



Promontory's Director of Equestrian Services, Shelley Van den Neste with an 11 yr old Holsteiner Stallion, Ramiros, owned by Promontory member Brooke Horan.

# For the Love of Horses

Promontory's Equestrian Center stands as a significant commitment to the art of horse training, riding performance and blue ribbon care.

BY LESLIE MILLER

Gazing northeast toward a clear blue skyline, Promontory's state of the art equestrian center appears along Utah's horizon like a mirage, floating on a sea of native grass. The distinctive structure sits prominently at the feathered edge of a broad meadow bordering the sage studded hills of Promontory Ranch Club. Designed exclusively for the equine members of Promontory, the Center stands as a significant commitment to the art of horse training, riding performance and blue ribbon care. Unparalleled in the state of Utah, this "horse haven" makes a bold first impression, as does the new Director of Equestrian Services, Shelley Van den Neste.

Leaning against a polished granite counter in the Equestrian Centers' member lounge, Van den Neste looks at home in her new work environment. In a relaxed manner, she skims over the highlights of her career.

"I spent eighteen years in South Florida where I showed and trained horses," she begins. "In 1996 I trained a horse to be a National Champion at the National Show Horse Finals. My horses were doing really well on the show circuit and more people brought me their horses to train."

In addition, Van den Neste competed in 2004 in the first annual Arabian and Half-Arabian Sport Horse Nationals and won the National Reserve Champion, fourth Level, on a horse called Smith N Wesson. She also won the National Reserve Champion Training Level, riding the Stallion Aragon Strikes. She is a United States Dressage Federation (USDF) Bronze and Silver medalist and USDF "I" graduate with distinction.

As the morning at the Equestrian Center unfolds, behind her a panorama of the Wasatch Mountains comes to light through a towering glass wall on the south end of the indoor arena. Beyond the glass, Deer Valley's signature ski runs drop from the mountain's spine and disappear behind dense clusters of aspens and pines. It's only the muffled sounds of nickering horses that remind us we are actually indoors.

After winning the National title, she decided to take a lesson in dressage training and was instantly hooked on the classical methods. "I had just competed two horses to National titles and that lesson taught me that I really didn't know how to ride! I decided to become a student of the classical method of training. I learned that Dressage isn't just for horse training, it was a change of life." Van den Nestes' passion for Dressage is expressed in her determination to bring this method of horsemanship to her students at Promontory.

The great riding masters refer to Dressage as a highly collected agile form of riding that is based on lightness of hand. The object of Dressage is to develop the physical ability of a horse harmoniously which results in a calm and flexible animal. The horse becomes confident and acquires a perfect understanding of his rider.

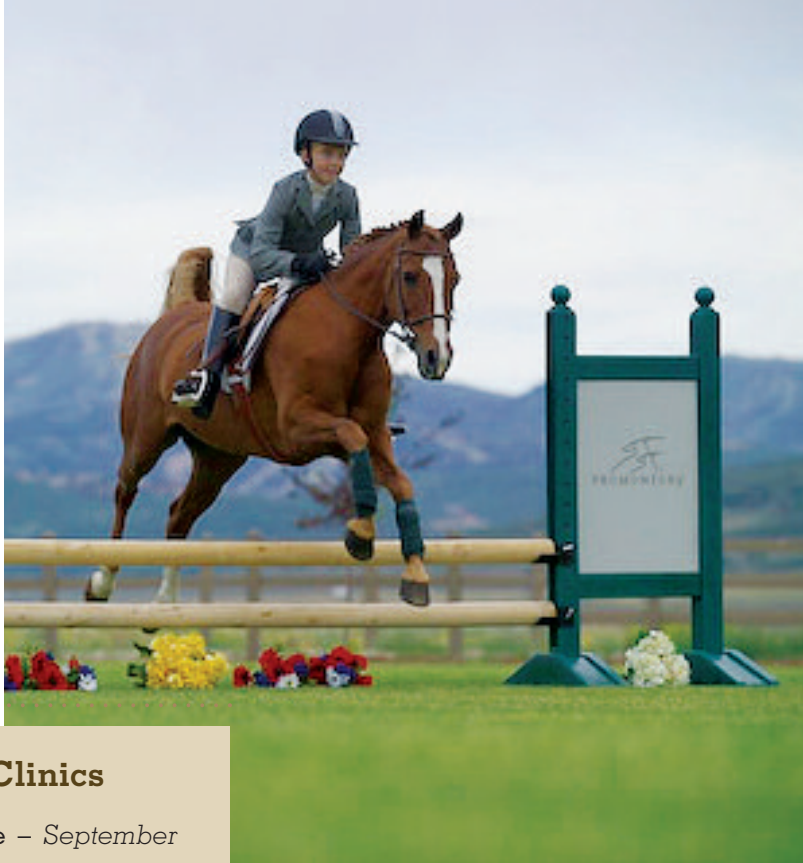
Van den Neste likes to add a little something to that horse training philosophy. "Let's have fun with our horses and they will become really good dance partners." Her objective for the Promontory Equestrian Center is for it to become "a dominant force competitive in the Dressage circuit and show arena." Equally, she hopes to



