

Maryland Judge

Barbara Kirchner Magrogan Celebrates 50 Years as a Horse Show Judge

By Katherine O. Rizzo

If you had asked Barbara Kirchner Magrogan as a child if she wanted a career in the horse industry, she would have said yes, even before ever sitting on a horse. Even as a toddler, she would beg her parents to head over to Golden Horse Shoe, the local hack stable on Layhill Road in Montgomery County, with her older sisters to go for a ride. “They just wouldn’t let me because they said I was too young,” Magrogan explained. But then, when she was around seven, her parents gave her a package of five riding lessons with Dorothy Viera of Weathervane Stables in Spencerville as a Christmas present. That one present has led to a 50-year career with horses.

Becoming a Rider

Magrogan and her eight siblings grew up in the Kensington area. She would often head to Wheaton Park Stables to trail ride with her sisters and friends using money she earned from babysitting gigs. When Viera sold Weathervane, Magrogan followed her to her the new Marshwood Stables and continued to take lessons, as well as starting to show horses for the farm.

Making lifelong friends along the way, Magrogan dabbled into horse ownership when she started working with a friend’s horse named Flower Power in the 1960s. “She was owned by a friend but I rode her a lot and we kept her off of Norbeck Road,” Magrogan remarked. “But it wasn’t until later that I got my first horse of my own.”

It was February 1969 when she bought a horse in Virginia and needed a trailer ride back to Maryland. That is when she met Richard Mills, who recently passed away. Mills picked up her new horse and Magrogan began boarding at his Millhaven Farm. “That’s where I met so many lifelong friends like LuAnne Levens!” Magrogan said smiling. Soon after arriving at Millhaven, she fell in love with an off-the-track Thoroughbred Mills had brought in on consignment. “So I sold my first horse and bought this mare instead. She was a pistol for sure!” Magrogan stated.

After a few months of not-always-successful rides with the mare as she became increasingly unwilling to work, Magrogan sought the advice one of the area’s newest veterinarians, Roger Scullin. Dr. Scullin examined the mare and declared she was in perfect health and would be foaling within a week. “I couldn’t believe she was pregnant and I knew nothing about foaling,” Magrogan explained.

With the help of her newfound Millhaven family, a little brown colt was born on March 17, 1971. Magrogan named him Winning Spree and called him Benedict for short. After

he was weaned, she sold “Momma” to a young man in Virginia and moved her colt to Bazy Tankersley’s famed Al-Marah Arabians’ Poolsville location, where Magrogan was working as her private secretary.

Magrogan broke Benedict herself and showed him in hand and on the flat. “I hated to jump so I got Marlene [Allen] to show him for me,” she explained. “He’s the horse that really made a name for me,” she said about Benedict, adding, “and he was the only Thoroughbred at the all-Arabian breeding farm!”

Becoming a Judge

While she started bringing Benedict along, Magrogan was still showing horses at Marshwood Farm. “That’s where I became so impressed with judging,” she said. “I don’t really know why I was drawn to it.”

Magrogan was 21 years old at the time and timidly walked up to show judge Edna Lytle one day asking if she could sit with her to learn how to be a judge. “Edna was so happy to help and took me under her wing,” Magrogan said. “She told me the secret to judging was to keep really good records.” Magrogan and Lytle continue to be friends to this day. “She really became a mentor to me and is still a best friend,” Magrogan added.

Magrogan also shadowed Bruce Fales and Chris Brighoff while watching videos by George Morris, Rodney Jenkins and more.

A few years later, Magrogan was ready to start judging on her own. “My first big show on my own was at the Fredrick County Fairgrounds,” she said. Her judging career started out at the local level and steadily grew from an average of 10 to 12 shows a year in Maryland, Virginia and Pennsylvania to an average of 35 to 40 shows a year all over the United States and Canada. “I really had a hard time saying no to people,” she said with a laugh.

“My sister was big into endurance riding and I got to judge 100 mile rides in Florida and Vermont,” Magrogan said, pointing out that she never restricted herself to just one discipline in terms of judging. “I’ve judged pretty much everything you can think of... except dressage, because I never really had the time to learn enough about it.”

As a side note, for 22 years, Magrogan was also a volunteer fire fighter and often was both the judge and EMT at local shows. “Only at shows with one ring going,” she explained. She created Medical Standby Services specifically to supply EMT services to horse shows as well as festivals, music events and more. “It was a great side gig for all of us volunteers and I’d hire EMTs and such when they had weekends off,” she said. Magrogan retired and sold the com-



Barbara Kirchner Magrogan with the 2019 Double Supreme Champion Welsh Pony Rosehaven Lady Slipper, owned by Sally Steinmetz and shown by Susan Weigand at the Maryland State Fair.



Barbara Kirchner Magrogan aboard her friend’s horse Flower Power in 1969 at a barn along Norbeck Road.



Marlene Allen competing Barbara Kirchner Magrogan’s homebred Thoroughbred Winning Spree (Benedict) in Ocala in 1975 (above) and as a foal born at Millhaven (right) in 1971. Magrogan considers the horse that launched her career in the horse world.

