

Ranney riders showcase talents at national level

Kelsey , Reader Submitted 7:16 p.m. EDT June 9, 2014



Two members of Ranney School's Equestrian Club, Ashleigh Conroy-Zugel '16 (Holmdel) and Sophia Calve '16 (Oceanport), are heading to Gladstone, New Jersey, June 12-15 to compete in the United States Equestrian Federation Dressage Festival of Champions. This national competition has four divisions for children and young adults under age 25-only the top 12 riders in the country from each division will compete. Ashleigh will compete in the junior division and Sophia in the pony division. This competition also includes two adult divisions; the winners of the Grand Prix division will represent the US at the World Equestrian Games in Normandy this summer-the most prestigious international equestrian event.

(Photo: Web art)

Sophia started riding at just 2 years old and this will be her third year riding in the national championship with her horse, Goose Landings Medallions Thor. Sophia has competed at Dressage at Devon for the past two years as well as the Concours de Dressage International (CDI) in New York, earning marks in each competition.

Ashleigh began to ride at age 8, with a focus on hunters and equitation. At a young age, Ashley earned placement in the Hampton Classic, Winter Equestrian Festival, HITS on the Hudson and the Capital Challenge. Today, she prefers dressage competitions and rides at the Junior level with her horse, Ungaro. In 2013, she qualified for the North American Junior and Young Rider Championships, where she represented Region 1; her team came in fourth place.

In the fall, Ashleigh had a fall when her horse was spooked by a groundhog and was unable to ride or attend school for nearly four months. Within just a few weeks of being able to ride again, however, Ashleigh earned ribbons in the Junior Individual and Junior Tam test at the 10 CDI-W.

Both families have been appreciative of the school's flexibility in enabling Ashleigh and Sophia to balance both their academic requirements and their rising equestrian careers, which can call for time out of school. Says Ashleigh's mother, Mrs. Sonia Zugel, also a dressage equestrian, "The Zugel family would like to thank Ranney and its whole team for helping Ash through her rehabilitation as well as allowing her to excel in the equestrian arena. Without their support and flexibility, it would not have been possible. Every athlete needs a huge team to work together. Ranney has an amazing team in place and has figured out a system to let students compete throughout the school year and yet excel in academics."

Adds Sophia's mother, Dr. Beth Calve Hartog, "Ranney faculty have helped Sophia maintain her training schedule by allowing her to be exempt from gym and study hall on a daily basis so she can get to the barn and train each day. They also have allowed her to adjust her academic schedule to accommodate her competition schedule."

Both students seem to have found that scholar-athlete sweet spot. In addition to being among the top young equestrians in the country, Sophia recently earned a Bronze medal for her score on the National Spanish exam and was named to the Shore Conference "B Central" Division Softball team. She also worked as a member of the set crew for the Upper School's production of "Our Town" this year and is a member of the Tri-M Music Honor Society. Ashleigh plans to attend a Global Leadership Conference in Europe this summer, after being nominated by Ranney Upper School administrators. She also serves as a JustWorld Ambassador and created a pilot Junior Ambassador program for the New Jersey Chapter of The Nature Conservancy.

Both girls helped to create Ranney's Equestrian Club during the 2012-2013 school-year to bring students together who shared a common passion for horseback riding. As part of the club (read back story), the students volunteer at the Special People United to Ride program (SPUR), a therapeutic riding program children based at Lincroft's Sunnyside Equestrian Center. (Read the back story). Both students train and ride outside of school.

Sophia and Ashleigh are now among the company of Ranney alum Jessica Springsteen '10. Graduating this year from Duke University, Jessica has also had exceptional success as a competitive rider, participating the past two years in the Global Champions Tour and representing the United States in Nations Cup competitions. All three girls are potential Olympic contenders.

You can read more about Ashleigh in this Phelps Media Group release: <http://www.phelpsmediagroup.com/viewarticle.php?id=9119>

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