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Pony Club Mentors

Older Members Guide Youngsters

By Karla Wright, VRPC Horse Management Organizer



The River Bend D1/D2 team (left to right) Elsa, Isabel, Sarah, Mia, and Ola with their C-Advisor Shannon.

PHOTO COURTESY: RIVER BEND PONY CLUB ARCHIVES

The sun had just come up and already ponies were arriving at Copperfield Farm in Hume, Va. for D Rally on July 2., a competition for new and less experienced Pony Club members. I was there to be the Chief Horse Management Judge, and with our younger members, this role typically involves teaching.

At Pony Club rallies, parents and other adults who are not officials do not help the members. Members are able to put their skills to the test as they compete in five-member teams, four riders and a stable manager. In addition, at D Rally, each team is assigned an upper level member to serve as an advisor. It is this group of upper level members (typically young teenagers) that make this rally successful.

On the morning of the rally, members moved in and set up their stalls and tack rooms. Each team's upper level advisor made sure their team had everything they needed, that it was set up appropriately, find their grooming kit. At a Pony Club rally, competitors are judged on their horse management skills as well as their riding. Each team is expected to be prepared for things that can go wrong, from broken tack to a minor injury to a horse or rider. After setup, each upper level advisor helped their team manage their schedule and made sure they walked the cross country and stadium courses with their coach prior to tacking up for their turnout inspection.


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When the riding started, the upper level advisors continued to keep their team together with riders going in different directions, both coming and going from the dressage, cross county, and stadium arenas. As the horse management judges checked the tack room equipment, the upper level advisors helped their members recognize the different pieces of equipment in the required equipment list and explained to confused younger members why they might want to have an extra set of leathers and antibiotic ointment in their kit.


By mid-day, the upper level advisors were looking more than a bit tired but they, like all good horse people, continued to plow through, helping their young members with final cool downs after stadium and cross country. They got each of their members through their final inspections with grace and charm.


I was impressed with the amount of work the upper level advisors performed and how much they helped and taught the younger members on their teams. The advisors helped them when they were frustrated by a "not so great" dressage test and celebrated when they had their "best ever" cross country run. They showed the younger members everything from how to best hang a box fan to how to have fun at a Pony Club Rally. But more than that, they were mentors and role models, and an example of what it means to be a responsible horse person.

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