



UPHA National Convention • Las Vegas, NV • January 12-15

As the old saying goes, “What happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas”. This could not be further from the truth for attendees to this year’s United Professional Horseman’s Association (UPHA) convention, who all gained valuable insight into the industry, and took home a plethora of knowledge to put into practice at their respective barns back home.

The event, held in conjunction with the American Hackney Horse Association (AHHS), American Road Horse and Pony Association (ARHPA) and American Morgan Horse Association (AMHA), was held at the Aria Resort and Casino on January 12-15, 2026. It was a welcomed respite from the cold weather that has blanketed most of the country this winter. The massive hotel and event space encompasses over 4,000 rooms spread out between two curvilinear glass towers, in which the main tower soars 50 stories overlooking the Vegas strip. It ranks amongst the largest hotels in Las Vegas.

In a departure from the norm, the convention was held mid-week, with a welcome party on Tuesday evening, and wrapping up with a gala awards ceremony on Thursday evening. Popular photographer Howard Schatzberg was on hand to capture all of the excitement from the week, and Richfield Video provided streaming of the many awards ceremonies.

On Monday evening, Grace Arnold, LLC sponsored this year’s welcome party, which was held at The Wizard of Oz at Sphere, a one of a kind event space featuring a fully immersive 4D cinematic experience using the venue’s massive 160,000 sq. ft. interior display plane 16K wraparound screen, Sphere Immersive Sound, and multi-sensory effects (wind, fog, scents, haptic seats) to place audiences *inside* the classic 1939 film, transporting them down the Yellow Brick Road with enhanced visuals and remastered audio for a feeling of being physically present in Oz. It utilizes AI to augment the original film. As anticipated, the event was extremely popular and tickets sold out quickly.

On Wednesday evening, an associates activity was held at The Mob Museum. Attendees learned the fascinating history of organized crime and law enforcement in Las Vegas. This interactive museum offered an inside look at the notorious rise of the mob in the city, and celebrated the heroes who brought them down. Members participated in a scavenger hunt, scouring the three floors of the museum for answers to provocative questions about the history and ongoing battle between organized crime and law enforcement.

Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday were packed with association meetings as well as many educational forums. These forums offered a well-rounded exploration of forces shaping the horse industry, blending economics, business, education and horsemanship. Sessions examined how supply and demand influence breeding decisions and long-term sustainability, alongside the real world business realities of operating within the equine industry, from budgeting and pricing to managing clients and balancing passion with profitability.

The sessions explored the following themes

according to the UPHA:

• **Supply and Demand: Shaping the Future of the Breed**

This forum examined how supply, demand, and perception are shaping the Saddlebred industry. Panelists agreed the main issue isn’t overbreeding, but development, marketing, and presentation. Strong buyer demand—especially for well-developed, mid-priced horses—highlighted the importance of professional marketing and positive buyer experiences. Collaboration among breeders, trainers, and sellers was emphasized, along with expanding divisions, inclusive events, and alternative pathways beyond top-level championships to create more opportunities and long-term industry sustainability.

• **The Power of Positive Training and Coaching**

Led by Betty Baird Kregor, this session focused on relationship-based coaching, mental preparation, and performance psychology. Panelists stressed the importance of calm, clear communication, confidence-building, and placing riders in the right mental state before entering the ring. Trainers were encouraged to separate learning from execution, adapt coaching styles to individual riders, and use tools like visualization, goal-setting, and reflection. The forum also addressed wellness, fitness, and thoughtful communication as essential to rider success and horse welfare.

• **Judging 101: What Are Judges Really Looking For?**

This session clarified how judges evaluate classes, emphasizing strict adherence to class specifications—not reputation or favoritism. Presentation, showmanship, and attention to detail were identified as key differentiators. Judges addressed misconceptions about favoritism, discussed safety and practicality in rules, and reinforced their responsibility for fairness, welfare, and consistency, while encouraging education and transparency across the industry.

• **From the Ground Up: How Every Role Shapes the Horse Industry**

This forum highlighted the transferable



The week was filled with informative and well attended forums, including the above, “Judging 101: What are Judges Really Looking For?”



