



Morgan Horse Clubs, and How *We* Can Get Involved

By Denny Emerson

The following paragraph is a direct quotation from the American Morgan Horse Association.

“AMHA has a wonderful network of recognized clubs and youth teams representing local Morgan communities across the United States and abroad, serving as a vital link between Morgan owners and AMHA. These groups are involved with promoting the Morgan at a grassroots level while celebrating the people who love them with a myriad of events and activities for members and the public alike. Please locate a Morgan club or youth team in your area, join to help support your local Morgan community, then enjoy. For questions regarding establishing a club or youth team please contact AMHA at info@morganhorse.com or call 802-985-4944.”

By my count on the AMHA page, there are 51 clubs and youth groups, most scattered across the United States, with four other clubs in Great Britain, Canada, Australia, and Sweden.

Many horse breeds and disciplines have national associations and federations where rules and broad-based decisions are formulated, but almost always the nitty gritty work gets done locally. Take the United States, for example. At the very top we have a federal government. Then there are 50 state governments. Then each state is broken down into counties, counties into cities and towns, and even within the most localized governmental agencies, these will

often be further divided into specific categories. Most associations are further subdivided in the manner of governmental agencies.

Every one of the Morgan clubs and groups will have members, and some of those volunteer members are the people who make it happen at your local, state, or national level. I don't have a clue what the Swedish Morgan Horse Association does. Similarly, I don't know much about what goes on with the New England Morgan Horse Association, even though I am a New Englander. But I *do* know quite a lot about the Vermont Morgan Horse Association (VMHA) because I am a member of that club, and I volunteer as a board member and with helping put on our annual horse show, Vermont Morgan Heritage Days.

Other activities include hosting clinics, potluck dinners, selling books, mugs, and T-shirts at various events, manning booths at other shows and fairs, and interacting with the public. I asked Nina Quinn, one of VMHA's stalwarts, “If you were asked to describe what we actually do, what would you say?”

These are not Nina's precise words, but here's the essence of what she said: We are ambassadors. Every time we are at shows, clinics, fairs, meetings, any place that people gather, it is our job to promote Morgan horses, not in a pushy way, but by being friendly and enthusiastic.

ABOVE: Promotions at the club and local level are an important way of introducing the Morgan to new enthusiasts. Pictured are the Lippitt Club booth at the Massachusetts Equine Affaire 2023 and scenes from the Ohio Equine Affaire 2023 (photo © Elise Tedona).



LEFT TO RIGHT: Maine Morgan (photo © Andy Illies) and Ledyard Farms public events.

This resonated with me as something I have noticed, too. Someone loves horses, let's say, but is not yet hooked on any particular breed or style of riding, driving, or other kind of horse activity. That person is a potential convert. Now I won't go so far as to say that we should look at that person as a fish waiting to be hooked (but I *do* think that!). So, what will it take to reel that person in? There are many breeds, so what will make them choose Morgans?

Well, the simplest answer is that our friendliness and enthusiasm will go far to sell our breed, whereas if we are indifferent and non-communicative, that is a huge turnoff.

Years ago, at a prestigious three-day event held at Fair Hill, Maryland, I'd been introduced to an older lady who was one of the event's primary sponsors. On the afternoon after the cross country, I watched her walk up to a group of riders high with excitement from having gone well earlier in the day.

"How did it go today, girls?," she asked. One glanced briefly around, said "It was good," then turned back to her friends. The older lady quietly walked away. I thought, "how rude, how unkind, and how stupid to blow off the person who had made their

wonderful day possible."

And how does that relate to joining and supporting a local Morgan club? Because each one of us has the power to join and to be a spokesperson for our breed, or not. Each Morgan horse person has the ability to become involved locally in a club or group, and from that base, can take on the role of Morgan ambassador. Every time that we open access to our group—the way those eventing riders did not—we are building Morgan strength.

In a rather small breed like the Morgan, every new convert counts. I think it is at the local and club level that direct contact with the horse-loving public is most immediate. The next time that you are at a horse show, a trail ride, a fair, or clinic, and someone asks you about your Morgan, this is your chance to bring a newcomer into the fold.

There are at least 50 Morgan horse clubs and associations, so pick one that works for where *you* live. Join, get involved, and know that you are helping to shore up an entire breed. It's like the "How do you eat an elephant?" question.

"One bite at a time." ■