



Dear AQHA members,

My year as AQHA president has been somewhat emotional. It's no secret that I have spent my presidency battling cancer, so while I was dealing with that life-changing news, the thought of the privilege of leading the world's largest equine association virtually erased the emotional effects of having cancer. It's truly been a remarkable year, and I could not be more proud of AQHA and the many progresses made during the last 12 months. No, I cannot take sole credit as many of the progresses were simply the culmination of prior decisions that came to fruition.

Ranching Heritage

At the end of 2012, the AQHA Ranching Heritage program had been in place for close to 14 months. In 2012, AQHA put on the first two AQHA Ranching Heritage Challenges, awarding more than \$20,000 at each. The challenges are exclusively for horses bred by AQHA Ranching Heritage Breeders, and they're exciting classes designed to show off the skills that a good ranch horse would already have.

One of the challenges returned to Fort Worth, Texas, in January 2013 during the Fort Worth Stock Show. A challenge was also held in early March at the Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo in conjunction with the AQHA Pfizer Versatility Ranch Horse and AQHA Cowboy Mounted Shooting World Championship Show. Challenges are tentatively scheduled for June in Rapid City, South Dakota, and in August at the Colorado State Fair in Pueblo.

13-&-Under and Super-Select

One of my goals was to develop some sort of recognition for our older exhibitors. That led to also wanting to recognize our youngest exhibitors. So, in 2012, AQHA developed a plan to add awards to its world shows to recognize the top three 13-&-under competitors in every class at the Built Ford Tough AQHYA World Championship Show and the top three 70-&-over competitors in every class at the Adequan Select World Championship Show. Those exhibitors each received an award designed by AQHA's new trophy company, Awards Recognition Concepts. The achievement will also appear on the official records of the horse and exhibitor.

At the 2012 Ford Youth World, 536 exhibitors were eligible for the 13-&-under award, while 67 exhibitors were eligible for the 70-&-over or "Super-Select" award at the Adequan Select World.

We also added the 2012 Super-Select All-Around Amateur Award, which went to Rodger Call of Fort Worth, Texas. Also at the 2012 Adequan Select world, we presented the first Nutrena Senior Athletes of the Show award, which went to Suzanne Jones of Tatum, New Mexico, along with her homebred Freckles On My Mind. The award is given to the exhibitor and horse at the Adequan Select World with the highest combined age. Jones is a spry 87 years old, and Freckles on My Mind is 10, giving them the combined age of 97.

Adequan Select World

The Adequan Select World Championship Show celebrated its 10th year in 2012 by having a celebration the entire length of the show. A highlight of the show was a barn party where AQHA recognized the Select exhibitors who have shown at all 10 Select World shows.

In November 2012, AQHA announced the Adequan Select World will stay in Amarillo for another three years.

We are thrilled to keep the Adequan Select World in Amarillo, the home of AQHA's international headquarters. The City of Amarillo and the Tri-State Fairgrounds are committed to keeping the Adequan Select World here in Amarillo. Before the show's 10th celebration in September, the fairgrounds invested in significant improvements to the facilities. With this new contract, the city and the fairgrounds will continue to make improvements to the riding areas and stalls to ensure that they meet the needs of this world-class event.

Leveling

As its name suggests, the AQHA leveling program levels the playing field. The Rookie level, which is the true introductory level for AQHA competition, went into full implementation in 2012, and we saw a great exhibitor response to that new level. The newly added middle level, Intermediate for exhibitors and Progressive for horses, was tested at three pilot shows in 2012. Then on January 1, 2013, we kicked off full implementation of the leveling program, with our first leveled show of the year being the Florida Gulf Coast Circuit in Tampa. The AQHA Blue-Ribbon Task Force, tasked with designing and troubleshooting the leveling program, will continue to make program modifications as needed throughout 2013, keeping the best interests of our members and their American Quarter Horses as the ultimate goal.

Novice Championships

Leveling also cleared the path for AQHA to create two Novice championship shows, which were held the first weekend of October 2012 in Las Vegas and Murfreesboro, Tennessee. The shows were a huge hit and exceeded our expectations, with more than 1,300 entries at the SmartPak West Novice Championship Show in Las Vegas and more than 2,000 entries at the Nutrena East Novice Championship Show in Murfreesboro. Plans are for these shows to return to Las Vegas and Murfreesboro the first weekend in October 2013.

Animal Welfare

We have come a long way with regard to the welfare of the American Quarter Horse. One important step was the creation of the 14-member AQHA Animal Welfare Commission in early 2012 by the AQHA Executive Committee. The commission is made up of trainers, owners and breeders from within the AQHA competition industries – racing, showing, ranching competition and ranching industry – and is charged with identifying welfare problems and making recommendations to protect the industry and the horse.

AQHA continually revises its policies concerning animal welfare via the AQHA Public Policy Committee and the Association's standing committees. Through these avenues, as well as industry leadership, advisory groups and councils, AQHA is able to expand upon its proven efforts to safeguard the welfare of American Quarter Horses, as outlined by the AQHA Statement of Position, which can be found on the Association's website.

In 2012, AQHA implemented a new set of equipment rules, beginning with the 2012 AQHA World Championship Show. This is just one of the steps the AQHA Welfare Commission took in 2012 to ensure the safety and well-being of our horses.

I am proud of the progress we have made, and I look forward to finding more ways to ensure the safety of our horse.

A Database Tuneup

As times change, technology requires updates, too, and the AQHA Information Technology Department wants to make sure we stay on the cutting edge. In the AQHA offices, we've been undergoing a three-year overhaul of our database and its associated systems to not only continue providing the best customer service in the business, but to also improve member services. This update will help the Association better assist members with questions and paperwork, provide more streamlined mail services, and much more.

I have enjoyed serving as your 2012 AQHA president and on the AQHA Executive Committee for the last few years. I will continue to support the American Quarter Horse industry and look forward to the future of our organization.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gene Graves". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gene Graves
AQHA President