UPHA President, Paul Boone, with his wife, Betsy.

skills developed in the horse industry—leadership, communication, problem-solving, and emotional intelligence. Participants were encouraged to recognize their strengths, understand their impact within the industry ecosystem, and engage in leadership and service through organizations like UPHA to strengthen both personal growth and industry sustainability.

• **How to Crack the Nut: The Business Realities of the Horse World**

This practical session focused on financial sustainability in horse businesses, emphasizing budgeting, cash flow, and knowing true operating costs. Panelists highlighted recurring invoicing, account separation, advance budgeting, and pricing for profit. Additional income streams and value-added services were encouraged to build stability, with streamlined systems and financial clarity identified as essential for long-term success.

• **Generations in Conversation: Shared Paths, Different Steps**

This forum brought together professionals across generations to discuss career development, mentorship, and industry sustainability. Panelists

emphasized treating the profession as a business, building long-term assets, supporting grassroots programs, and maintaining strong community connections. The session reinforced that collaboration, professionalism, and adaptability are key to shaping a strong future for the industry.

Among the association meetings, long-time member Melissa Moore brought the concept of a professional women's group to the UPHA Board of Directors. According to the UPHA, they approved the formation of the United Equine Professional Women's group to, "support, empower, and mentor professional horsewomen of all ages and disciplines." The group held its first meeting held on January 14, 2026, with over 50 women in attendance. This group demonstrated a strong and immediate need for this type of community within the equine industry. The mission of this group is to create a strong, supportive community where women can come together to share knowledge, experiences, and life lessons learning how to navigate both the professional and personal realities of life in the horse industry. At its core, this group is built on the belief that true growth comes through collaboration, not competition. Ours is an industry that demands women wear many hats every single day: managing farm operations, training horses, handling clients, maintaining financial records, fixing equipment, hauling horses, serving as counselors and problem-solvers, while also raising families, managing households, and caring for themselves. The list is long,



The newly formed United Equine Professional Women's group met for the first time in an effort to, "support, empower, and mentor professional horsewomen of all ages and disciplines."

and the expectations are high. There are countless accomplished women across our industry who possess invaluable wisdom gained through years of experience. United Equine Professional Women aims to connect these women with younger professionals who are seeking guidance, encouragement, and practical tools to help them succeed and thrive.

In between the informative meetings and sessions was the opportunity to celebrate and honor the horsemen and women who go above and beyond for the industry in a series of luncheons and dinners, culminating with the black tie gala on Thursday evening. Also honored through popular vote were the overall horses and ponies of the year. Please see the following pages for the winners of these prestigious awards. The gala also included the ever popular live auction, which included the following fantastic items:

- Week Stay at "Siesta Sands Hideaway."
- A Custom-Tailored DeRegnaucourt Suit

Elegant"

- Kentucky Bourbon Trail Exclusive Tour and Tasting
- Waste Management Phoenix Open Package
- 2027 UPHA National Conference Package
- Breeders Cup Experience for Four People

Once again, the UPHA convention proved to be an informative and fun social event. According to UPHA President, Paul Boone, "This year's conference wasn't about a checklist of accomplishments. It was about our people and our horses. Throughout the week, the camaraderie among horse trainers was unmistakable. Trainers supported one another, shared ideas, and took the time to truly connect. New relationships were formed, old friendships were strengthened, and there was a genuine sense that we are better when we work together."

Next year, the conference heads back to the east and the sunny skies of Orlando, Florida on January 5-8, 2027.

