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EQUESTRIAN
NETWORK
MAGAZINE

VOLUME 1. ISSUE 4

May/2006



Months Club in the Spotlight

Old Peoples Riding Club Keeps Riders Young

Every month Equestrian Network Magazine features a story about an equestrian club or organization, written by one of their members. This month our story is about Old Peoples Riding Club (OPRC).

Old Peoples Riding Club Keeps Riders Young

by M. Y. Mim

One spring day nine years ago, Hope Jacobs and a guest followed their participation in a spring hunter event by watching a demonstration by a local Pony Club chapter.

"Why don't you start a club like that?" asked Hope's guest.

"Why ever would I want to do something like that?" Hope thought.



Logo for a Central Illinois-based
OPRC chapter

"We've held clinics in dressage, sidesaddle, driving, eventing, vaulting; overnight camps; travel; covered dish dinner, parties, bonfires; trail rides; horse swims; trips to the races; tours of tracks,..."

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But the idea kept nagging her.

"Because," she finally realized, "Pony Club was so much fun!"

In 1998 Hope Jacobs, who turns 60 this September, founded the Old People's Riding Club (OPRC) with four other members.



Hope Jacobs, OPRC founder, astride her Pinto mare Mrs. Bigelow.

It's unlikely anyone would consider a 21-year-old an "old" person, but if you're too old for Pony Club, you're just right for OPRC. (Since then, both the Pony Club and some chapters of OPRC have expanded membership categories to include older or younger riders.)

Hope published a story about her new non-profit organization in the *Chronicle of the Horse* and, a year later, in *Practical Horseman* magazines. Suddenly OPRC took off like, well, a race horse out of the starting gate. In just three years OPRC included some one-thousand members spread across the nation and Canada in 30 or 40 chapters.

"We did no advertising," said Hope. "Most join through friends."



[View the Art of Patricia Borum](#)



Founder Hope Davis tries out Polo through an OPRC event. & Whitney Williams, a Formidable Founders chapter member who also serves on the OPRC Board of Directors, rides Otto, a seven-year-old off-the-track. 15.2 hh Thoroughbred.

"I retained a lawyer early on to ensure that everything was above-board. I found out I had to have a Board of Directors three years ago.

"I chose level-headed good people... leaders selected from relatively large, active chapters. These chapters hold some 40 activities each year. I wanted people willing to disagree with me."

Hope and the Board members communicate daily.

"What surprised me most was how much time it takes to run OPRC and how great the members are, particularly the Board members."

Last year Hope committed four hours per day to OPRC. This year she cut that down to three hours "because the Board does so much, I can," she said.

"Otherwise, it wouldn't be fun."

Hope began riding on a donkey as a kid in Orinda, California. The family soon moved to Maryland, where she continued riding. In her 30's, she joined a hunt club and began a love affair with fox-hunting.

These days Hope and her Paint mare Mrs. Bigelow mainly participate in actives arranged by her own chapter the "Formidable Founders," located in Lothian, Maryland.

According to fellow Formidable Founder member Whitney Williams,



Many OPRC chapters offer driving clinics

"Our chapter includes 50 to 60 members, ages 23 to 60-ish. We talk to the group at meetings and if there's enough interest [in an activity], we assign an organizer. It's up to the organizer to make it happen.

"We've held clinics in dressage, sidesaddle, driving, eventing, vaulting; overnight camps; travel; covered dish dinner, parties, bonfires; trail rides; horse swims; trips to the races; tours of tracks,..." She trailed off.

Take a Long Ride west to central Illinois to another very lively chapter with a charming logo and great name: "Stayin' Alive."

"The Stayin' Alive chapter name is an interesting story," said member Sara Rhoades.

"The chapter had been in existence for a couple of years when I joined, but they still hadn't come up with a name. I became president about five months after I joined, and we still hadn't come to a consensus. I confess that I was instrumental in delaying the vote on a name because I was determined not to be called 'Hags and Nags.'

"The Stayin' Alive name came from a group of us sitting around after a rating ride. The new members who had just passed their D1 tests with flying colors (even though several of them had test anxiety beforehand) were relaxing and saying how great they felt at being able to pass a riding test at their age.

"The oldest member, who had only done trail riding for the last 19 years, was thrilled with the idea of beginning to learn so many new things at her age. It really made her feel alive again. (She was 61 at the time.) Everyone else joined in with similar sentiments.

"Then Donna, the 61-year-old, struck a Travolta-like pose and said 'Stayin' Alive,' and we all laughed and applauded."



The Yakima Valley, WA, chapter sponsors an enormously popular annual winery ride.

The long list of chapter-sponsored activities could exhaust a Pony Clubber. Just within four months, the group participated in or has planned:

- * Free trailer check-up, bake sale, and raffle for an equine massage
- * Champaign County Farm Bureau seminar on Adventures of Trail Riding with the president of the Illinois Trail Riders
- * Chapter presentation to Parkland College students followed by seminar "Animal ID and Your Horses."
- * Trail ride near Decatur.
- * Two-day, third annual tack sale to benefit OPRC and the Farm Bureau.
- * Invitational Fun Show on horseback, open to members, their families, and invited guests. Games followed by cook-out
- * Road trip to see the Lippizan Stallions of Temple Farms
- * Trail ride.
- * Two-day Competitive Mounted Orienteering event.

There's something for everyone everywhere, according to dozens of members interviewed.

Lisa Parker, President of the Yakima Valley Chapter, heads another active group.

"Our favorite events are our yearly winery ride (even Hope has been on that one!), the Christmas Carol Trailride, our 2/3 phase event (trail class, dressage or reining pattern, trot poles out and then truly jump for those

who want to. You can do as much stuff as you like. It's all for fun).

"We have riding meetings where we do trail patterns, learn to barrel race, do drill-team and play games. We have bomb-proofing clinics, natural horsemanship clinics and farrier demonstrations. Every meeting is divided between business and education. I give English lessons twice a month (we are on our fifth year on that too!). The Western group does lessons as they need them." said Lisa.

" We ride English, Western and drive in our club. We have A circuit Western riders, eventers (me and a few others), hunters, serious trail, back-country horseman, "hardly" riders, and non-riders. Most of our members are in their 40's and 50's, but we have two in their 30's and one in her 20's. We have 50 members and about five of them are men.

" We truly have a wonderful network of support."

Lisa's parting comment reflects the entire OPRC organization.

To learn more about OPRC, visit the website at www.oldpeoplesridingclub.org and www.oprc-rockville.net.



Lisa Parker of Yakima Valley and Badger.

Equestrian Network Magazine is curious: Were or are you a member of the U.S. Pony Club? Write and let us know. We'll share the information.

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Do you have a club or organization you would like to tell us about? All clubs or organizations should not be a business or for-profit organization. If your article is chosen to be published, your club or organization will have national exposure on Equestrian Network Magazine. Please send your article to info@equestmagazine.com and write "Club or Organization" in the subject line. All stories must be less than 800 words and have no typographical or grammatical errors. Who knows, your story may get published and your club may be featured like Old Peoples Riding Club Keeps Riders Young (OPRC).

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