!

Click on the links below to submit your award applications!

Please refer to CDA's 2025 omnibus for criteria.

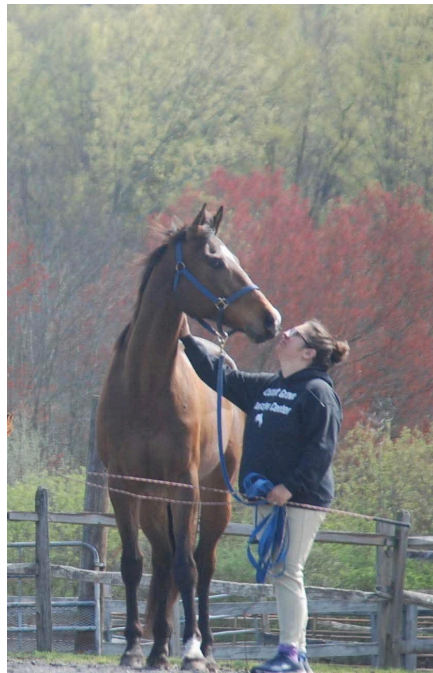
[Schooling Show Competitions Awards](#)
[Recognized Show Competitions Awards](#)
NEW! [Western Dressage Schooling Show Awards](#)
[Vista Vintage Award](#)
[Rider Achievement Awards](#)
[Year End Awards Information](#)

2025 CDA Sponsored Clinics

**Lisa Schmidt Clinic October 11, 2025
Belle Free Farm Columbia, CT**

Our last clinic of the 2025 season was held on a beautiful fall day with Lisa Schmidt. She is a United States Equestrian Federation licensed "S" dressage judge with Young Horse, Dressage Seat Equitation and Musical Freestyle accreditation. Lisa is also a FEI dressage competitor and trainer at all levels. She has earned her USDF Gold, Silver and Bronze Medals. Lisa is a member of the USDF L Program Faculty and has trained two 'r' judge's groups. From 2010 to 2016, Lisa was USDF Region 1 Director and a member of the USDF Executive Board.

Rider levels at the clinic ranged from Training Level to Prix St. Georges. Lisa worked with the riders on finding a good hand to bridle contact, helping the horses to be more round. Several lessons focused on horse and rider finding more balance and "sit" in the canter. Lisa also shared tips on getting horses to halt squarely, noting that every horse can do it but most riders make the mistake of not spending enough time working on halts. A good halt can provide an easy high score when other movements in a test are difficult.



Q: What is your equine background and can you share how you came to be the owner and trainer at Chestnut Grove Equestrian Center?

A: My background in horses goes back to when I was about 7 years old. Like most little girls, I wanted a pony. Eventually my parents brought me to The Riding Center in Bethlehem, owned by Bonnie Giannotti. Bonnie supported my parents and I in getting my first horse, Deandra. I rode with Bonnie until I went to college at the University of Vermont where I rode on the IHSA team and learned more about the hunter/jumper world. When I came home from college I had a couple of different jobs before I became a Certified Vocational Agricultural Teacher and got my Master's Degree in Agricultural Education. Then I started my career as a Vet Science teacher at Nonnewaug High School. During this time, one of my students mentioned to me that Bonnie was looking to sell her house and farm. I had always wanted my own riding center and a few months later, my husband Tom and I became the owners of Chestnut Grove Equestrian Center! It is so unique and fulfilling to own and teach out of the same exact facility I grew up riding and boarding at. Eventually we got pretty busy at CGEC and I was able to stop teaching at NHS and start working full time at CGEC.

Q: Tell us a bit more about Chestnut Grove Equestrian Center.

A: At CGEC we focus on how horses, horsemanship, and a positive learning environment can teach



After a great year of clinics we are planning for and looking forward to the clinics of 2026!

Membership Spotlight: Emily Lula

children of all ages important soft skills in a fun way. Horses teach children about responsibility, resilience, and communication. They teach people how to be a leader and how to work with another species to achieve a common goal. I love watching students work through difficult times and gain confidence when they are successful. Helping people prove to themselves that they can do hard things is one of my favorite parts of my job. At CGEC we offer private lessons and group classes year round. It is fun to work one on one with people in private lessons but I also really like the camaraderie and support that the students give to each other in the group lessons. In the summer we offer camp where the kids work together to take care of the horses, ride, and do activities. This horsemanship education in addition to riding is very helpful as we do a bit of showing in the summer months. I think it is important for competitors to know all of the aspects that go into horse showing and horse care.

Q: How did you become interested in dressage?

