

A BRIEF HISTORY OF EVENTING IN THE FLATHEAD VALLEY

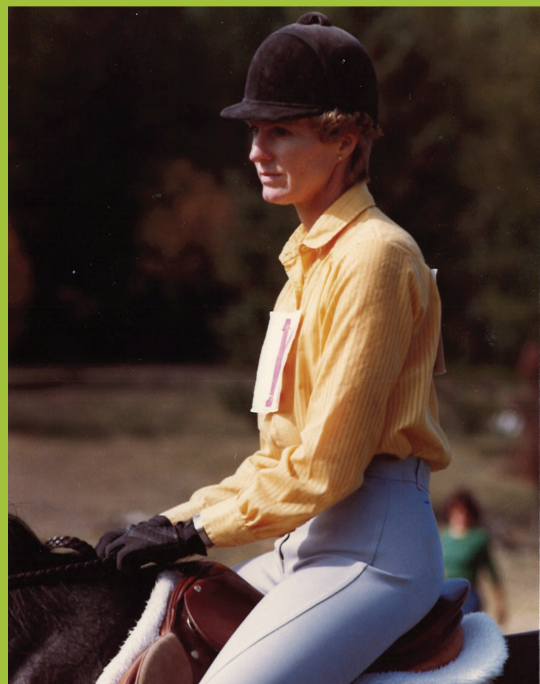
CELEBRATING 30 YEARS

BY AMBER HEINTZBERGER

It's been three decades since the first recognized event sparked interest in the Flathead Valley of Montana, eventually putting the region on the map as an eventing destination – all thanks to a small but devoted group of local horse enthusiasts.

Below right to left: Duck jump; Pat Young jumps a cross-country fence on Becky Broussard's Sebastian during the 1994 Herron Park Horse Trials; Sarah Broussard (right) presents an award; Pat Young (left) smiles at another rider during the awards ceremony for the 1981 Herron Park Horse Trials; PJ Rismon perches atop a horse-shaped jump designed for sponsor, LaSalle Vet Clinic. Photos courtesy of Pat Young and PJ Rismon





IN THE BEGINNING

The Flathead Valley's first schooling course was built at Herron Park in 1983; the following year, the same location hosted the first event of the Flathead Valley. Area equestrian Pat Young fell in love with the sport after taking her horse to an event in Jackson, Wyoming. After Herron Park was bestowed to Flathead County, Young and a local riding club worked to get permission to have cross country courses built.

"It was great because the county did nothing with the park and then it developed, so everybody wanted to use it," recalls Young. "Pete Costello was the best builder we could get; he'd built Rolex Kentucky and he was amazing. Pete was from Oregon and wanted eventing to come to the Northwest."

In the following years, they developed the Herron Park courses to the preliminary level, and the event became increasingly popular. Herron Park's first event in 1984 had around 30 entries; in 1989, Herron Park hosted its first United States Combined Training Association (now USEA) recognized horse trial, and the event continued to grow. In 1992, permanent stabling was built, and in 1993, Pete Costello built Intermediate course. As the entries continued to grow, up to about 180, the facilities maxed out with no more room for stabling.

BECOMING THE EVENT AT REBECCA FARM

Originally from Louisiana, Jerome and the late Rebecca "Becky" Broussard, who passed away from breast cancer in 2010, moved to northwest Montana in the mid-1980s, settling in Flathead Valley. When the area's original horse trials at Herron Park needed room to expand, they stepped up to the

challenge. The Broussards purchased a suitable tract of land and moved the event to Rebecca Farm.

"They bought the property in the summer/fall. It was farmland with an old house they call the brick house and it was awful. There was a ton of clean-up to do," recalls Young. "There was farm equipment and junk everywhere, but Becky could envision what she wanted there. She also brought key members of the club out and asked what they thought, and they all thought it was wonderful."

Becky hired course designer Captain Mark Phillips to design the cross country courses, and impressively, they built novice through intermediate levels in the first year. "That's a huge deal to get done in less than a year," says Young. "They cleaned up the property before the snow flew and employed so many excavators and trucks. There was so much activity out there all at once. It was just monumental what they did."

Jerome got involved too – organizing the construction, hiring contractors, building the office. "Becky and Jerome just dug in and put on their first recognized event only a year after Herron Park, with all those levels, and it was a great event," says Young. "It was a huge commitment and they just got started. They really got expert help to do things right, and if something wasn't right, they re-did it."

THE PRESENT AND BEYOND

Today, The Event at Rebecca Farm is an economic boon to the region, producing an estimated \$5.5 million in local economic impact, according to a study completed by the University of Montana Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research.

Clockwise from top right: Joaquenia Heinrich and Monegan jump over a cross-country fence. PJ Rismon (top in yellow) hugs another rider during the awards ceremony. Riders assemble in a field at Herron Park during the Herron Park Horse Trials. PJ Rismon during the same event. Pat Young organized the event the first few years—she is considered by many as "the mother of Herron Park." A current jump at Rebecca Farm. Photos courtesy PJ Rismon, Shannon Brinkman and Pat Young.

