

## **Participant Testimonials**

“The 2016 Young Rider Graduate Program was a truly exceptional experience in every aspect. Many of the most prominent professionals within every aspect of the industry took time out of their schedules to speak with young, developing dressage riders throughout the country. Even though these speakers are considered among the most elite in our sport, each one was as encouraging and down to earth with us as the next. They opened themselves up to follow up conversations and welcomed continued connections that will prove invaluable. The volunteers who organized the event were incredibly kind and passionate. Every detail from the accommodations to the food was meticulously well thought-out. It was also such a treat to be in the company of fellow horse lovers of the same age. When I walked into the hotel room my roommate and I were sharing and a dressage training book was on the nightstand, I knew I had found my niche! I formed friendships that will last a lifetime. The entire event can be describes as inspiring, but also extremely practical in helping young riders in the United States achieve their goals and continue to develop the wonderful sport of dressage. I was honored to be a part of it, and am very grateful to all those who made it possible.” – Kate Peper

“As a young dressage professional, I was very excited to be selected for and participate in the 2014 USDF/USEF Young Rider Graduate Program. The program's line-up of business professionals, top coaches and trainers in our sport, and Olympians made for a weekend full of information and memorable experiences. This well-run weekend allows participants to meet other young professionals. Throughout the weekend, discussions with speakers allow participants to clarify the direction of their business as well as determine what role each participant wants to have in the sport of dressage. Whether you want to be a top rider, trainer, breeder, barn owner, judge, business person, or a top amateur, this program offers endless opportunities to learn from people who have had success in business and dressage. USDF, USEF, The Dressage Foundation, the speakers, and sponsors go above and beyond to make this program an experience not to be forgotten.” – Clara Etzel

“I cannot say enough positive things about the Young Rider Graduate Program! I had the privilege to attend the 2014 program and it was by far the best thing I have done for my career to date. We were able to meet so many of the top professionals in our sport and hear priceless advice straight from their mouths. As riders we are constantly searching for education to improve our riding and training and it only makes sense that we would need the same guidance in a professional sense. From equine law to customer service advice, training opportunities and sponsorship do's and don'ts, this program is essential for anyone considering a career in training horses. This program is absolutely incredible and I would encourage anyone who has the opportunity to attend this in the future to do whatever it takes to get there. You won't regret it!” – Sydni Ottesen

“I attended the 2014 USDF/USEF Young Rider Graduate Program. I come from a non-traditional dressage background. I never participated in the NAJYRC, and started showing in my early 20's on a pony. At the time, I had recently made the switch to Professional status after competing as an Adult Amateur. I had a lot of questions and I needed help to expand my toolbox

to achieve a lot of the goals I set out for myself. The USDF/USEF Young Rider Graduate Program did that, and so much more. It's allowed me to not only expand my network, but also gave me reliable, open access to resources to approach if I have any questions. It put names to faces within the governing infrastructure and industry that will play a major role in my career. Finally, it connected me to other people my age, who are also just starting their professional journeys. The USDF/USEF Young Rider Graduate Program is possibly one of the best investments I've made for myself and will continue to have far reaching dividends. Highly recommended to anyone who is interested in pursuing dressage full-time." – Kelly Gage

"As a participant in the Young Rider Graduate Program in 2010 and 2012, I really enjoyed the program. I cherish the information that I gained, and the friendships that I made. The organizers worked hard to get an incredible panel of professionals to come and speak to the participants. The weekend seminar format lends itself to deep discussion and networking. As young professionals we are eager to bring our horses to the biggest competitions, and most popular symposiums but the Young Rider Graduate Program offers a quiet, intimate setting to learn and discuss some of the most important aspects of our profession, such as legalities, marketing, syndication, training abroad, fundraising, and national organizations. It was an honor and a privilege to be part of this program, and I am grateful to all those that made it possible." – Meaghan Byrne

"As a Junior and Young Rider, I was always one year too late reaching the levels to try to compete in the NAJYRC. I was very excited when I was invited to participate in the Young Rider Graduate Program, as it finally provided an opportunity for me to be involved. Competing as an adult amateur, I was skeptical as to what I would gain from a program seemingly geared more towards aspiring trainers, but I was excited to pack my bags for Florida regardless. The program was a fantastic experience. Not only did we get to learn from top equestrian professionals, but we were also able to make valuable friendships and connections within the dressage community. Most importantly for me, the experience convinced me that, although I was not aiming to be a trainer or professional rider, I really did want a career that allowed me to be involved with horses. After the program, I went home determined to find such a career, and several months later began a position as an Equine Product Lines Specialist with Markel Insurance. The Young Rider Graduate Program inspired me to find a job involving my passion, and I am so grateful that I have." – Michelle Burch

"The Young Rider Graduate Program was an invaluable experience for me and an experience that would benefit every aspiring young dressage professional. Both the participants and the presenters had a wealth of knowledge to offer and were wonderful people to get to know. Even coming from a professional horse family, the program had so much useful information that I was able to put to good use right away - from how to successfully apply for scholarships to new training ideas to how to improve and safeguard my business through better marketing and liability coverage. This program is a wonderful opportunity!" – Nora Batchelder

"As a participant in the 2012 Young Rider Graduate Program, I cannot emphasize enough how much I enjoyed the whole experience. Not only were the accommodations wonderful, but the presentations and speakers were exceptional as well. The topics of discussion were highly relevant and important for young people who are trying to start a business or make a professional

transition in the dressage industry. The diversity and caliber of speakers were excellent as well. This program provided a unique opportunity for participants to interact with a stellar group of influential figures in the sport of dressage. I am truly grateful to have had the chance to be a part of such an outstanding program.” – Melissa Reese

“In January 2012, I was invited to attend the USDF Young Rider Graduate Program in Wellington, FL. The invitation was an honor in itself, since just 30 young dressage professionals attended the three-day conference. It was also my first trip to the mecca of equestrian sports for the winter season, and my first taste of where I know I want to be someday. After dozens of lectures from Grand Prix riders, equine lawyers, PR executives, and more industry professionals, I knew this would be something that really supercharged my career path. I can’t even begin to describe how much I learned – I returned from that weekend with even more inspiration, drive, and tools for success. In just that weekend, I had met so many amazing new contacts, toured some gorgeous farms, and created a better plan for how to get where I want to be. I can trace everything that I was able to do this year back to the 2012 USDF YR Graduate Program somehow, and that is just awesome. I am excited and motivated to keep moving forward.” – Lucy Fuelle