

## The Southlands Foundation Annual Report 10 June 2023

The Southlands Foundation is a not-for-profit, 501(c)3 educational organization. Established by Deborah Dows 40 years ago. We are celebrating a significant anniversary this year. The founding purpose of Southlands is to establish an outdoor recreation center including a farm and riding school for the benefit of local communities. The mission is to provide a historical and agrarian connection to the community, and to cultivate a respect and love for the land and its animals through education, conservation and outdoor recreation, principally through the riding school. The Southlands School of Horsemanship, which is open to people of all ages, teaches riding and horsemanship through hands-on instruction, lessons, trail riding, and special programs including summer camps, Mommy and Me, and horse shows at home and away. Most of the land is under easement to Scenic Hudson, to ensure that it will remain undeveloped. We have a responsibility to maintain the acreage as open land, and many of those acres are dedicated to hay production for use on the farm.

Mrs. Dows' inspiration lives through our land, our people, and our horses. The top-notch riding instruction delivered by our trainers Jonathan Edel, Michele Edel and Susie Williams is enhanced by our community programs especially in the important work Susie and Michele Tugade do with our partners at Samaritan Daytop Village and the Bulkeley Middle School, and in the new programs that Lydia Higginson is developing. All these programs are part of the mission.

The School of Horsemanship and community engagement are two streams flowing into the same river. They support each other and are part of what makes Southlands a special place. We strive to do this without stressing our limited resources, and we are getting better at making the programs pay for themselves. However, we do continue to face challenges. As you will hear in the Finance Report, we have been operating with deficits that draw down on our modest endowment. Part of our financial reporting as a non-profit organization, requires Southlands to file form 990 each year. This form is a matter of public record, but it is now also posted on our website. <https://southlands.org/annual-990s>

This also has been a year of transition. We have been experiencing turn-over in staff, as have many businesses, resulting in difficulty recruiting and retaining dedicated personnel. Limited resources and staffing stresses the system. As with all change, the transition in organizational structure takes time. We are grateful to those who have renewed their energy for improving communications, the program, the facilities and the grounds recognizing there is still much work to do.

We will continue to work on improving communications in person and via social media and other outlets to better represent our programs and our successes, both for community events and the for the riding programs. We welcome your feedback. The Board of Directors remains open to your thoughts and concerns and welcomes an improved line of communication with the membership. We encourage people to participate on committees and volunteers, as many of you do. And, as we said last year, if you are interested in Board membership, let us know so we can keep a running list for next year.

### Buildings and Grounds

**Paddock Improvement Project:** We raised significant money a year ago to improve our paddocks. I wish we could say we are finished the project, but we did make substantial progress. Swales were constructed in the west paddocks, which do help channel the water out when it rains. We were able to replace significant lines in our fencing last fall. This Spring, the staff installed mud mats in several of the paddocks, and when the soil loosens up, the rest can be installed. Manuel also did a terrific job of dragging and leveling the ground in the smaller paddocks. We still have money in the fund, and will complete the fencing repairs this year, paying attention to yearly maintenance going forward. We are grateful to the many members who donated to this cause, and thank you for your patience in the slow progress.

**East House Porch:** The porches of the East House, where some of our staff live, needed significant repairs, which were undertaken at the end of last year.

Ring Waterer: Jonathan Edel oversees the condition of the footing and jumps in our three rings, and they require professional maintenance almost every year. The footing at Southlands is very good, which is good for our horses' legs and for our reputation when people bring their horses to our shows. The footing in the jumping arena needs moisture to keep it compacted and springy, but our current system is not adequate. Jonathan has been working with a team to determine how best to deliver water and we are hoping to have proposals soon. We are particularly grateful to Philip and Stephanie Steinkraus, who have been supporting the effort and intend to contribute funding for the project. We will keep you posted on the developments.

Trails: Clearing the trails is an annual, and sometimes monthly, labor of love. Manuel has mowed some trails in big field and on the perimeters of the hay fields. Last year, Jeremy Joyce, brought in his heavy machinery to move a tangle of huge trees out of the trail and to repair some storm damage to the culverts, which are holding now. There are some trees down in the woods again this year, and as soon as we get the hay crop in, we will start to work on trail clearing. We will certainly need some volunteers for that activity and thank Nancy Strohsahl and Ron Hill for their continued interest in the open trails at Southlands.

Hay Crop: We hope that Jim and Joya Yantz, will be starting cutting and baling hay next week, weather dependent. The wonderful men at Samaritan Daytop Village, have signed up to help stack the hay, and we are very grateful to them.

Manuel Bautista's expertise in bringing in the hay, stacking it and managing the help is impressive. We have a special level of gratitude for Manuel. His knowledge and care for the horses, and for the operations and appearance of the place are dear to his heart, and deeply are appreciated. We also appreciate Diego Bautista as he is quickly learning the ropes.

