

Feb/March 2026



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Dear Members,

I would like to extend heartfelt congratulations to all of our year-end award winners! Our February celebration was worth the wait. It was a wonderful event filled with silent auction treasures, great food, and best of all, the company. Thank you to everyone who attended and helped make it such a success.

This winter has certainly tested us. The challenging weather impacted both our horses and our ability to stay on track with goals in and out of the ring. I think we can all agree, horses included, that we are grateful to finally see green grass returning!

We are excited to welcome back some clinic favorites, including Kendra Clarke's Dressage Simulator and Bobbi Carleton's Ride & Critique Ride. We are also thrilled to introduce new opportunities this year. Such as a multi-day riding clinic with Bill Warren and a Working Equitation clinic with Stephanie Hayes. We're pleased to offer a diverse calendar that supports learning and growth for riders of all levels and interests.

Our 2026 competition season features our traditional spring and summer schooling shows, along with three virtual shows. At our spring Sperry View Farm schooling show, we are excited to host a Pony Club Rally. Supporting young riders is essential to the future of our sport, and we warmly welcome these dedicated competitors. These shows offer valuable opportunities for members to learn, compete, and qualify for our Year-End Awards and Rider Achievement Programs.

The 2026 Omnibus will be shipping soon. Be sure to support our sponsors and note important updates. In response to the growing popularity of Western Dressage, we are pleased to include these tests in this year's Omnibus. The CDA is thrilled to participate in The Jockey Club Thoroughbred Incentive Program known as T.I.P. Look for more information later on in this newsletter.

CDA proudly offers scholarships for our youth and adult amateur members. For complete details on all of our programs and opportunities, please review the Omnibus and visit our website.

We are always looking for new volunteers, fresh ideas, and member input. Everyone is welcome at our monthly meetings, we would love to see you there! If you are interested in getting involved, please reach out to me at blasivalerie@yahoo.com or contact Fern Feldman at fernfeldman@gmail.com.

We look forward to welcoming you and your equine partners to a fantastic 2026 season!

Warm regards, **Val Blasi**, President Connecticut Dressage Association

Year End Awards Banquet

The February 8th Year End Awards Banquet proved to be a wonderful afternoon celebrating our members' achievements in the 2025 show season. The turnout was fantastic, with a full room. Lunch was delicious and the raffle included fantastic prizes. Attendees were also able to win clinic spots and lessons in our silent auction. Thank you to everyone who donated to the raffle and the silent auction and also to our volunteers who made the event a success. We appreciate everyone's support.



Congratulations to all of our award winners!

Member Spotlight

Katie Rodriguez
Owner & Trainer of Connecticut Dressage Academy

1. Tell us about yourself.

I am an FEI-level dressage rider and trainer, and owner of Connecticut Dressage Academy. My work focuses on developing horses and riders through correct foundational training rooted in classical principles and a horse-first philosophy.

I began my professional career working with challenging and misunderstood horses, which shaped my belief that strong basics and clear communication solve most issues. Over time, that passion for correct development led me to dressage, where I now train horses from young prospects through the FEI levels, while also coaching riders of all ages and ambitions.

In addition to my training program, I run a structured riding academy that creates an entry avenue for youth and adult riders interested in dressage. My goal is to build riders who understand biomechanics, harmony, and horsemanship, rather than just test movements. Whether in the show ring or the lesson arena, my program emphasizes sound development, longevity, and preserving the horse's spirit.



Ireland's Eden

2. How long have you been a professional trainer and what inspired you to become one?

I entered the professional world at a relatively young age, although initially not in dressage. I was drawn to working with "problem" horses because I quickly realized that most of the time, the horse itself wasn't truly the problem. Often, there was a misunderstanding in communication or gaps in foundational training. I found it very rewarding to help horses through those moments and to help owners better understand their partners.

I distinctly remember being about fourteen years old, working a challenging horse in the round pen. The barn manager walked over and said, "I haven't seen anyone have that horse go so well before." That moment stayed with me. It gave me confidence that I might have a natural feel for training, and it sparked a desire to continue learning and refining my skills.

Over time, that curiosity shifted toward the development of correct basics and classical foundations which ultimately led me to dressage!