Photos courtesy of Howard Schatzberg

2025 UPHA/AHHS Horse/Pony of the Year Divisional Award Winners

Saddlebred Five-Gaited Open

HELLUVA STORY

Owner: Silver Brook Stables, Inc. Trainer: Debbie Foley

Saddlebred Five-Gaited Amateur

MIDD'S DELANEY

Owner: Swope Equine Investments
Trainers: Peter and Kim Cowart

Saddlebred Five-Gaited Ladies/Ladies Amateur

PSYCHEDELIC MEMORIES

Owner: 5R Farm LLC Trainer: Steve and Tiffany Wheeler

Saddlebred Five-Gaited Junior Exhibitor

THE NORTHERN CROWN

Owner: Pearson Waller Trainer: Robert Gardiner

Saddlebred Five-Gaited Pony

CH MACHO CAMACHO

Owner: Sultan Show Horses LLC Trainer: Matt Shiflet

Saddlebred Three-Gaited Open

HS KALARAMA'S DEAL MAKER

Owner: Sandy Gallagher Trainer: Neil Visser

Saddlebred Three-Gaited Amateur

HALLELUJAH MOMENT

Owner: Dream Blue LLC Trainer: Shelley Fisher

Saddlebred Three-Gaited Ladies/Ladies Amateur

NASHVEGAS

Owner: Helen Rich Trainer: Smith Lilly

Saddlebred Three-Gaited Junior Exhibitor

CH ON HIGHER GROUND

Owner: Greg Lurvey Trainer: Mark Bodnar and Sheri Brandt

Saddlebred Three-Gaited Pony

CH SAY YES TO SUCCESS

Owner: Katty Wozniak Trainer: Todd Miles

Saddlebred Fine Harness Open

HOLY SMOKES

Owner: Donna or Don Nabors Trainer: T.J. Santaferria

Saddlebred Fine Harness Amateur/Ladies

ARROWHEAD'S DIFFERENT BREED OF CAT

Owner: Swope Equine Investments Trainer: Peter and Kim Cowart

Saddlebred Three-Gaited Park Open

CH UNDULATA'S JOHNNY REBEL

Owner: Rhiannon White Trainer: Neil Visser

Saddlebred Three-Gaited Park Amateur

CH IT'S AEROSMITH

Owner: Dream Blue LLC Trainer: Shelley Fisher

Saddlebred Three-Gaited Park Junior Exhibitor

HS AMBITIOUS JOE

Owner: Sandy Gallagher Trainer: Neil Visser

Saddlebred Show Pleasure Three-Gaited Adult Amateur

KING OF SWING

Owner: Sandy Gallagher Trainer: Neil Visser

Saddlebred Show Pleasure Three-Gaited Junior Exhibitor

CH GRACEFUL SURPRISE

Owner: EAC Equine LLC Trainer: David and Kristen Cater

Saddlebred Show Pleasure Driving

CH CHESS PIECE

Owner: Stone Ridge Equine Care LLC/Linda Stone
Trainer: Todd Miles

Saddlebred Show Pleasure Five-Gaited Adult

CH MAN ON THE MOVE

Owner: Dream Blue LLC Trainer: Shelley Fisher

Saddlebred Show Pleasure Five-Gaited Junior Exhibitor

LANDMARK'S MISTLETOE

Owner: Blue Oaks Way LLC Trainer: Mark Turner

Saddlebred Country Pleasure Adult

CH CROSSFIRE'S CHARMED LIFE

Owner: Mia Provenzano Trainer: Mark Bodnar and Sheri Brandt

Saddlebred Country Pleasure Junior Exhibitor

CH ROSELANE'S TOWN TOPIC

Owner: EAC Equine LLC Trainer: David and Kristen Cater

Saddlebred Country Pleasure Driving

CH MBA'S JUST ABOUT THYME

Owner: Mary O'Keefe Trainer: Amanda Simpson

Saddlebred Western Pleasure Amateur/Junior Exhibitor

CH DOUBLE PARKED

Owner: Bandy Acres Farm/Scarlett W. Mattson Trainer:
Adam Clauson

Saddlebred Hunter Country Pleasure

