

EAST MEETS WEST

Submitted by Sam Rettinger and Mary Ellen Williams

On November 7th, Whispery Pines Percheron six horse hitch headed out on the 500-mile trip to Equine Affaire in Springfield, MA. We couldn't have made this trip without the backing of the PHAoA Education and Charitable Fund sponsoring the Percheron clinics. It was a great collaboration that allowed us to meet and greet people interested in the Percheron horse. The clinic offering to let people drive a draft horse was phenomenal in the number of people who wanted a chance to drive and the number of people we had to turn away. We held three clinics Friday through Sunday for two hours each day. Over the three days, we had close to 150 participants do actual driving, which was all we could handle in the time allotted.

The variety of people that we worked with ranged from youth to folks in their mid-70's. Some had dreams of driving, some had driven with a family member. All these things brought back good memories of days past when the family was using draft horses on

the farm. A lot of our students were single driving horse owners (not necessarily draft horses) who wanted more education and experience in driving, or they were thinking of getting a second horse. Our students really were looking forward to hands on driving both a team and single. For the younger generation, this occasionally was a dream of just being able to drive such a big draft horse. One very cool feature about this clinic is that the horses involved in our Drive a-Draft are the Whispery

Pines show horses that perform in the Fantasia Show at night. They are very well broke, very well-mannered but these horses are also very upbeat, experienced performance horses. The students didn't just have the opportunity of driving a draft horse, they had the challenge and experience of handling and driving the show hitch performing Percherons. These draft horses have a capable but forgiving mindset so that they can handle all levels of experienced drivers, which gives a unique feeling for the student to learn how to drive

the horse around the ring. In the three days of putting on these clinics, the horses were also involved in the Equine Affaire breed demos, using draft horses around the farm and Fantasia every night.

The Fantasia show was considered "Dueling Drafts" and so we performed each night in the ring with the Morrisville College Belgian six-horse hitch, driven by Scott Seymour. Morrisville College, located in New York, is one of the few state colleges that has a well-known draft horse program as part of their equine and animal science offerings. Mr. Seymour offers a traveling six horse hitch for competitive draft horse shows, and exhibition events with the college students throughout the show season. This was our second clinic of Drive-a Draft. Our first offering was held at Equine Affaire in Columbus, Ohio this past April. From our experience, it was heart warming to offer this clinic and find out how much passion is still in this country for driving a draft horse. When we offered the clinic in Ohio, we met people from surrounding states of the central US. Equine Affaire asked us if we would consider going east

and offering clinics this fall. In Springfield, we found that we had a great number of people throughout the New England states that participated in our class and many of them had ties to draft or driving horses. It was nice to see the passion for draft horses still existing throughout both regions. In offering these clinics, the Percheron Education & Charitable Fund sees having boots on the ground to be valuable to their mission of promoting, perpetuating and educating people on the Percheron draft horse. To offer these experiences at a national and state level requires collaboration and as Kellie Rettinger said, "We make a great team". 🐾



In a harnessing class Kellie showed a unicorn hitch while Sam talked. Xenophon Photography



We had a Birthday Girl celebrating with Tony! Photo by MEW



Sam instructed the team Drive-a-Draft. Photo by MEW



The only space big enough to hitch in was the parking lot-in the dark! Photo by MEW



Flash is having fun schmoozing with the crowd. Photo by Whispery Pines



Scott Seymour driving the Morrisville College Belgian Hitch. Photo by MEW



"Dueling Drafts" in the ring for Thursday's Fantasia performance. Photo by MEW