

# Amateur Riders Simone Cox and Barbara Phillips Make Horse Show Entries Easy with Equestrian Connect

It was less than two years ago when amateur jumper riders Simone Coxe and Barbara Phillips were having coffee together and griping about entry forms. They had been doing their own entries for years and were sick of all the repetition, endless handwriting and the holdup when mistakes were made. Then and there the two equestrians decided that instead of just wishing there was an easier way to enter horse shows, they would take the bull by the horns and create one themselves.

And so evolved Equestrian Connect, a web service that allows exhibitors to complete their entry forms online. After registering with [EquestrianConnect.com](http://EquestrianConnect.com) and initially entering horse, rider and membership numbers, all information is saved and automatically reproduced on a new entry form when the exhibitor selects the next show. The completed legible and accurate form can then be printed out, signed and mailed to the horse show office with payment. Each participating horse show provides its official entry form.

Because of its ease of use, the service has caught on quickly. Originally started in California, the service spread like wildfire and there are currently over 450 horse shows that have come on board including many major East Coast shows such as HITS, the Hampton Classic and St. Christopher's. There are currently over 4000 individual users with approximately 400 of them being trainers.

To demonstrate how easy the system is to use, Equestrian Connect is offered free for an introductory 90 day period. After that, exhibitors may sign up on an annual subscription of \$39.99 per horse, for unlimited entries. Or, for horses that go to four shows or less, there is an \$8 fee per entry form.

Equestrian Connect works with horse show managers who want to encourage exhibitors to use the service. There is no fee for horse shows to come on board although they often put the Equestrian Connect link on their individual websites. Equestrian Connect then includes their website link in their email alerts which are sent regularly to subscribers. It is a win-win situation for both exhibitor and horse show.



Friends and business partners, Barbara Phillips and Simone Coxe, at a recent horse show.

Flying Horse Photography

## Kudos

It is no wonder that exhibitors and horse show management are raving about the service.

Olympic Team Gold and Silver Medalist **Leslie Burr Howard** from Westport, Connecticut, commented, "It's time for the horse show industry to realize more of the benefits of technology. This is a positive beginning."

If exhibitors love the system, then one could say that horse show secretaries go even a step further to total adoration. "I love it when entries come in that were prepared through the Equestrian Connect website," said Troy Powell, head secretary of **The Hampton Classic**. "They're always legible, accurate, and complete, which, unfortunately, can't always be said for entries scribbled in a hurry!"

The staff at **HITS** concurs. As Jessica Keil, horse show secretary for HITS said, "The highlight of inputting entries into our horse show program is when we come across an Equestrian Connect entry. It saves us an immense amount of time since they are easily readable and complete. Most entries usually require deciphering poor handwriting which leads to misspelled names and addresses in our database. Those mistakes also come back to haunt the person who filled the entry out when their horse's name is mispronounced in the ring, or their prize money is returned to us because we were unable to read the address on the entry blank."

Amanda J. Lambert, another HITS secretary, agreed. "It's always a pleasure to receive Equestrian Connect entries because they are so neat and legible! Our data input is much

quicker and with less mistakes when we aren't trying to figure out someone's handwriting."

### The Founders

Simone Coxe and Barbara Phillips met about ten years ago when they took lessons at the same farm. Although they both have moved from that facility to different farms and trainers, their friendship on and off the showgrounds has remained intact. Their frustration with entry forms, coupled with Barbara's background in computer science and Simone's in public relations, created the perfect partnership for their brainchild, Equestrian Connect.

### Barbara Phillips

With a background in computer science and business, Barbara knew that the internet would provide the perfect solution for doing entries quickly and easily, although, "I never imagined it would take off so quickly!" she said.

At the helm of three other start-up companies where she provided the product development, vision, and computer strategy, she was able to face the challenge of horse show entries not only with her wealth of expertise but with the mindset of the typical horse show competitor.

Barbara and hubby Stuart have two children in college; Carolyn competes on the east coast and Kevin cycles. Barbara says, "Stu is a big fan. We have young horses at home and he has been seen feeding them carrots. He is a Silicon Valley venture capitalist and with that background he looks for companies that meet a real market need and fulfills customer requests. Equestrian Connect proved those two tests."

Barbara competes in the Amateur and Open Jumper divisions 1.30 meter on her horses, *Alberta*, *Ramira* and *Charisma*. Her most recent accomplishment was winning the HITS Thermal Circuit Championship in Low Amateur Jumpers and the show championship in Level 4.

Her 2011 goal is to move up to the High Amateurs at 1.40 meter.

Barbara trains with Butch, Lu and Guy Thomas at Willow Tree Farms in Woodside, California.

### Simone Otus Coxe

From 1985-2002 Simone juggled a career in her own public relations firm in the technology field with marriage, mother-

hood and horses. When she sold her company in 2002 to have a third child, she thought her corporate days were over and she would finally be able to devote herself entirely to her growing family and her riding. Her children are now 13, 12 and 8 and the youngest, Isabel, will begin showing in short stirrup this season.

Simone started riding as an adult and she alternates between the Modified Am/Jr Jumpers, and the Low A/O Jumpers (1.20-1.30). Her mounts are *Cardano* and *Dondero* and she recently retired a 19-year old horse named *Fortuna*. Always a realist, her goals for this season are to "fix some bad habits and get back to consistently riding in the A/O Jumpers. I eventually want to ride in the high A/O's."

She also owns a Grand Prix horse, *Mr. Whoopy*, shown by her trainer Duncan McFarlane of Outwoods Farm where Simone is also trained by Helen McNaught. She is excited about *Mr. Whoopy's* 8th place finish in the HITS \$1 Million Grand Prix last year at only 8 years of age. He recently won the Grand Prix at the Capitol City Classic in Sacramento, California in April.

Simone's husband, Tench, is very supportive of the business and the horses, "although he sometimes wonders how all this horse stuff happened to him!" she laughed. "He is in the venture capital business, and knows what it takes to start a business. My kids think it is cool, but that I work too much."

### Looking Ahead

Eventually, Simone and Barbara want to expand Equestrian Connect to list show results, track points and even put together show reports of riders and horses. They are also considering adding videos and photos and developing the site into a venue of entertainment for horse lovers.

Although they've received interest from riders competing in other disciplines, right now they plan to stay focused on the hunter/jumper market.

Equestrian Connect is currently focused on USEF A/AA and Jumper-rated shows for now, although that may change as the company expands to include B-rated and local shows.

Meanwhile, the two women are enjoying the early success of their venture and find it gratifying when they hear compliments like, "Equestrian Connect is like Christmas—it's almost fun doing entries now!"

To learn more and take a guided tour of the system, visit [www.equestrianconnect.com](http://www.equestrianconnect.com). ☺



Simone Cox and *Cardano* competing in the A/O Jumpers at HITS Thermal in California.



Barbara Phillips and *Alberta* at Thermal where Barbara won the HITS Thermal Circuit Championship in Low Amateur Jumpers.