CH REEDANN'S HEIRLOOM

Owner: Phyllis Brannon Trainer: Phyllis Brannon

Hackney Pony Open

CHARLOTTE'S WEB

Owner: Tammy Whitworth Trainer: Paul Boone

Hackney Pony Ladies/Amateur

CH HEARTLAND SECRET WEAPON

Owner: Jacqueline Ohrstrom/Berrywick Farm Trainer: Rich Campbell

Harness Pony Open

STARLETTE

Owner: Golden Creek Farms Trainer: Tom Lowry

Harness Pony Ladies/Amateur

ANTICIPATION'S ELISE LF

Owner: Golden Creek Farms Trainer: Tom Lowry

Roadster Pony Open

ISHMAEL'S SO RARE LF

Owner: Golden Creek Farms Trainer: Tom Lowry

Roadster Pony Junior Exhibitor

CH HEARTLAND VELVET TOUCH

Owner: Maya Tasch Trainer: Bret and Susi Day

Roadster Pony Amateur

ALEXUS TEXAS

Owner: Cynthia Scoggin Trainer: Randy and Denessa Harper

Roadster Pony Under Saddle

HEARTLAND THUNDER MONKEY

Owner: Ella and Levi Hayes Trainer: Rich Campbell

Hackney Pony Pleasure Driving Amateur

WAIT & SEE HOW IT GOES

Owner: Ghareeb Equine Investments LLC
Trainer: Rich Campbell

Hackney Pony Pleasure Driving Junior Exhibitor

UPTOWN FUNK

Owner: Darien Walker Trainer: Amanda Simpson

Roadster Horse Open/Wagon

SUPER SHAQ

Owner: Melissa Moore Trainer: Melissa Moore

Roadster Horse Ladies/Amateur/Youth Amateur

XCELERATOR

Owner: Hagan Saddlebreds Inc. Trainer: Chris Gantley

Roadster Horse Under Saddle

AC/DC

Owner: Kandi Kuck Trainer: Don and Allison Deardorff



2025 UPHA Overall Horse and Pony of the Year

Saddlebred Five-Gaited MIDD'S DELANEY

Owner: Swope Equine Investments
Trainer: Peter & Kim Cowart

Saddlebred Three-Gaited NASHVEGAS

Owner: Helen Rich • Trainer: Smith Lilly

Saddlebred Fine Harness

CH ARROWHEAD'S DIFFERENT BREED OF CAT
Owner: Swope Equine Investments
Trainer: Peter and Kim Cowart

Saddlebred Three-Gaited Park Horse

CH IT'S AEROSMITH
Owner: Dream Blue LLC • Trainer: Shelley Fisher

Saddlebred Show Pleasure Horse

CH MAN ON THE MOVE
Owner: Dream Blue LLC • Trainer: Shelley Fisher

Saddlebred Country Pleasure Horse

CH MBA'S JUST ABOUT THYME
Owner: Mary O'Keefe • Trainer: Amanda Simpson

Hackney Pony

CHARLOTTE'S WEB
Owner: Tammy Whitworth • Trainer: Paul Boone

Harness Pony

ANTICIPATION'S ELISE LF
Owner: Golden Creek Farms • Trainer: Tom Lowry

Hackney Pony Pleasure Driving

UPTOWN FUNK
Owner: Darien Walker • Trainer: Amanda Simpson

Roadster Pony

ALEXUS TEXAS
Owner: Cynthia Scoggin
Trainer: Randy and Denessa Harper

Roadster Horse

SUPER SHAQ
Owner: Melissa Moore
Trainer: Melissa Moore

2025 UPHA Chapter Horse Persons of the Year

Chapter 1 Ann Miller
Chapter 2 Merin Maggi
Chapter 3/4 Jackie Sweeney
Chapter 5 Christie Milbury
Chapter 6/7 Mattie Luedeker
Chapter 8/17 Courtney Huguley
Chapter 9 Chad Cole
Chapter 10 Mike and Dale Arnston
Chapter 11 Caroline Boyer
Chapter 12 Paul Boone
Chapter 13 Steve Demjen
Chapter 14 Scott and Danielle Neidinger
Chapter 15 Phyllis Zuber
Chapter 16 Jessica Saft
Chapter 18 Michael Eure

