

Sarah Vandenberg

Briarwood instructor adds Level III USEA certification to long list of credentials.

Sarah Vandenberg joined an elite group of instructors nationwide when she recently earned her Level III certification from the United States Eventing Association. The owner of Briarwood Riding School at Copper Meadows in Ramona, Sarah is one of only five such accredited instructors on the West Coast and the only one in San Diego/Orange County.

"It was extremely challenging but very worthwhile," Sarah notes. "I firmly believe instructors, as well as riders, need to continually push themselves to stay on top of the sport of eventing and the USEA Instructor's Certification Program is designed to do just that."

The USEA ICP is designed to identify essential training principals for riders and horses and to ensure that instructors possess the necessary theoretical and practical knowledge required in dressage, cross country and stadium jumping, as well as horse management and effective teaching methods. Level III instructors are fully certified in all areas through the CCI** Level.

Rigorous national assessments test the instructor's ability in mounted lessons in all three disciplines, as well as written exams and hands-on stable management testing. "The testing process is very intense as you are observed and judged while actually teaching one-on-one in each of the three phases under the scrutiny of some of the top riders and coaches in the United States. As the instructor, you are required to be able to evaluate the horse and rider you are assigned, then create a lesson which allows a clear progression in a one-hour period," says Sarah. "It made me really excited to get home to my regular students."

Sarah's students at home were her major motivation for joining the ICP in the first place. Encouraged by her coach and ICP faculty member, Brian Sabo, Sarah realized that she wanted to give her horses and riders the very best. The ICP was a great tool to do that. "I am privileged to work with a great group of students. From the beginners who have never been on a horse, through our successful upper level competitors, Briarwood students exemplify the best that the sport of eventing has to offer," Sarah comments. "They motivate me to continue to seek new ways to help them achieve their goals."

A top-level rider, competitor and instructor, Sarah has competed through the Advanced Level, winning unprecedented consecutive gold medals at the North American Young Riders Championships. She has been helping create successful horse and rider combinations for nearly 20 years.

Sarah adds her USEA Level III certification to her distinguished United States Pony Club "A" rating. She is currently campaigning two young horses on the eventing circuit as well as training and coaching her roster of over 30 full-time students at

Briarwood Riding School.

Briarwood Is Booming

Success is defined many different ways at Briarwood and students are encouraged to work with Sarah to design their own program. "Most of our riders choose to compete and we have a great group of horses and riders competing at all different levels," explains Sarah. "But some choose to stay at the lower levels or not compete at all and they are just as welcome in our program as an active, upper level competitor. Everyone is serious about their progress but also supports one another in the process. It is not unusual for us to have a large group competing at a show and have everyone show up to cheer on a teammate."

Success is also defined by correctly matching



horses and riders to achieve specific goals. For some riders, that means identifying prospects and bringing horse and rider up through the levels together. Other riders may need a reliable partner to help them gain confidence at the lower levels.

"So much can be achieved through the correct pairing of horses and riders," says Sarah. "Sometimes a partnership is right but may not be experiencing success because they need some adjustments to their training regime. Even a simple change of tack can make a huge difference for both horse and rider. Whatever the issue, there is nothing more rewarding than seeing a well-matched pair performing at their best. It doesn't

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matter if it is a beginner attending their first show or an upper level rider finishing on top at a three day event. It is one of the best parts of my job."

One of the unique features of Briarwood Riding School is their string of high quality school horses. School horses have been a part of Briarwood's history since its inception in 1987 and each brings his or her own special qualities to the program. From walk-trot experts to show-ready mounts, the Briarwood school horses allow people who don't have a horse of their own or need to work on skills apart from their own mount, a chance to excel. Many of our horses have been with our program for many years and are treasured members of the family," says Sarah.

The current year has been very busy year for Briarwood, with many students moving up the levels. "We had a very successful show season with several riders completing their first Novice, Training and Preliminary events this year, as well as bringing home both ribbons and great experiences," notes the trainer.

In addition to recognized horse trials, Briarwood attended several schooling shows and held cross country clinics at both Copper Meadows and Galway Downs. "It has been a great opportunity to work with people from out of the area who can't necessarily be in our regular training programs," says Sarah.

Also new this year is the Briarwood Riding School website: www.BriarwoodRidingSchool.com. "It was a lot of fun to put together," says Sarah. "We went through a lot of photos and really the history of Briarwood. I hope everyone enjoys it as much as we

did putting it together. We really look forward to all of the fun and success 2008 is going to bring."

Located at Copper Meadows in Ramona, San Diego County's only three day event facility, Briarwood accepts horses and riders of all levels. Copper Meadows hosts two recognized horse trials per year offering Beginner Novice through Advanced Levels as well as many schooling events and clinics. Limited boarding at Copper Meadows is available for those in training. Sarah can be reached at 619-685-7531 or www.BriarwoodRidingSchool.com.

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