3. Who are your mentors and what aspect of their approach drew you to them?

I have been fortunate to work with some exceptional trainers. I was first introduced to dressage during an apprenticeship with Patrick King, where I traveled to various clinics across the country. Many of those clinics were not held at dressage barns, yet watching him apply dressage principles to improve horses in other disciplines was transformative. That experience sold me on the universality of correct dressage training.

My first dedicated dressage trainer was Sarah Geikie, with whom I trained my horse Winters. I have also worked closely with Jordan LaPlaca, Sarah Lockman Tubman, Lee Tubman, and most recently Marco Bernal.

What I appreciate about Marco's approach is his attentiveness to the horse as an individual. He frequently comments on the horse's eye, expression, and spirit; elements that are just as important as mechanics. His program emphasizes systematic, practical exercises that create reliable improvement without quick fixes. Each ride is centered around respect and appreciation for the horse, and that philosophy strongly aligns with my own.

4. In recent months, there were social media posts regarding lesson barns, specifically geared towards beginners, struggling to keep lesson fees reasonable and meet overhead. These lesson barns serve as a pipeline to the specialty barns and trainers. I have met some of your young riders, who are smart, funny, and quite talented. Is it difficult to attract new youth riders?

I do think it can be challenging to attract youth riders to dressage. I wasn't initially drawn to dressage myself as a young rider. There are several contributing factors. Access to trainers willing to work consistently with children and provide suitable school horses can be limiting. Additionally, dressage requires patience, discipline, and time before the "fun" movements appear.

In many jumping programs, a coordinated young rider may begin jumping within a few months. In dressage, the foundations take years to build. I've had young students ask if we can try jumping, but I've never had one request for extra time practicing leg yields! That said, they certainly wouldn't turn down the opportunity to feel piaffe or passage on a schoolmaster.

I believe part of our responsibility as professionals is to make the journey engaging. Through Connecticut Dressage Academy, I work hard to create an

environment that blends structure with enthusiasm. We incorporate thoughtful cross-training, provide safe and interesting school horses, and maintain a positive, supportive culture. My goal is to show young riders that the foundations themselves can be exciting and that the partnership you can build with your horse through dressage is so rewarding!



Furst Fritz owned by Misty Meadows Equestrian, LLC

5. How would you describe your overall training philosophy?

My training philosophy is rooted in classical principles, correct biomechanics, and respect and appreciation for the horse as an individual.

I believe that strong basics solve nearly everything. When a horse is properly developed physically and mentally, the upper-level movements become a natural progression rather than a forced goal. I prioritize rhythm, balance, straightness, and suppleness before asking for collection or expression.

Equally important to me is preserving the horse's spirit. I want my horses to be attentive, confident, and willing; never shut down. Training should build strength and understanding, not tension or fear. My goal is to create partnerships that are harmonious, sustainable, and rooted in trust.

6. I know you are recently married and purchased a new horse. Congratulations! Please share how your new horse is coming along and what are your 2026 plans?

Yes! We were married in September and had a beautiful wedding! Around that same time, my friend

and colleague Mary Lauristen brought a mare to my attention, initially as a prospect for clients. When I tried her, I absolutely fell in love with her.

However, having just funded a wedding, purchasing a horse wasn't exactly in the budget. One day when I got home, I discovered that my husband had sold his car so we could buy Eden! I guess he is a keeper! ;)

She has been such a joy to develop. I am taking my time with her foundation and focusing carefully on strength, balance, and confidence. She is exceptionally kind, with a wonderful mind and presence. The plan for 2026 is to debut at Third Level and continue building her correctly for the future. More than anything, I am enjoying the daily process with her - she is truly special.



Connecticut Dressage Academy at a CDA show.

7. What is one piece of advice you'd give to someone starting in this industry?

Surround yourself with people who genuinely want to see you succeed and strive to be that person for others as well!

This industry can be challenging and competitive, but it can also be collaborative. Seek mentors who challenge you constructively. Stay curious. Invest in your education. And never lose sight of why you started!

If you maintain integrity, prioritize the welfare of the horse, and commit to lifelong learning, you will build something meaningful and lasting.

Opportunity for a CDA Youth to Apply for a D4K Sponsorship

Lendon's Youth Dressage Festival - August 7-9, 2026 - Horse Park of New Jersey, Allentown, NJ

For riders of all levels (from Leadline to FEI U25, Para, and Western), ages 4 through 25, plus alumni, also featuring a new Horseless Division for competitors without a horse.