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Yvette Legras  
and 19 yr old  
Welsh cross  
pony named  
Little Miss Fancy  
Pants (aka Taffy)  
train on the  
practice field.



## Dressage Clinics

**Miguel Duarte** – *September*

From Portugal's esteemed family of classical riders, the Ralao family, Miguel brings a background of classical education both from previous generations and from the great Dressage Schools of Portugal.

**Walter Zettl** – *February*

One of the world's most accomplished and revered masters of classical dressage and a sought after clinician and coach.

"introduce equestrian sports to Promontory members eager for a new challenge and a new adventure in their lives." She currently has five horses that are actively showing and soon plans for them to compete in California and Arizona. Closer to home, there are two recognized Dressage shows a few miles away in scenic Heber Valley.

The Promontory Equestrian Center is a training facility with the flexibility to plan a variety of activities. Van den Neste offers a menu of specialized equine member services

that include private lessons, trial lesson packages (for individuals trying out the Equestrian Center) and training. She is qualified to teach all seats English, Western, Dressage and Hunter Jumper. Fortunately, the programs and facility are not only for the serious equestrian interested in competition. "There are many members that just want to learn to ride or ride better. They are not interested in showing, but want to be competent riders." she says. "This is such an intimate facility. After we workout in the arena we can go for scenic rides on the trails behind Promontory or gather for a beer in the members lounge in front of a blazing fire."

Van den Nestes' talent for training horses and a university degree in business management merged when she became the Equestrian Facility Manager of the 111 acre, Palm Beach County Jim Brandon Equestrian Center in Wellington, Florida. The equestrian showplace hosts western and English riding shows and demonstration events. It is home to the Gold Coast Dressage Association shows and events, which Van den Neste was a member of for 10 years. The center had eight show arenas and two barns that stabled 128 horses. She was responsible for selecting and coordinating all aspects of the world-class facility including staff, maintenance equipment and operations. After Hurricane Wilma nearly destroyed the almost completed

Center, Van den Neste had to delay the grand opening another year. After the first successful year, she started to look for another project and arrived at Promontory in March 2007.

A young stable hand leading a diminutive Icelandic pony, one of 16 horses currently boarded at the Center, momentarily distracts her. She eagerly follows them to one of two wings with 32 (12 x 12') climate controlled stalls. The temperature in the barn is a comfortable and consistent 65 degrees. Promontory's horses always "look like they are ready to go to a show," says Van den Neste. She makes sure they are routinely washed, vacuumed and show clipped. Clean saddle pads, leg wraps and tack are stored in convenient, private lockers near the stalls. Van den Neste is so particular about the condition of the horses, she makes sure the dark coated animals are turned out first, "so their coats don't get bleached by the (high altitude) sun."

Van den Neste enjoys programming clinics for Promontory's equine members and their friends, such as the one this season with Czech clinician and author Walter Zettl. These special clinics include a gourmet dinner in the Center's members lounge along with book signings and an exhibition. While Promontory's equestrian clinics enhance the educational features of the Center, they also provide a rare opportunity for horse-lovers from across the country to come together in a friendly and motivational environment.

Outside in the bright alpine morning happy horses in turn out areas trot up to greet her, hungry for attention. There is a round pen for training and an emerald green practice ring and track encircled by a handsome three rail fence. It is a perfect day for a ride. Van den Neste glances at her watch. She's about to give a lesson to develop a musical freestyle for her students' up-coming event.

"I love working with horses," she says as she looks across the manicured grounds of the Equestrian Center, "because they are intelligent, powerful and sensitive. They have a silent language that we will never fully understand." Perhaps this very mystery is at the root of every equestrian's passion and certainly Shelley's lifelong devotion. ❖