



Nutmeg State Happenings

Kyle Van Splinter Natural Horsemanship Clinic



Luki O'Connor of Fern Hill Studio

Kyle Van Splinter was born with a passion for horses and initially learned traditional horsemanship via English riding and jumping. About seven years ago, her horses GiGi and Firenzé guided her to a better way — good horsemanship, both on the ground and in the saddle, is about establishing a strong partnership through trust and communication.

About two years ago, utilizing learning from her horses as well as internationally known clinicians, she began her We Move As One Natural Horsemanship Instruction and has been helping humans and horses enjoy all of their equestrian activities more effectively together.

On Sunday, July 30, Kyle Van Splinter was the guest clinician at a Natural Horsemanship Clinic sponsored by Comet Oak at Halcyon Hill Farm in Oxford, and hosted by Donna and Ricky Collins. The first portion of the morning clinic began with a brief demonstration by Kyle as she interacted with GiGi, her elegant, athletic, eight-year-old Thoroughbred/Swedish Warmblood at liberty.

As the two moved together as one in Halcyon Hill Farm's ample outside ring, songs emphasizing the theme of the clinic were

playing in the background: *Just the Two of Us*, *Lean on Me*, and *It Takes Two*. As the music paused, with her equine companion willingly and closely by her side, Kyle discussed with her audience, comprised of auditors and participants, the value and importance of the equine-human alliance.

"The purpose of my demo with GiGi being at liberty was to show the concept that every successful partnership begins with communication and trust," Kyle said. She went on to explain the different types of communication we share with our horses. "When we are encountering strange objects on the trail, and the horse senses from you, his leader, that we'll be okay, then things are good, we're okay," she said. "You have to also be sure that you're the same person that you are in the saddle that you are on the ground. Our main goals should be to make the horse feel safe, comfortable, and have fun."

When breaking down the different types of energy we can use to connect to our horses, Kyle illustrated that through our body language, we can convey, employ, and use our various energy types to effectively improve our relationship with our animals.

"Calm and relaxed energy has its purpose, but not all the time. You can modulate your energy in accordance to what we are asking of our horses. For instance, you may use a heightened energy when requesting a canter," she said. "We must also be aware of the horse's body language by paying attention to his ears and eyes, and his licking and chewing as he processes information. We must also give our horses the opportunity to try and then reward the try, or make sure to recognize the try and drop energy and/or any other type of pressure."

As Kyle worked with each of the participants, who ranged from eager youngsters to more experienced adult handlers, she demonstrated some techniques and methods to teach each student how to establish a better understanding and communication with their horses. She also expounded upon the benefits of building a more trusting partnership through fairness, consistency, and timing. "When the partnership is right, you get their mind, and then everything is magic for horse and rider," she said.

 Sally L. Feuerberg



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