

The Riding Club of Barrington Hills

Its future... an outline for discussion

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PURPOSE

The purpose of this outline is to suggest that the Riding Club of Barrington Hills consider a new strategy to ensure and enhance its future as an organization which

- (a) represents a broad spectrum of equestrian interests in the Barrington area,
- (b) is an effective steward of the Barrington Hills trail system and
- (c) provides a firm foundation for the continuation of Barrington Hills as a rural and equestrian community.

SITUATION

The Riding Club of Barrington Hills is an organization of approximately 225 members, most of whom reside within the Village of Barrington Hills or who own horses boarded in the Village of Barrington Hills.

All members of the Club have a vested interest in maintaining the rural and equestrian nature of the village.

The village is comprised of approximately 1,440 households of which probably no more than 200 are Riding Club members. Yet the Riding Club is considered an important and influential organization central to the fabric of the village.

A core component in keeping the village an equestrian-centered community is the system of riding trails that run thru private properties, along public roadways and thru Cook County's Spring Creek Forest Preserve. Stewardship of the trail system is and has always been a central mission of the Riding Club.

With the election of Bob Abboud to the presidency of the Village Board, along with supportive trustees who include Fritz Gohl, Julie McKeVitt, Steve Knoop and possibly Walter Smithe, the Riding Club will have a powerful ally in the fight to retain and possibly extend the trail system thru new developments that come into being.

This is a major step forward.

Unfortunately, I don't believe that new developments were ever the greatest threat to the health of the trail system.

With or without new development, the population of Barrington Hills is changing. Over 20 new building permits are issued each year. Long time residents who understand the equestrian nature of the community are aging, dying or moving away. Equestrian properties are being purchased by non-equestrians. Non-equestrian properties are being purchased by non-equestrians. Most new homes are being constructed by non-equestrians.

It is the non-equestrians who, I believe, represent the greatest single threat to our trail system, and thus, our way of life.

Some long-term non-equestrians are people who understand and support the trails. The ones that don't have already shut off the trails thru their properties. There isn't much we can do about them.

New non-equestrian residents are the big issue. These are the people who, thru ignorance or arrogance, can move onto a property and willfully shut down a trail. These are the people who can be on the wrong side when equestrian issues are at stake in elections or are under consideration by our Village Board or Park Board.

Furthermore, as the non-equestrian population grows, the proportion of equestrian residents declines, and the Riding Club itself becomes increasingly marginalized. That this is already a factor was made clear to me during the recent Park Board election where key Park Board members referred to the Riding Club as a ***“special interest group”*** whereas I firmly believe the Riding Club to be a foundational component of the community itself and represents the widest range of equestrian interests in town.

I believe the Riding Club needs an aggressive new approach to reverse this trend and take a leadership role in the preservation of our village as an equestrian community for years to come.

STRATEGY

I believe our mission is to ensure that *all new residents of Barrington Hills are, in fact, equestrians.*

How can we accomplish this?

One approach is to ally ourselves with another “special interest group,” the National Rifle Association, and simply shoot in-coming non-equestrians as they arrive with their moving vans. This is probably the most cost-effective way to go.

Or we can “convert the heathens.”

To do this, we must subscribe to the idea that you don’t have to be a rider or own horses to be an “equestrian.” Rather, you must recognize and support the rural and equestrian values and lifestyle which set this community apart from any other in the country and the importance of these to property values and quality of life.

This strategy dictates that the Riding Club develop a tactical plan to

- (a) Enroll every new resident (equestrian or not) into the Riding Club.
- (b) Indoctrinate every new resident into the “theory and practice” of being part of an equestrian community.
- (c) Achieve this, where possible, before an incoming resident actually moves in and certainly before the resident can take some action like building a fence or installing a swimming pool that shuts off a trail.

The upside benefits are clear:

- (a) The membership of the Riding Club will grow. I feel we should set a goal of 100 new members within 12 months of the plan’s inception and strive for similar increases every year. Our unachievable goal should be 100 percent membership among Barrington Hills households.
- (b) Increased revenues from larger membership.
- (c) Greater avoidance of trail closures by non-equestrian residents.
- (d) A village electorate more informed and more understanding of the equestrian issues that impact the community as a whole.

There are downside issues:

- (a) What happens when non-horse people outnumber horse people in the Riding Club?
- (b) This recruitment program is going to require time and effort, financial investment, etc. Can we provide the leadership and the long-term commitment needed to design and implement the program?

TACTICS

1. Increased emphasis on social activities. We must make non-equestrian residents feel that they are being embraced by their new community, and that the core of this new community is the Riding Club of Barrington Hills. Thus, the Club should sponsor frequent parties, fundraisers, even an annual formal ball that gives non-equestrians a social reason for membership. Hold as many functions as possible at equestrian facilities: the Riding Center, large equestrian homes, the Polo Field, etc. Make these people understand that they are part of a unique community ... an equestrian community!
2. Welcome Wagon committee. Every incoming resident should be met by a Riding Club committee that (a) contacts the resident in advance of move-in, (b) invites the resident to a neighborhood coffee or cocktail party hosted by Riding Club members, again in advance of move-in if possible and (c) during this process have a plan of education, indoctrination and membership enrollment in place.
3. Non-equestrian involvement in equestrian activities. Don't just sign 'em up and forget 'em. Put these new members to work. They can be jump judges at Pony Club events; timers and scorekeepers at Polo Club events. Let them help plan and host events, parties, fundraisers, etc.
4. Make it easy for non-equestrians to become riders. Have a committee whose sole purpose is to facilitate training new riders. I'll be glad to chair this one.
5. Membership drives. The above activities should be year-round. But additionally, we should plan at least one and maybe two concerted membership drives each year to approach and recruit any and all non-member households in the village. I see this as very similar to the election campaign run on behalf of Bob Abboud and managed, perhaps by the same people.
6. Don't forget equestrian residents who are ***not*** currently Riding Club members. What can we do to attract them into the Club?