A: I was first introduced to dressage through Bonnie at The Riding Center but it wasn't until I started actively competing in eventing that I started to work hard at it. Then in May of 2023 I had my daughter Annie and in September of 2024 I had my daughter Grace. I did not ride while I was pregnant. Each of my daughters were born via c-section as well, so I had at least 18 months out of the saddle. As I have gotten back into riding and gaining my strength and skills back I have started to fall in love with the sport and I look forward to more competitions and training through the levels.

Q: How does dressage support the other disciplines you compete/train in?

A: Dressage supports all aspects of horsemanship and all disciplines. If you have solid basics of moving the horse off your leg and seat and adjustability in your striding, all of the other disciplines are easier. In eventing, I find that when I am having difficulties in jumping or cross country, it can usually be fixed with dressage training.

My favorite aspects of dressage training and competition is the relationship with the horse. I try to think of each show as an opportunity to build my trust and communication with my horse. I think of each time we go down the centerline as a challenge for George and I to work on together and as an opportunity for us to bond. The comments and scores we get from the judges are excellent feedback that I can use to be more efficient in my communication with my horse and

to enhance my skills. The judges work so hard to provide feedback that is clear and fair. I really appreciate all that they do for our sport.

Q: What are the challenges/rewards in working with young riders interested in dressage?

A: A lot of my students are in the Leadline category right now. It is great because they are almost guaranteed a good experience. I always hope that they get a ribbon but I never expect it. The ribbons are great but that is not why we show. We show to build our confidence and to get another set of eyes on our riding to see the areas we can improve in. Showing also gives us a goal and something to work towards. I really like how dressage is set up in a way that builds upon the skills. I like how I am allowed to lead my students in a walk pattern right now, and then they can do the a walk pattern without me, then we can add in some trot work and so on. I find it very rewarding to watch my students work towards the goal of participating and be successful in the show. The challenges with working with young riders interested in dressage is variability in the horses. As we all know, sometimes horses have hard days or are more excited about the grass outside of the arena than they are leg yields. It is challenging to teach students how to deal with these situations.



Q: What are your goals for next season?

A: My plan for next season with George is to start at Training Level and do some schooling shows at that level. Then I would like to do some rated shows at Training Level and move up to First Level within the CDA shows and other schooling shows. I also hope to

have my group of showing students participate in all of the CDA shows!

We are always looking for more people to join our barn family either as boarders, group lesson students, private lesson students, or show participants! You do not have to show to ride with us but it is more fun if you do! If you read through this and think we match your vibe be sure to check out our website at www.chestnutgroveequestriancenter.weebly.com or check out our Facebook page: Chestnut Grove Equestrian Center or our Instagram page: @chestnutgroveequestrian.



CDA Youth Connect News and Updates from Our Junior Members

Contributed by Willow Riston

We are very thrilled to have our youth contributor, Willow Riston, share her 2025 D4K experience with our CDA members.

Team spirit, sportsmanship, and skill all come together in events like The **Youth Dressage Festival**, affectionately known as *Lendon's Youth Dressage Festival*. This year the event was hosted at the Horse Park of New Jersey on August 8–10,.

All Competitors participated in a unique three-phase format that included a written test, an individual

dressage test, and an equitation ride. All of these events together rounded out everyone's strengths. If your weakness was the written tests you had a chance to advance in the individual test and the equitation ride.

This year the Connecticut Dressage Academy located in Madison, CT, attended the event. Katie Rodriguez (owner and head trainer) brought three students. Amelia, Ruby, and myself, Willow. It was everyone's first time attending the event and no one was put to shame! All staff and competitors were very welcoming and it was quite easy to get used to the new surroundings.

Throughout the show all competitors were required to do a minimum of one volunteer hour. Volunteers' hours consisted of setting up arenas, taking down arenas, putting jumps back up, and checking on horses to make sure they had water hay and a mostly clean stable. "I loved how every competitor had to volunteer. I feel that it really connected us to the community and gave us the opportunity to try new things." — Amelia LeSieur



Requiring every competitor to complete at least one volunteer hour was an amazing way to build community and teach responsibility. It helps riders appreciate the hard work that goes into running an event, from setting up arenas to managing schedules, and encourages teamwork and gratitude. By giving back, competitors became more connected to the

sport and to each other, making the festival not just a competition, but a shared experience that strengthened the dressage community.

Throughout the event there were so many classes you could sign up for that you usually don't see during regular dressage shows. "I loved how there were tons of classes and options alongside the dressage tests. I got to see different events and judging that I don't usually see at normal shows. I am excited to try out some of the different classes next year!" — Ruby General

Each test showcased a progressive scale of difficulty, asking more from the pair as they develop in skill and partnership. What's truly amazing is watching the wide variety of horse breeds and rider styles bring these tests to life. From elegant Warmbloods to spirited Cobs and even some very determined ponies. Each combination brought something unique to the arena.

