Notes provided by Joy Black, ENYDCTA President

On Sunday, February 26, 2023, ENYDCTA's Sarah Geikie clinic at Aering Green Equestrian Center was a delightful day of learning, camaraderie, and celebration.

The Winter Program committee, consisting of Josh Powell, Rita Moore, and Vickie Hurewitz, did an excellent job organizing not only this event but all of the 2023 Winter events. We are immensely grateful for their hard work and dedication. Laura Fay, the owner of Aering Green, and Josh Powell, who boards his horse Lindero at the farm, worked diligently to prepare for the day, which included a delectable lunch with scrumptious desserts and champagne to commemorate Lindsay Shae's Century ride sponsored by The Dressage Foundation. The Century Club recognizes North American dressage riders and horses whose combined ages total 100 years or more. Lindsay, who is 74 years old, rode Obligato (also known as Kody), a 27-year-old horse owned by Laura Fay. Together, they totaled 101 years, and it was an honor to have them participate in the clinic day.

Following Lindsay's century ride, Sarah addressed an audience of roughly 20 people in the heated viewing room on the subject of harmony and how to achieve it. The discussion was highly interactive, with significant participation. Harmony refers to the horse and rider combination that appears relaxed, free of tension, supple, confident, and responsive to the aids. However, achieving harmony is a process that requires baby steps in the horse's comprehension of the rider's communication. The rider must take responsibility for working towards harmony, which is not a quick process. Just like riders, horses also have "aha" moments. As riders, we must be consistent and apply the aids accurately so that the horse can begin to comprehend what is being asked of him. By inconsistently applying the aids, such as using your legs back or forward when requesting a canter, the horse may become confused, and it will take longer for him to comprehend what is being asked.

To test whether you are on the right track towards harmony, there are two exercises you can try at home;

* The first is the stretchy circle, where you ride a circle and observe if the horse reaches out to the bit while maintaining balance, which is the ultimate goal. As Cailin Sanford reminded us, sometimes the stretchy circle is not an all-or-nothing thing the first time you try it, but rather a gradual process where the rider encourages the horse to stretch out to the contact a little bit more each time they ride.
* The second exercise is called "überstreichen," where the rider puts their hands forward for several strides, and the horse should maintain its balance and tempo. While riding on a curved line, the rider can release the inside rein for several strides to test the diagonal connection (inside leg to outside rein), and the bend and balance should remain the same.

We were pleased to have a Western rider attend the clinic, and Sarah emphasized that Western and English dressage are the same, except for the tack. All of the basics for the gaits are the same, regardless of whether you are in Western or English tack. It was a wonderful clinic that brought new friendships, a once-in-a-lifetime experience for Lindsay and her century ride, and a day of learning for individuals who are passionate about horses and improving their riding skills.