#### Volunteers and Donors

Southlands could not thrive without the energy and assistance from our robust corps of volunteers. The list of activities is long: gardening, trail work, tidying up, interior decorating, heavy lifting, helping in the barn and in the office, working the horse shows, the gala and our community events. This is a testament to the care and love you have for this place and we are so grateful and appreciative of your help. The list of volunteers is too long to mention by name, but each one of you is deeply appreciated for your every contribution large and small. We are also grateful to those who give generously from your purse. Our end-of-year giving was robust and people continue to make contributions through the year for dedicated uses or for general operating funds.

Thank you to my fellow Board members who are also volunteers. They work long hours, sharing their expertise and dedication. They have been a great inspiration for me personally, and I have learned much from each one. Most importantly, they demonstrate a strong commitment to the legacy of Southlands and its future. We extend a warm welcome to our new Board members Sara Thompson and Amanda Miller

#### School of Horsemanship

The School of Horsemanship is the core of our Southlands program and, the quality of our school horses is very good. They are the first lesson mounts for beginners, and many riders continue in the program on their beloved school mounts. There is a sizable group of boarders who had their beginning lessons on school horses they still love, and they remain a very active part of our lesson program. The school horses and ponies really earn their keep at this time of year. The ponies especially do double and triple duty for camps, lessons and horse shows.

Riders are thrilled with the quality of instruction. Jonathan and Michele teach every level and every age group with skill and good humor. Susie's morning group lessons are filled with a loyal set of riders, whose numbers keep expanding. Thank you all for your hard work.

Attracting new young riders is essential to growing the program. We hope that Mommy and Me, and the Pony and Nature Camps, will help attract the next generation of riders. We look forward to Emma

Mearkle directing the Nature Camp with the able assistance of Holden Meilman, who is back for her second summer. Saffron Sharifi will direct the Pony Camp. We have a host of rotating helpers lined up as well: Tully Walther, Rio Derman, Sarah Miller, Erin Logan, Lucie Sloan and Mia Sloan. Pony camp is fully booked, and Nature Camp has a few spots still open.

We are happy to have Sarah Regner back with us for the summer, and we welcome Allesandra Von Eikh as a part-time equine program coordinator. Thanks also to Pam Molyneux who continues to help out at our home shows and to manage the ribbons, and to Sue Hoag who works part time in the office. Sarah Murphy is our part-time bookkeeper.

Our trainers take advantage of teachable moments, both in the saddle and on the ground. Our working student program provides the opportunity for our young riders to learn what it takes to keep a barn running smoothly, not just riding, but horsemanship and facilities maintenance. Anna Kalishman, Tully Walther, Emmy Nelson-Madore and Olivia Justino continue as our working students. Michele Edel is responsible for managing the barn and for horse health, and she does everything when we are short-handed. Thank you so much.

Our team had a successful outings to winter horse shows and last month to Saratoga. They brought home ribbons and great experience. They have plans for HITS and other away shows throughout the summer. At home, Southlands hosted a successful HVHJA show in May, and we hope for more plans later in the season.

We are looking forward to the third year of the Wednesday afternoon Jumper Series, initiated by Jonathan and Michele. This gives Southlands riders (adults and kids) the opportunity to hone their competition skills at home. Trainers from other barns bring their young and green horses to Southlands for a low-key, but still competitive event, and they leave with compliments for how well-organized and friendly the event is.

A new Executive Director: Lydia Higginson

Last year, with the loss of our previous Executive Director, the Board determined that with a base of strength in our riding program, we could hire an Executive Director who could focus on strengthening community engagement, development and fund-raising for all programs that serve the Southlands mission. Lydia Higginson has been here in that role since last September and has attracted many new faces and programs to Southlands and has tackled numerous administrative challenges. Lydia is collaborating with other community partners including Wilderstein to attract new audiences to Southlands and plans a Plein Air fund-raising event in July. She has attracted some new funding and notes that successful grant-making is built on community benefits. We are grateful for the enthusiasm and determination that Lydia has brought to the job and we have high hopes for her success in broadening the role Southlands can play in the community.

## Conclusion

The School of Horsemanship and community engagement are two streams flowing into the same river. Development of the horse program is enhanced by growing and serving our greater community. We strive to do this without stressing our limited resources, and we are working to raise funds to support these activities. We are committed to celebrating our horse program and also by having a place in the community that embraces those who may want to engage with our horses and our landscape in different ways.

Mrs. Dows had a vision for the future that must be tempered by what the future has delivered in terms of expectations, changing demographics and the accelerating costs of doing business. We have made it to forty years, and with some work, we will make it to fifty. The work of the next ten years must confirm the legacy of Mrs. Dows, and the legacy of the current generation.

Elise Quasebarth  
Southlands Board President