The beauty of dressage lies in that harmony. Seeing how the different horses, with their own movement and temperament, interpret the same patterns with their riders guiding them seamlessly through each movement. It's not just a test of training; it's a performance that highlights the deep bond between horse and human.



Having a variety of classes brought a wide range of people to the event. Like the Caprilli, where jumps were incorporated into a dressage test. "I loved the versatility of judging and tests, it brought a broad range of individuals to the event. It seemed to keep people on the side lines wondering what new tests to take on next year."

I am excited to see what next year entails for the event and for everyone attending. There are so many opportunities for people and there is more to come. Next year will bring even more people to try new things. Thank you for an amazing 2025 event, and I hope to see new faces next year!

General Announcements

Volunteer Information -

If you are interested in volunteering with us: Email Carol Mohyde carolmohyde@gmail.com or Amy Ravitz amy.ravitz@yahoo.com

Opportunity to 'Shadow' a Volunteer

— Ask Carol or Amy

Earn USDF Volunteer Recognition — See more at [GMO Volunteer Incentive Program Hour Log](#)

Thank you to all of our 2025 volunteers!

USDF Region 8 News

A Message from our Regional Director

Greetings Region 8!

October 2025

We have just wrapped up the Regional Championships and they were a major success. For the first time, there were nine rings to support both the National Show and the Championships. 553 horse/rider combinations competed and there were 660 championship rides. Of note (and dismay to many) the AA First Level Championship had 72

participants! Show management needed to get a presidential modification to rules in order to run the class over two days. In addition to the competition, show management pulled out all the stops by arranging breakfast, brunch or lunch on each day. Thank you to Lyric Dressage, Hemp Steed, Archie's and Alliant Insurance Services for sponsoring the meals. Congratulations to all who participated, and special shout out to those who are headed to Ohio for the National Championships.

Kate O'Connor once again spearheaded the silent auction to raise funds to offset the travel expenses of our Participating Delegates. Thanks to donations from Bobbi Carleton, Deb Reinhardt, Anita Jaffe, Regina Cristo and Mary Piro. And thank you especially to Kate for her donations and time spent organizing. We raised more than \$850.

This is fun and exciting: First introduced at the 2024 Adequan®/USDF Annual Convention, the United States Dressage Federation™ (USDF) is thrilled to announce the official launch of the new You Be the Judge education module, available through the USDF website. Made possible by The Dressage Foundation's (TDF) Mary Anne and Walter McPhail Judge Education Fund, and USDF's partnership with Black Horse One, this new platform allows all members to have a peek behind the curtain to understand what, specifically, judges look for and how they assess scores in the competition arena. To access the new module, visit the USDF homepage and look for the You Be the Judge link. Attendees can also join us for a live session of You Be the Judge during the 2025 Adequan®/USDF Annual Convention.

As I mentioned in the last newsletter, the Convention is coming up December 3-6 in Lexington, KY. Preliminary information and registration is available here: <https://www.usdf.org/convention/>.

GMO Leadership, make sure your GMO is represented on the Board of Governors at the 2025 Adequan®/USDF Annual Convention! GMOs with at least 25 members are eligible to have representation. This is your GMO's opportunity to have a voice in the governance of USDF. Please make sure your GMO officers on record with USDF are current! If you have any questions, or need assistance to complete the form, please e-mail Sarah Garn at sgarn@usdf.org or call the USDF office.

In an effort to streamline the Convention, each USDF committee is having an open meeting prior to the Convention. It is worthwhile to dial into at least one or two of the calls that interest you to see what's going

on and discuss and plan the future of USDF and dressage in the US. The full schedule is listed [here](#), along with the meeting links, and start times for the open portions, to which you are invited.

Dressage4Kids is pleased to announce the Victoria D. Schmidt and Lisa K. Schmidt TEAM Scholarship Program. Thanks to a generous donation from the Victoria D. Schmidt estate, this new initiative will provide support for youth dressage riders in conjunction with the D4K TEAM Program and is expected to benefit D4K TEAM participants for many years to come. D4K's TEAM (Training, Education, And Mentoring) Program oversees clinics all over the US for youth riders of all levels, ages 25 and under. These clinics are taught by top international riders and trainers who are dedicated to the development of young riders. For more information, or to apply for the Victoria D. Schmidt and Lisa K. Schmidt TEAM Scholarship Program Scholarships, go to: <https://dressage4kids.org/scholarships/victoria-d-schmidt-and-lisa-schmidt-team-scholarship.html>

Please forward me any information about show and clinic schedules and I will be sure to include it in my newsletters.

