



Fairfield County synonymous with 'horse country'

By Meg Barone

Bob Cacchione was an 18-year-old college sophomore in 1967 when he established the Intercollegiate Horse Shows Association with participation from only two colleges and a handful of students.

As the non-profit organization celebrates its 50th anniversary this year, Cacchione, of Fairfield, can boast it has participation from more than 400 colleges and universities throughout the United States and Canada and more than 10,000 students. That level of interest in his association, which promotes competition for college students regardless of financial status or riding level, mirrors the overall popularity of all things equestrian throughout the country and in Fairfield County.

While Connecticut is small, geographically, it has a big impact on the equestrian world. "You have some of the best trainers (of horses and riders) in the country who live in the immediate area and you also have incredible horse facilities; Oxridge Hunt Club in Darien and Fairfield County Hunt Club in Westport," Cacchione said.

The Greenwich Polo Club has weekly matches open to the public where people can tailgate, spread a blanket and enjoy a picnic lunch, or sit in a VIP box in the grandstand. There is also the New Canaan Mounted Troop, a non-profit organization that provides comprehensive educational horsemanship and equine care programs for youth in Fairfield County. "Those are just some of the attractions in Connecticut," Cacchione said, adding that its proximity to Manhattan is also a big draw.

"You can have a wonderful horse property in lower Fairfield County and still be an hour or less from New York City. It's the best of both worlds," said Pat Marsh, a Fairfield realtor with Berkshire Hathaway and owner of horses. Marsh shows horses and enjoys pleasure riding.

The state has an estimated 50,000 horses and about 550 horse-related businesses including horse training and boarding facilities, farriers and farms with a large concentration in Fairfield County.

"Connecticut has a pretty vibrant equestrian community," said Marsh, who offered advice for those looking to purchase a horse property in Fairfield County. "There are towns that are more horse-friendly than others. I would find a town that has a horse association," she said. Three Fairfield County municipalities have horse or equestrian associations – Greenwich, Fairfield and Newtown.

Marsh also recommends checking a town's zoning regulations related to



Above photos: Quiet Lake Estate. Courtesy of Higgins Group Real Estate/Christie's International Real Estate.



Chestnut Farm, Weston. Photo courtesy of William Pitt Sotheby's International Realty.



This 2.74-acre property is available at 175 Mountain Road, Wilton.

equestrian properties and activities before buying. "In Fairfield you need at least two acres to keep horses," she said. Regulations may vary from town to town. There may be specific regulations about keeping houses, building barns, building riding rings or other amenities that would support equestrian activities, she said.

There are also communities that have more equestrian trails than others. The

towns of Weston and Easton share Trout Brook, which has more than 700 acres of hiking and equestrian trails maintained by the Aspetuck Land Trust. The Greenwich Riding Trails Association has about 150 miles of trails. In Fairfield the municipally owned Brett Woods Open Space has riding trails that can be accessed from trailheads and also from some backyards.

At least two horse properties on the

market in Fairfield have direct access to equestrian trails so there is no need to load a horse into a trailer and drive to go horseback riding, unless you want to ride on the shores of Long Island Sound, which is allowed only in the town of Fairfield and only off season.

Marsh is the listing agent for a 17-acre horse property at 480 Catamount Road in Fairfield that has a six-stall barn, riding ring, fenced pastures, and 11-room house; on the market for \$2,195,000. Pamela Foarde of AI Filippone Associates with William Raveis Real Estate represents a 16.76-acre equestrian property with its original antique English barn and two-horse paddock at 3808 Redding Road, for \$1,659,000.

Quiet Lake Estate, a 153-acre equestrian property that straddles Wilton and New Canaan, is currently on the market for \$22 million. It offers a 8,000-square-foot mahogany and butternut barn with 11 over-sized horse stalls and two tack rooms, seven horse paddocks, riding arena, a trotter track, five miles of scenic equestrian trails, two guest houses, two lakes, and two approved helicopter landing sites. Listing agent Gail Murphy of Higgins Group Real Estate/Christie's International Real Estate said the property qualifies as a working farm under state regulations and therefore enjoys lower taxes.

In Greenwich, Sally Slater of Douglas Elliman is the listing agent for the world class equestrian property Lionshare Farm at 404 Taconic Road, which comes with 95 acres, 36-stall show barn, two indoor riding rings, 14 grass paddocks, a jumping derby field, two outdoor riding rings, 34-stall polo barn, and a price tag of \$39 million.

"If you are a top competitor in (equestrian) disciplines you have rigorous requirements regarding the stabling of your horses. Because horses are so expensive we, as owners, go to extremes to keep them comfortable and sound," said Gloria Marwell, a realtor with Berkshire Hathaway in Pawling, New York, who shows her cutting horses in national competitions.

Not every horse property in Fairfield County requires such deep pockets. Jonathan Deak of Coldwell Banker represents Maple Meadow Farm at 109 Maple Road in Easton, which has three acres, a three-stall barn and two turnout fields for \$625,000.

In Weston, listing agents Karen Curtis and Mark Basile of William Pitt Sotheby's International Realty, represent Chestnut Farm at 227 Lyons Plains Road, which has three acres and a large barn, on the market for \$2,195,000.