We'd like to share an upcoming opportunity connected to D4K. As many of you know, CDA already supports this organization through our donations, so this feels like a natural extension of that relationship.

CDA will sponsor a limited number of CDA members who may be interested in participating. If there are families or youth who would like to be involved, we'd love to hear from you. Please let us know if your child might be interested in being part of a CDA-sponsored group.

More details will be shared soon. Thank you for helping us continue to support great organizations like D4K and for encouraging opportunities for our youth to get involved. Learn more at dressage4kids.org

2026 CDA Clinics

Ride-Critique-Ride Clinic with Bobbi Carleton (R)
April 18-19, 2026
Sperry View Farm, Bethany CT

Once again, we bring back our popular ride/critique/ride clinic! Each 45 minute session will include an opportunity to ride through the test of your choice and receive scores and comments. Bobbi will review your test with you and suggest improvements. You may choose to ride through your entire test again or work with Bobbi to focus on a specific aspect of the ride.

[CDA Release Form](#) | [Sperry View Farm Release Form](#)
| [R-C-R Clinic Registration](#)

Bill Warren (S) Clinic

June 20-22 2026

Sperry View Farm, Bethany, CT

Bill is an FEI 4* and USEF "S" dressage judge based in Wellington, Florida during the winter and in New England for the summer months along with Bill McMullin (USEF "S" judge and USDF FEI instructor/trainer faculty) making up the team of Warren McMullin Dressage.



Photo Credit: Susan Stickle

He not only judges in the US, but also internationally as well as being involved in conducting judges education programs in the US, including forums and mentoring apprentice groups for judges, promotions.

Additionally, he maintains an active clinic and teaching schedule where he enjoys working with riders of all levels. His unique teaching skill combined with his experience as an FEI ride rider and trainer, along with his judges eyes, brings horse and riders to their fullest potential.

Registration Coming Soon!

Stephanie Hayes Working Equitation Clinic

October 17, 2026

Connecticut Equestrian Center, Coventry CT

Stephanie Hayes from Johnson, Vermont, has been a professional in the horse industry for 35 years and involved in Working Equitation since 2017. She is a USAWE L judge, Recognized Professional Instructor, and serves on the Professional Development Committee. She is the co-founder of New England Working Equitation, a USAWE affiliate organization.

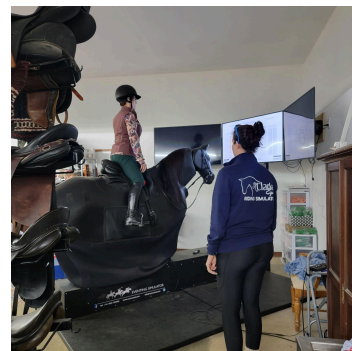
Stephanie has competed successfully on self trained horses earning numerous National Leaderboard and Regional Championships in levels 1 through 7. She was awarded the Platinum Lifetime Achievement award on her Lusitano DEM Rayo in 2025. Stephanie is currently ranked #70 in WAVE international rankings and has qualified for selection for the USAWE team at the 2026 World Championships.

Registration coming soon!

The Dressage Simulator clinic with Kendra Clarke was on March 14, 2026.

Attendees had a wonderful trip down to ride "Blue" a Racewood Eventing Simulator in Kintnersville, PA. Kendra worked with each rider on biomechanics. Some of the topics covered in the lessons include, rein pressure, seat balance, leg cues, and working on body asymmetries. Kendra provides wonderful feedback and takeaways.

Photos: Carrie Wind, Sean Brassington, Viola Tagliatela



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!

“In dressage, the halt is the only movement without movement. Asking a horse to stand still contradicts his natural flight instinct. Although he needs to remain ‘forward-thinking,’ ready to respond immediately to your aids, he also needs to be relaxed and quiet in his body.”

Volker Brommann, on how to improve your dressage horse's halt.

Quote Credit to Dressage Today, January 2026.

T.I.P. PROGRAM



The CDA is thrilled to participate in The Jockey Club Thoroughbred Incentive Program referred to as T.I.P. Thoroughbred riders and their horses have the opportunity to be recognized in various categories.