All the best,
Helen
vandeh13@gmail.com

CDA Membership for 2026!

[Click here](#) to see all the fantastic benefits of membership and to renew!

CDA Sponsorship Opportunity in the 2026 Omnibus

Please consider sponsorship in the 2026 Connecticut Dressage Association Omnibus. The CDA Omnibus is an annual publication that is distributed to 175+ members. The Omnibus is an invaluable reference used by our members to get information about not only shows and events in our region, but professional goods and services for equestrians and their horses.

CDA is a not-for-profit organization, and your sponsorship revenue helps to defray the cost of producing the Omnibus. If you have any questions about omnibus sponsorship, please contact Megan Clarke at megan.clarkeCDA@gmail.com with subject heading "Omnibus Ad".

We appreciate your consideration and generosity.

CDA Sponsors – Connecticut Dressage Association (ctdressage.org)



Vicki Hammers-O'Neil

FEI Trainer and USDF Instructor Certification Faculty Member
203-213-2798 • fourtempis@aol.com • www.vhdressagellc.com

instruction that comes to you, with a focus on horse well-being and rider education
lessons • all-day/partial-day clinics • coaching at shows • instructor certification prep

TRAVELING THROUGHOUT CONNECTICUT, AS WELL AS NEW YORK & MASSACHUSETTS

CDA Scholarships **CDA Scholarships for Youth & Amateurs** **Vista Vintage Educational Scholarship**

CDA offers one or more scholarships per year, per category for CDA members. Check out the details for 2025 on the [CDA Scholarship Web](#) page.

The Vista Vintage Educational Scholarship

Through the continued generosity of Vista Vintage Award founder, Ted Plaut, CDA stewards the Vista Vintage Educational Scholarship.



The Vista Vintage Award singles out the best performances by our special senior horses. These are the equine partners who demonstrate that age is no

barrier to competing and earning scores to make any rider proud.

The Vista Vintage Award program focuses on the success of 'senior horses. It consists of a \$300 cash prize and an elegant special award.

For more information contact Kari Bradshaw at rhotshoe3@gmail.com.

Philla and Charlie Osborne Volunteer Award

Each year, CDA has the option to give a Volunteer of the Year Award for special service to CDA.

History: The award is named in honor of Philla and Charlie Osborne who donated hours and hours of service to CDA in the 80s and 90s. They were always found at the practice ring at shows (recognized and schooling) checking numbers and entries and letting riders know when they were "on deck". Philla and Charlie also rode for many years with Vicki Hammers-O'Neil and today, Philla owns a horse that is being trained and competed by Vicki.

CDA Rider Achievement Awards

An annual CDA Rider Recognition Program focusing on Juniors and AA's. Qualifying rides must be completed within the current competition year and can be achieved at either schooling or recognized shows.

Scores can be achieved on multiple horses. Training through 4th level. 3 scores, minimum 62% for schooling and 60% for recognized.

Follow CDA on Facebook **CDA Facebook Page**



CDA Facebook Pictures Needed
Please submit pictures for the CDA Facebook.
(The submitter needs to own the picture or copyright of the submission.)

Send to Jessica.amber77@gmail.com

2026 Calendar of Events

COMING SOON - 2026 Dates!

Next CDA Board Meeting
Monday, November 24, 2025
6:00 PM At Fern Feldman's house
OR Zoom Meeting will start at 6:30 pm
Contact Fern Feldman:
fernfeldman@gmail.com

*Please check the Website regularly for the status of events Ctdressage.org and eligibility criteria.

"It's very common for riders to try harder when something isn't happening. We get into that desperate feeling, and that doesn't help the horse at all. Quality riding really goes back to basics of rhythm, regularity, the correct contact and the correct outline. Those things, at the end of the day, are what gets the points in a test."

~ Chrissa Hoffman

CDA sponsored Shows

CDA @ Virtual Show #1

Opening date – closing date TBD
Video due: TBD
Judging and results by TBD

CDA @ Virtual Show #2

Opening date – closing date TBD
Video due: TBD
Judging and results by TBD

CDA @ Virtual Show #3

Opening date – closing date TBD
Video due: TBD
Judging and results by TBD

CDA @ Weatogue Stables

Opening date – closing date TBD

CDA @ R Folly Farm - See you in 2026

Opening date – closing date TBD

CDA @ Sperry View Farm - See you in 2026

Opening date – closing date TBD

CDA @ BelleFree Farm - See you in 2026

Opening date – closing date TBD