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9 TO 5 with Horses

FOR A HORSE LOVER WITH ORGANIZATIONAL AND PEOPLE SKILLS, MANAGING A RIDING PROGRAM CAN BE A GREAT CAREER.

BY NANCY MOELLER

Have you wondered if riding will have to take a back seat to your career once you've graduated from college? After all the years of lessons and shows, for many young people, going to college and on to a career means leaving riding behind. But it doesn't have to, as Hannah Houston, a riding academy manager, has discovered.

From the age of 9, Hannah spent most of her free time at the Equestrian Reserve in Alpharetta, Ga., where she took English and western lessons. By the time she was 13, she was working there, cleaning stalls and feeding horses on the weekends. In high school she became an assistant instructor, and she continued that role in college when she was home for summer breaks.

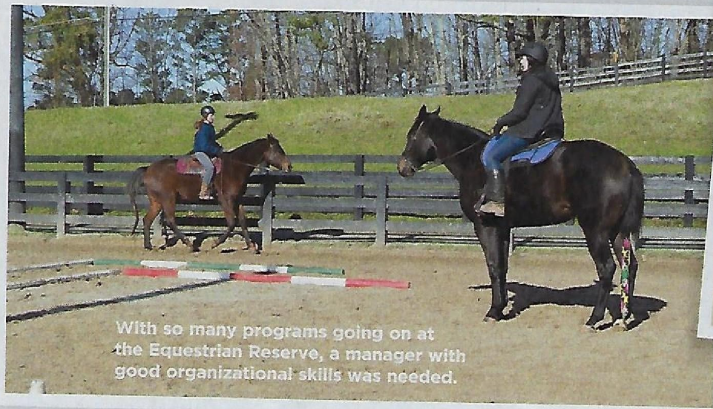
That's where she thought her work with horses would end. She didn't own a horse, and college graduation meant starting her career in public relations and moving out on her own. It didn't look like her schedule or her budget would leave much room for riding.

CORPORATE LIFE BLUES

At first, working at a public relations firm was a lot of fun. Her main clients were restaurants and hotels around Atlanta, which meant she had access to a lot of delicious food! However, the job required 50 or more hours a week, mostly behind a desk. Occasionally, Hannah would get a call from Donna Romeu, the owner of the Equestrian Reserve.

"She would need me to help run a show on a weekend," says Hannah. "It was fun to be back in the arena with the younger riders and around the horses I'd known all my life."





With so many programs going on at the Equestrian Reserve, a manager with good organizational skills was needed.



Hannah made the switch from a career in PR to one with horses!

After two years in PR, Hannah became discouraged with both the job and the sedentary life it required. Just as she was thinking about making a change, Donna called and asked Hannah to drop by the barn.

"She asked me how the job was going, and I admitted it wasn't great," Hannah says. "Donna knew the long hours behind a desk were wearing on me."

A BETTER OFFER

It was then that Donna told her she would like to reduce her own hours at the barn and offered her the position as manager at the Equestrian Reserve, overseeing the riding academy.

"She told me she could really use me full-time and that I could have housing as part of my salary package if I wanted it," says Hannah. "Taking her offer was the best decision I could have made."

The Equestrian Reserve has 170 students in a highly structured lesson program, plus a competition team. Students work through five skill levels as part of the curriculum Donna developed while using her background as a school principal as a guide. Often, there are three lessons going on at once, taught by one of the 20 part-time instructors. For anyone to step in as manager of this program would require that they have exceptional organizational skills.

"Hannah thinks on her feet and knows how to prioritize tasks, and she knows what it takes for this business to be successful," says Donna. "She has leadership skills, is great with

both kids and adults, and is always looking for ways she can improve."

NO TWO DAYS ALIKE

Her job is a perfect pairing of her passion for riding and teaching with her ability to make a large organization run smoothly.

"There are lots of forms required to enter the show team into a competition," Hannah says of her office work. "I also talk to prospective students about our program and manage the social media accounts for the barn, both of which are similar to what I did in my PR position."

One high school junior and instructor at the Equestrian Reserve says Hannah has inspired her to become an intern there to learn more about the business.

"Hannah has a lot on her plate," says Olivia Halphen. "I admire how she handles it."

In addition to teaching lessons herself, Hannah assists the veterinarian when she makes rounds, matches students to appropriate horses, and helps to develop the teaching skills of the younger instructors.

"Every day is different, and that's what I love about it," says Hannah.

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

Hannah knows how unusual it is to have a job like this in a big metropolitan area.

"My friends are excited for me, but it's hard to explain to strangers exactly what I do," she says with a laugh.

Donna thinks that's because she wears so many hats at the Equestrian Reserve.

"There are a million details she has to consider, whether it's the different cultures of our students or what feedback to give the instructors," says Donna.

While she uses some of the same skills she did at her old job, there are big differences.

"A lot of my work is at the computer, but it's broken up by lessons," Hannah says of her job. "Plus, I get to ride a good bit, whether it's a horse that needs some extra work or a greener horse we just acquired."

Looking at Conner, the horse she has just saddled, she smiles.

"I don't think I could go back to corporate America after this." ✱

Job Requirements

If managing a riding academy appeals to you, here's what you need, according to Donna Romeu, longtime owner of The Equestrian Reserve riding academy:

- ★ A college degree in education, psychology or business;
- ★ Strong interpersonal skills working with children, their parents and other instructors;
- ★ High-level organizational skills to prioritize tasks and get it all done;
- ★ Experience on a high school or college equestrian show team;
- ★ A love of horses, riding and a passion for sharing it with others.