The Jockey Club created the Thoroughbred Incentive Program (T.I.P.) to encourage the retraining of Thoroughbreds into other disciplines upon completion of careers in racing or breeding.

A way to recognize previous race horses at their new job! A TB horse needs to be registered with the Jockey Club in order for the owner to obtain a TIP number. A TIP number is needed to be eligible for TIP awards at a show.

Provide T.I.P. Numbers with your entries. For more information and to see if your Thoroughbred is eligible, visit <https://tjctip.com/default>. Good luck to the Thoroughbreds and riders!

CDA Youth Connect News and Updates from Our Junior Members

Send us your stories and experiences.

General Announcements

Volunteer Information -

Wow! What a February we have had. I hope everyone was warm and safe.

First off, a bit of housekeeping. Nominations are now being accepted for Participating Member Delegates. A PM delegate represents the interests of all USDF Participating Members within their respective region on the USDF Board of Governors (BOG). As a PM delegate, you will be asked to vote on governance issues at the BOG General Assembly held at the USDF Annual Convention, as well as issues that may arise throughout the year. Communication is key if elected as a PM delegate.

PM delegates should communicate with their Regional Director to stay informed on important regional and national issues, as well as with the Participating Members within their region whom they will be representing the BOG. If you are interested in running, information can be found at

<https://www.usdf.org/about/about-usdf/governance/nominating/index.asp>. or you can talk to Kate O'Connor (nativeross@charter.net), our representative on the Nominations Committee. Our region also helps with travel expenses through the proceeds of our Deb Reinhardt Silent Auction held at the Regional Championship in September. USEF has issued [Dressage Riding Standards Guidelines](#).

Beginning this month, I am going to give a primer on the governance of USDF so our members have an idea of how USDF is structured and who you can go to in our region for information (or maybe think about joining a committee yourself!) USDF is governed by the Executive Board made up of the President (Steve Reinig), Vice President (Deb Reinhardt) Secretary (Carolyn Tice) and Treasurer (Lorraine Musselman). In addition, there is a Regional Director from each of the nine regions, and three At-Large Directors who oversee the Activities Council (Sue Mandas), the Administrative Council (Anne Moss) and the Technical Council (Sue McKeown). There are 17 Committees that operate under the Board who meet regularly to review policies, rules and take up new ideas.

Please go to this link <http://www.usdfregion8.org/> to learn about the committees which comprise the Activities Council.

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 Scholarships

CDA offers one or more scholarships per year, per category for CDA members. Check out the details for 2026 on the [CDA Scholarship Webpage](#).

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 (18 or older). It consists of a \$150 cash prize and an award.

For more information contact Kari Bradshaw at rkhotshoe3@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.

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.

details

<https://www.weatoguestables.com/services>

Judge: Stephanie Mason "r"

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

CDA @ Sperry View Farm - May 2, 2026

(opening date: 4/12/26 – closing date: 4/28/26)

Judge: Matthew Beasley "L" Graduate with Distinction

CDA @ R Folly Farm - August 9, 2026

Please refer to Abacus Events prize list in CDA omnibus for more details

<https://www.rfollyfarm.com/events.html>

Judge: Karry Brothers "L" Graduate with Distinction

CDA @ Sperry View Farm - September 6, 2026

(opening date: 8/16/26 – closing date: 8/29/26)

Judge: Steve Ruggiero "r"

CDA @ BelleFree Farm - October 3, 2026

(opening date: 9/12/26 – closing date: 9/26/26)

Judge: Augusta Van Tongeren "L Graduate"

2026 Calendar of Events

Next CDA Board Meeting March 30, 2026

6:00 at Fern's in person

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.

CDA sponsored Shows

CDA @ Virtual Show #1

[Click here for results](#)

CDA @ Virtual Show #2

Opening date March 13, 2026

Closing date April 5, 2026

Video due: April 26, 2026

Judging and results by May 7, 2026

[Click here for prizelist](#)

CDA @ Virtual Show #3

Opening date May 1, 2026

Closing date May 24, 2026

Video due: June 14, 2026

Judging and results by June 25, 2026

[Click here for prizelist](#)

CDA @ Weatogue Stables - June 20, 2026

Please refer to Weatogue Stable prize list for