



Holly Hamilton

2004 Maryland 4-H Youth Development Award Recipient

by Hope Holland

I caught up with Holly Hamilton, 4-H leader and joint master (with Mark Challberg) of the Goshen Hounds, while she was at the mundane task of cleaning her kitchen. She agreed to an interview and I suspect, like many of us horse folk, would much rather talk about her horse interests than do housework.

In the few minutes of our initial conversation I found out that she, like most of us, has named her e-mail after her horse—what do those people who don't have horses do for e-mail names? I found out that her name is actually Hope ("but everyone calls me Holly") and I found that she is a very busy lady.

Ms. Hamilton, whose boarding and lay-up farm is in Adamstown (Frederick County) works for Dr. Elizabeth Schultz of Ijamsville, and can often be found in the spring of the year taking mares over to be bred at Shamrock Farm.

With self-admitted very best friend, Sue Ferrara, she is co-leader of the Montgomery County based Horse N Around 4-H group. This is in addition to the work that she does in her job as joint master of hounds. I have always been told that if you want something done you should give it to a busy person and this is certainly true of Holly Hamilton.

On March 6, Holly Hamilton will receive the Maryland 4-H Youth Development Award in recognition of work above and beyond the call of duty to the younger members of Maryland's equine community.

Willard Lemaster, 4-H Animal Science Specialist at the Extension Service he explains, "When I think of Holly, I think of an 'I'll be glad to' attitude. She not only is a reliable and highly respected horse volunteer, but when she says that she will be glad to undertake a task, you can rely on the fact that it will not only be done, but it will be done to the highest level of dependability and of quality as well.

I use the term 'above and beyond' because, unlike most of the adult members of the 4-H clubs, Holly never had to become a 4-H leader because her kids were members. In point of fact, Ms. Hamilton is not married and has no kids—no that's wrong. Holly Hamilton now has about 60 kids, all of them members of the Horse N Around 4-H club.

Hamilton reached the 4-H through the auspices of Sue Ferrara, who did have two kids in the 4-H. Twelve years ago when Sue needed a helper to work with her in the Montgomery County based 4-H group that she had been running almost single handedly for eight years, Ted Veneman suggested Holly who was working with him at the time. He thought that she might be just the person to help Ferrara in her quest for a mounted drill coach for the 4-H members who wished to form a drill team. It was a wonderful match although Hamilton remembers the drill team with less than the misty mantle that time and distance might be thought to give it.

"Boy," she says, "Were they bad but we had a great time!"

Such a great time that when Ferrara asked Holly to help at the club level, Hamilton not only acquiesced but went to MCE (Montgomery College Extension) and took the necessary classes to start coaching the Horse Bowl in the winter, the drill team in the summer and also helped at the fair for the 4-H horse show.

As Holly remembers about the early days of that show, "We only had a one day show then, no stalls, no ring, we rode in the grandstand area. We have really come a long way at the fair."

Hamilton goes on to say, "Sue Ferrara should really have this award with me as she has been a 4-H leader for 20 years now."

Ferrara demurs, "Holly has been on a lot of committees and she has taken over a bunch of the real work with the kids while I have stayed sort of in the background and done a lot of the paperwork. She has been a huge part of the club, believe me. I also think that the club has become a large part of Holly's life as well. It has become like an extended family to her and she has made friendships among the adults that have gone on even after their kids have left 4-H. This has become an important part of Holly's life."

One thing that both women agree on is that they are best friends. "We make a good team," they have both said when spoken to individually. "We not only work well together, but we are great friends even beyond the 4-H group."

As an illustration of the place that 4-H and both of these women have played in the creation of horse men and women in Maryland, Hamilton's joint master at the Goshen, Mark Challberg, is a 4-H father who finally said to Sue Ferrara, "Well, heck, if the kids are all going to be involved with horses, I might as well learn to ride, too!"

And, as both women point out, "Look what happened after that! Now he is joint master of the Goshen Hunt club."

Hamilton is highly prized as a friend to people outside of the 4-H as well, illustrating by her life the tenets of the 4-H vision.

Her neighbor, Eddie Verdi of Edmar Farm in Ijamsville says, "Holly has been my neighbor for over 20 years now. She's the best. If I need a hand on the farm with any small or large emergency that comes up, at any hour of the day or night, Holly is there. She will drop whatever she is doing and just come on over to pitch right in and is always willing to lend a hand."

Jim Steele, manager of Shamrock Farm, agrees. "Holly is one of the most civic minded people of our horse community. I am always hearing stories of something that she had done to help out with this person or that cause," he says.

Hamilton herself would like to see more for the kids from the 4-H if finances could permit. "I would like to see more and bigger scholarships for the kids. They are our future and not just in the horse industry. We have kids from our club alone who are in college now majoring in Business at RIT, Biology at Bucknell, Chemistry/Biology at the University of North Carolina and Speech/Psychology at William and Mary. We have another one who is a graduate in Animal Husbandry at the University of MD and every one of these kids is still actively involved in the horse industry. Some are even finding time to give back to the 4-H clubs."

She goes on to say, "That is what I like to see and what I am proudest of. We are very lucky now to have Dr. Amy Ordakowski-Burk at the University of Maryland. She is really putting in a lot of time and effort in the 4-H program and it shows. On the down side is the budget cuts that we are seeing at the extension office. For instance, we have lost our animal extension officer to those budget cuts and they are not going to be replacing her."

It may be that, with the economics of Maryland at the current time, we will be seeing even more cuts to programs that might otherwise encourage the kids of our state to go on to lead fulfilling lives in both the areas of education and of service, but with leaders like Holly Hamilton to provide an example for them it seems that the kids will have a beacon of hope to light the way. ■