



Valerie Vizcarrondo Pride (far right) walking the course with the officials at the Strzegom CIC03* in Poland.

ROGER HALLER SCHOLARSHIP: TAKING OFFICIALS TO A NEW LEVEL

BY VALERIE VIZCARRONDO PRIDE

In 2016 the USEA established two educational scholarships in memory of the late Roger Haller to address the urgent need of training new officials who can serve at the highest levels of the sport. Increasing the pool of eventing officials was one of the reasons Haller devoted so much of his time to addressing the shortfall by developing the USEA's educational programs for officials. The scholarship was designed to provide financial assistance to those licensed officials who are working towards promotion to the "R" license, the "S" license or the FEI licenses. The USEA awarded the inaugural scholarships of \$5,000 each to Valerie Vizcarrondo Pride and John Williams.

This time last year, I was applying for a scholarship made possible by a man that left a huge hole in the eventing world. Roger Haller was so well liked and respected by so many all over the world, a feat not easily achieved by an official trying to coordinate the efforts and best interests of so many at one time who at first glance have a lot of different interests and opinions! He put smiles on the faces of so many people, and made it all look easy. Pursuing the upper ranks of officiating is somewhat daunting when you first begin, and here I was applying for the Roger Haller Scholarship to help make it all possible. In addition to all of the pressure I put on myself to do things to a high standard, could I carry the weight of Roger's legacy at the same time? Roger knew how important it was to get others involved at the highest levels of eventing, both in the U.S. and worldwide. Was I up for the challenge? I held my 'R' Eventing Judge's license, which enables me to judge through the two-star level in the U.S. I still do a lot

of training, coaching and competing, and judging at the 'R' level is within my comfort zone. As an eventer, however, I guess it's just natural to get to one level and before you know it you have your sights already set on the next!

Fast forward . . . I won the scholarship and so just like that there was no looking back – I needed a plan! I was determined to honor Roger and the sport of eventing by making the most of my opportunity. I know I'm biased, but eventing really is the best sport and eventers really are the best people. I got so much great advice from others, some on what to do and some on what not to do! Before I knew it, we had concocted a plan that had me pursuing both national and international licenses. I had my sights set nationally on my 'S' license to be able to judge through Advanced and internationally my FEI 1/2* license so that I could represent the U.S. as an official outside of our country. Luckily Roger's grant was going to help make this pursuit financially possible because this had me traveling not just throughout the U.S.,

but all over the world!

It might come as no surprise that my judging quest started, like most event riders, in Ocala in February! I attended a seminar hosted by the USEA at Rocking Horse Horse Trials that helps train judges on how to judge. I think the biggest myth I bust when I speak with people about my judging is what exactly an eventing judge does – everything! Just like an event rider, an eventing judge must be proficient in all three phases. Yes, you must judge the dressage and have a great understanding of it. But you also have to approve the cross-country and jumping courses; are they safe? Are they appropriate for the level? What are you going to do if x,y,z happens? You judge show jumping and you are essentially the final say on cross-country penalties. You also have to be able to handle disciplinary matters and questions, comments and concerns all while working with the other officials and organizers playing a role in the event. This seminar had it all covered with people that know a thing or two

about eventing on the world stage, and so many of their personal stories and examples came from when they've officiated the biggest events in the world! Marilyn Payne was the dressage expert and helped my eye really develop for catching the big ticket item for Advanced dressage, the flying changes. Capt. Mark Phillips was the cross-country expert, and we walked around the Advanced track at Rocking Horse discussing all sorts of theory and what-ifs and what to-dos about everything from footing to safe fence construction to what is appropriate (or not!) for the Advanced level.

Taking this information forward, I then had to serve as an apprentice for two different Presidents of the Ground Jury at two Advanced events. I did this at Fair Hill in April where they offer both national and international division at Preliminary, Intermediate and Advanced, and then again at Millbrook which is arguably one of the best events in the U.S. As always, the "official" officials at these events were so giving of their time and knowledge. It gives you a great sense of confidence going forward that you have helped be a part of making some tough, yet fair decisions and doing your best to make things work out for everyone. Just like when you ride, you want to rise to the occasion of being at such high profile competitions. The atmosphere is electric, the enthusiasm is contagious and I learned a lot while getting to "judge" some absolutely spectacular horses and riders. I came home from both events inspired to raise my standard for my own riding, teaching and officiating!

It would have been efficient if my year had been spent traveling up and down the East Coast. But, this circus eventing life had much more in store! One of the criteria for my FEI license requires a positive referral from working with a foreign official. Next thing you know, I'm in Strzegom, Poland, "judging" an FEI Nations Cup CIC03* with some of the most respected officials in all of Europe. I sat with the top German judge watching the German team absolutely dominate the competition during all three phases. I had the time of my life, and certainly made some friends for life all while expanding my knowledge. It

was truly an opportunity I will never forget. I have to thank the USEA for all that they do for us – even though I was a touch star struck by both the riders and officials alike – I trusted in my training and preparation, and I hung right in there with the big kids! I received the positive assessment that I needed to apply for my FEI license.

Back to reality and back to the U.S. to find myself taking the final exam for my 'S' license at the Richland Park Horse Trials. I sat down next to Linda Zang and Wayne Quarles and judged the CIC3* dressage like it was just any other day. I had to write an evaluation of the cross-country course comparing the Advanced track to the CIC3* track and later had to defend my thoughts on everything from the warm-up, to the numbers of strides in the combinations, to the level of difficulty at this event and beyond. I walked the show jumping course with designer Marc Donovan and was asked not only about what he had on the course; but all sorts of jumping theory about shapes and related distances.

What would a final exam be without any multiple choice and true/false? Well, don't worry, we had those, too! Lots and lots of fun questions about the rules in addition to the open book test we had to take online before we got to Richland. Just like from my days in college, you first think "yay open book." And then you realize that it's open book because some of the questions asked are so obscure and sneaky! Be honest, how many of you reading this have ever read the *USEF Rule Book* in its entirety? I thought so. That's why you need to be able to know the rule as an official, you also need to know where to find them so you can help others learn the rules (hopefully before they break them!).

So now what? I'm in a bit of a holding pattern. To complete my FEI license I have to take their final exam which occurs at a seminar, much



Valerie and Marilyn Payne working together at an event.

like the one I attended to start this adventure at Rocking Horse. Except the FEI seminars offered in 2018 are right now either at Luhmühlen Horse Trials (in Germany) or Hartpury Horse Trials (in England). Pinch me! It gives me plenty of time to study the FEI rulebook. My application for my 'S' license has been officially submitted to the USEF, along with 20 names of other licensed officials asked to provide a recommendation on my behalf. The USEF Licensed Officials Committee will vote on new officials when they get together in January.

The pursuit of these licenses is such an exciting and educational experience, each and every time. But, it does take some time to get through the entire process. If you have any interest whatsoever in becoming a licensed official, you should start by attending the training seminar in whatever area it is that you find interesting. Even if you don't pursue the license application, you will learn so much by just going the first time. You will be able to bring so much information back to use with your own horses and/or students in addition to meeting the first criterion of the licensing process. Before you know it, you will be excitedly waiting for the next seminar to come up, and then before you know it you've checked all of the boxes and can go take the final exam. 🐾