2025 UPHA Chapter Honor Shows of the Year

Chapter 1 Carosel Charity
Chapter 2 Silicone Valley
Chapter 3/4 Madison Classic
Chapter 5 UPHA Chapter V
Chapter 6/7 Pin Oak Charity
Chapter 8/17 Cleveland Tri-State Charity
Chapter 9 Rock Creek
Chapter 10 Monarch Show Series National Champ.
Chapter 11 IASHA Spring Warm Up
Chapter 12 UPHA Ch. 12 NC State Championship
Chapter 13 Spring Showcase
Chapter 14 New England Morgan Regional
Chapter 16 Ocala International
Chapter 18 UPHA Chapter 18



AHHS John H. and Maybelle L. Costello National
Rodney Hicks



Lydia Luhman Pederson National Distinguished Service Award
Sandy Backer



AHHS Elsa Mikkelsen Distinguished Service Award
Kathleen Flower & Travis Smith



AHHS Junior Exhibitor Award
Hudson Baumhoer



AHHS "Spirit of Youth Medallion" Award
Letty McMillan



UPHA National Honor Show
All American Horse Classic



National Horseman Icon Award
Justin Cowley (Evie Cowley accepting)



UPHA Ribbons of Service





**Anna Lee Spires Judd National Amateur Exhibitor Award
Elizabeth Scoggin; Deborah Barron (Carol Reedy accepting)**



**UPHA Tony Ray Young Professional of the Year Award
Emma Caruso**



**UPHA Shirley Parkinson Professional Achievement Award
Christy Parker**



**Dr. Scott Bennett Professional Services Award
Event Mix- John and Erin Fann**



**UPHA Associate Member of the Year Award
C.A. Lee, III**



**2025 UPHA Sportsmanship Award
Jacqueline Schatzberg**



**Lillian Shively Equitation Distinguished Service Award
Melissa Smith**



**UPHA Larry Bacon Lifetime Achievement Award
Robert Ruxer**



**UPHA Sallie B. Wheeler Distinguished Service Award
Ceil and Kenny Wheeler and Helen Rich (Ali DeGray accepting)**



2025 UPHA Special Recognition Awards





2025 UPHA and AHHS Special Recognition Awards



**UPHA Alvin C. Ruxer Lifetime Commitment Award
Dr. Margaret McNeese**



**UPHA Richard E. Lavery Professional Horseman's Award
Randy and Denessa Harper**



**Harry Sebring Professional Horseman's Award
Gerry Rushton and Stacy Hennessy**



**UPHA Tom Moore Hall of Fame
Nancy Becker**



**UPHA Tom Moore Hall of Fame
Mike Felty**



**UPHA Helen Crabtree Instructor Hall of Fame
Maria Gilman**



**AHHS Bill G. Robinson National Trainer Award
Thomas Lowry**



**AHHS Gwen Stableford Lifetime Achievement Award
Carl & Kathryn Nichols**



**AHHS Gwen Stableford Lifetime Achievement Award
Randy Harper**

The past few years have brought challenges to our industry, but this conference reminded me just how strong we are when we come together. UPHA has worked hard to stay united, and in Las Vegas, it was clear that unity is growing. While we may have different perspectives, our shared dedication to our horses and our profession always brings us back together.

This year's conference wasn't about a checklist of accomplishments. It was about our people and our horses. Throughout the week, the camaraderie among horse trainers was unmistakable. Trainers supported one another, shared ideas, and took the time to truly connect. New relationships were formed, old friendships were strengthened, and there was a genuine sense that we are better when we work together.

Our forums were well attended, educational, and full of thoughtful discussion. The energy of our young professionals was especially encouraging, fostering an atmosphere of inclusion, collaboration, and optimism for the future.

And of course, we can't forget the fun—our night at the Sphere for The Wizard of Oz was a shared experience that brought excitement to an already memorable week.

I left Las Vegas feeling proud of our membership and confident in the direction we are heading. We look forward to reconnecting in 2027 in Orlando and hope to see members from across the country join us as we continue moving our industry forward—together.

Sincerely,

Paul Boone
Paul Boone
UPHA President