30 YEARS OF MILESTONES

1978: Flathead Valley Hunt Club asks to use Herron Park for informal riding gatherings. The first portable jumps are brought in.

1981: Herron Park is designated Montana's first County Equestrian Park.

1982-1983: The FVHC constructs some permanent jumps.

1984: The Park Board gives FVHC permission to build a professional cross-country course. Pete Costello, Olympic course builder, completes novice and training level courses. The first formal Herron

Park Horse Trials was put on in September.

1985: The Flathead Valley Hunt Club merges with Flathead Dressage Club. The Herron Park Horse Trials becomes an annual event.

1988: Pete Costello builds a preliminary course at Herron Park.

1989: Herron Park Horse Trials becomes a US Combined Training Association (now USEA) sanctioned event.

1992: The successful 1990 event leads to further development of the facility. 60 permanent stalls are built. The event expands to two judges, and a beginner novice division is added to the event.

“Becky had a dream of having The Event at Rebecca Farm become an international event,” says Young. “Kalispell is a very small town and the gateway to Glacier National Park; now we have people coming from all over the world for this event. Becky did all of that, and then passed the reins on to [her daughter] Sarah when she knew she would pass away due to cancer.”

By 2004, in addition to the horse trials, Rebecca Farm began offering two- and three-star FEI level divisions. To encourage participation from the country’s top riders, the Broussards offered generous travel grants and even flew select East Coast horses to the venue via a charter airplane dubbed “Air Horse One.”

In 2012, The Event at Rebecca Farm worked with former Olympian and distinguished course designer Ian Stark to give the cross country course a new feel. The bold, galloping course includes elements inspired by Montana’s landscape and wildlife, as well as a bayou water complex as a tribute to the Broussard’s former home in Louisiana – jumps are carved into giant crawfish, beavers, snakes, and alligators.

The event also runs a long-format event including roads and tracks and steeplechase in addition to the cross country phase, at novice and training levels, including an educational component. “It’s a learning thing,” says Young. “They have people coach them in terms of how to do a three-day and before they start, they have a little training session. It’s a lot of work, especially during the event since you need a whole different set of volunteers for roads and tracks.”

ALL ABOUT THE COMMUNITY

In eventing, much of the support and funding come from grassroots competitors; many are adult amateurs competing at the lower levels. The upper levels are predominantly professionals, often competing for owners. The Event at Rebecca Farm has always aimed to provide a place where professionals and amateurs, upper and lower level riders, can all compete at the same

venue, at the same time, and enjoy the entire spectrum of eventing competition. “That was one of Becky’s signature thoughts, that everybody would be there together,” says Young.

The community and camaraderie include the event organizers and volunteers, as well. Volunteers often return year after year, making The Event an annual destination.

With novice through intermediate horse trials, as well as classic-format novice and training three-day events, plus FEI divisions up to 4*, on the roster, The Event at Rebecca Farm has something for just about every competitor. In 2017, 2018, and this year, The Event at Rebecca Farm hosted the North American Youth Championships for Eventing.

The Broussard family is still involved in horses outside of running The Event at Rebecca Farm. The USEA’s Becky Broussard Grants support developing riders, and the organization that Sarah started in her mother’s memory, Halt Cancer at X, has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for cancer research and support for local cancer support services. The family has also owned and supported horses for top-level event riders over the years.

“They’re incredibly generous people,” says Young. “Sarah is a ‘let’s see what we can do’ person, not a ‘we can’t do that’ person. She grew up eventing in her teens, and she grew up with The Event. When Becky started The Event, Sarah was in college, and after she graduated, she decided to come back to Kalispell.”

Rebecca Farm is also host to community events: a summer symphony, skijoring, and several hunter/jumper shows. The Event at Rebecca Farm offers free admission and a family-friendly atmosphere, including a Kid Zone with pony rides, face painting, arts and crafts, and miniature golf. Adults can relax with a brew or shop in the extensive trade fair.

Eventing in the Flathead Valley has come a long way since those early days at Herron Park, but that same community spirit is still alive in The Event at Rebecca Farm. And the memory of Becky Broussard lives on with every passing year. 🐾

30 YEARS OF MILESTONES

1993: A significant donor provides funding for Pete Costello to build an intermediate course. International judge Jack LeGoff judges the competition.

2001: Final year for the Herron Park Horse Trials— 246 competitors

are in attendance. Courses offered include novice, training, preliminary and intermediate.

2002: The inaugural The Event at Rebecca Farm is held, which draws 262 riders.

2003: The Event adds a CIC2*. A second event the following weekend hosts Adult Team Championships.

2004: CIC3*W and Advanced courses are added. The event draws 351 competitors.

2015: A CCI3* (now 4*) course is added.

2017: Rebecca Farm hosts the North American Youth Championship (called the North American Junior Young Rider Championships at the time) for the first time. The Event welcomes 591 competitors and 53 young riders.

2018: 597 riders compete in The Event and 44 young riders compete in the North American Youth Championships.

2019: The Event is once again host to the North American Youth Championships.