

Horse Training Secrets Now Available Online

Larry Surret has spent his life working with horses and their owners. Now, his 40 years of experience and decades of offering one, two and three-week training courses (Vol. 32, No. 2) are available to horse owners online. In fact, it's the only way that horse owners can access the tips he previously provided at the Minnesota Horse Training Academy.

"I never released videos of my lessons in the past as I knew my competitors would use the ideas and claim them as their own," says Surret. "I've since retired and will no longer offer the schools, so there's no reason not to share what I've learned. There were so many people who wanted to attend my schools but couldn't leave the farm. Now they can take the training at home."

Surret's Minnesota Horse Training Academy was like no other. It offered intensive courses with a no-questions-asked money-back guarantee. It's an offer he says was never acted on by any of his hundreds of students.

"My goal was to teach a horse owner how to teach a horse to do anything physically possible," he says. "Often, they would go home and teach their horses to do tricks we never talked about during training."

Surret challenged his students to bring an untrained or problem horse or a new horse they had just acquired to the school. Problems to be resolved included kicking, rearing, bucking, shying and more. Some students responded in ways even he didn't expect.

"One woman attended five times with five different horses," says Surret. "I asked her why, as she took notes and recorded my lectures each time. She responded that she used the schools to train the horses, which she sold for a much higher price."

Surret emphasizes the dangers and risks inherent in working with horses. He's very aware of these, having had horses break his neck and hip. His training further emphasizes reducing these dangers and risks by eliminating the fear and pain that can cause a horse to act up.

"We train horses to stand when a rider falls from a saddle or steps off," says



Surret with student and her horse sitting.

Surret. "We also teach the horse to stand when there's nearby gunfire, four-wheelers driving by and more."

Teaching tricks is a popular part of the school. Surret teaches his students how to get their horses to take a bow, play dead, sit, count, shake their heads and more.

"I've taught horses to count in 5 min.," he says. "It's simple association, one of eight techniques I use. I review every lesson with students and ask them to identify all eight and how they were used in that lesson."

The videos are of actual school lessons. The 13 posted videos cost \$49 for lifetime access. More will be added each month. Eventually, they'll provide the entire three-week course day by day.

A one-time payment of \$17 gives lifetime access to Surret's Facebook group/community page. Members get exclusive access to Surret's responses to student questions, as well as exchange experiences and ideas. The group also receives bonus training material and notices of horses he has trained that are available for sale.

Prospective students can visit Surret's YouTube channel for an introduction to the program.

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Peony Farm Is A Family Affair

Though comfortable in their suburban family home, Laura and Bryan Kubes still visualized relocating their family with three young daughters to an acreage in the driftless area of southern Minnesota. They knew it would be a significant change since Laura was a meteorologist at a local TV station, and Bryan worked for a farm seed company. Their dream was to start a specialty crop business on a rural acreage that included wooded and tillable acres and a source of clean water.

That vision didn't include locating to a peony farm, but that's precisely what they found near Spring Grove, Minn. Now in their third year of operating Hidden Springs Peony Farm, they've ramped up their knowledge and appreciation of peonies. They also have a growing list of agrotourism and specialty crop opportunities for the future.

Hidden Springs Peony Farm raises 15,000 plants of 600+ peony varieties (including heirlooms). Potted peony plants can be ordered from a catalog or purchased

at the on-site garden center. Bareroot plants can be ordered for shipment in early October. "Last year, we sold to 44 states," Laura says. "As I've learned more about peonies, I'm amazed by the great variety of flower types, the broad range of colors and fragrances, and the variation in bloom times." Besides peonies, the garden center offers unusual and native perennial flowers, fruit plants, houseplants, heirloom roses and orchid cacti.

After two years of operation, Laura says it was abundantly clear that their three daughters loved their new home. "Our 9-year-old is a math whiz and is really good at the checkout. Our 7-year-old loves picking and arranging flowers and bouquets, and our 3-year-old is a natural-born saleswoman! She tries to sell every customer lemonade from her stand."

After they took over the farm from the previous owners, Laura renovated the website extensively and continues to tweak it weekly. She also emails every name on their customer and prospect list weekly. These emails offer growing tips, fun facts about peonies and



Photo courtesy of Michelle Martin Randolf

Unique Carriage Service Shows Off Horses

Pair A Dice Carriages of Surprise, Wyo., is a stagecoach and carriage service centered around Percheron draft horses. "I grew up with horses and lived at the barn. I needed a winter job after college, and that's where the love of draft horses began," says founder Taylor Van Zyl. She shares that she joined friends at a restaurant in Aspen that was only accessible through cross-country skiing, snowshoeing or riding in horse-drawn sleighs. "I did that for a few seasons and then purchased my first team in 2017. The rest is history."

Today, Pair A Dice rents a 5-acre property in Arizona. "We spend the winter months from October through May down here and the other months up north in Wyoming." The holiday season tends to be the busiest. "People go crazy for Christmas in the city," Van Zyl says. "We do horse-drawn wagon rides at the largest Christmas venue in Arizona as well as private events throughout the valley." For the 2024 season, they'll show in Denver and Loveland, then hit Arizona's parade season. "The parades are mostly the winter rodeo parades, including the largest non-motorized vehicle parade in Tucson in February." Shows continue throughout the spring, then Van Zyl pivots to stagecoach rides in Cody, Wyo., throughout the summer before heading back to Arizona in the fall.

The Pair A Dice team consists of nine Percherons and several horses in and out for training. "What I love most is sharing the horses with the public," says Van Zyl.

Van Zyl says, "We do horse-drawn wagon rides at the largest Christmas venue in Arizona as well as private events throughout the valley."

"People always ask if my horses are Clydesdales, which Budweiser did a great job in popularizing. The lack of awareness of other breeds is interesting to me. I love sharing about draft horses, the industry, the rich history and the breeds, as well as answering questions and talking about misconceptions of what we do."

She admits the business numbers can be a challenge. "It's costing more than ever to maintain and care for the horses. People don't understand that when they book an event, it's not just the time during the event they're considering but also the time in front and after their event. It's hours of prep work and travel, not to mention day-to-day expenses to own the horses and the equipment."

Still, Van Zyl has advice for horse lovers eager to follow her path. "Don't be afraid to ask questions and keep trying. Find a niche and a location where you can bring value to the area and make friends with other local business owners." She stresses the importance of safety. "When dealing with working horses and the public, always be prepared and have a backup plan. And triple-check your equipment. Make sure everything is sturdy, safe, and tight with proper lighting and signage."

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Bryan and Laura Kubes operate a peony farm in southeastern Minnesota. More than 15,000 plants and various activities make it a thriving rural business.

gardening, and answers to questions.

Looking ahead, Laura says future changes to the farm will come from "whatever way our hearts and finances direct us." The farm already offers custom photoshoots, pick-your-own bouquets, potting parties, farm tours and picnics at the Peony Farm (three

weekends in spring).

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