



# FILL THE STANDS

*How to Grow Your Horse Show Attendance*

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# Introduction

## Thank You to Our Contributors

The American Saddlebred Horse Association (ASHA) is proud to share a reference guide to the issue plaguing many horse shows and equine events across the country, how to “Fill the Stands.” Through the generosity of R.H. Bennett and Cece Hagan, we have been able to produce this concise and informative guide to how to drive attendance and interest in your event. Bennett gave us a wealth of expertise from his creation and management of the Shelbyville Horse Show and the new Shenandoah Classic Horse Show. We are highlighting how he makes each show successful and what he has learned along the way with Shelbyville that allows him to systematically approach making the young show in a distant community a success. Hagan has been able to bring together a plethora of action items to market and increase entertainment value at the horse show. Our wish is that this guide will help shows build their attendance one session at a time. We extend our deepest gratitude to these individuals for all they do for the American Saddlebred and their contributions to this project.



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# Growing Attendance with Community Connections

Location and community are factors as essential to any show as is footing or stabling. For any show to be successful in generating interest from the city, a show manager or committee must get familiar with the facility and the individuals connected to it.

Decades ago when shows in the American Saddlebred community where showing strong attendance there was a more active ownership base that was connected to the community. These owners would plan events at the show that drew interest to get the people in the surrounding location to attend. In the modern day, show management and committees can learn from the successes of the past to adapt their current model to be more successful for each specific location. Your top priority when selecting a place to manage and put on a show is to identify the ways your show benefits the community, and what aspects of the community can help your show.

***“The first step is to show the community how the American Saddlebred industry positively impacts the community and generate their interest”***

An additional factor of this is finding the right connection in the community to communicate your event's value. R.H. Bennett in the planning of any show works to identify who are the top leaders in that community. Are they on a chamber of commerce board, department of tourism, community planning committee, hospital board, or a significant regional business person? Work through your show's venue to identify possible ties between these community leaders to horses, show venue or agriculture in general. For the Shenandoah Classic Horse Show, Bennet worked with a local real estate professional who was active in the Virginia Horse Center to make the introduction to a county judge, the mayor, and the tourism leader.



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As Bennett states, “it is important to not go to the community with your hand out before you have established a connection. The first step is to show the community how the American Saddlebred industry positively impacts the community and generate their interest, not financial support.”



A monumental resource in this endeavor is the local department of tourism. This is an office whose sole purpose is to “be the primary government agency charged with the responsibility to encourage, promote, and develop tourism as a major socio-economic activity to generate revenue and to spread the benefits of tourism to both the private and public sector” (U.S. DOT).

The Director of Tourism will be the most helpful in establishing the value your event has on the location you are planning your show. They can best help you understand and present the economic impact that a show can bring to the community. It is the responsibility of a show manager or planning committee to have the ability and the evidence to paint the picture of benefit your event to the community with statistics and facts.

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### **A sample list of influential economic impactors**

- How many hotel room bookings does the show bring in
- How many people travel in to attend the show
- How many restaurants do the show travelers support
- Demographics of our breed: upscale, like to shop and dine out
- Explain the cost of horses and scale of investment in coming to the event





# Engage Community with Vendor and Volunteer Operations

Once you have made a connection with the community leaders and have apprised them of the value that your show brings to the community you need to adapt your show to accommodate them. In planning, you need to look at the different aspects you can offer throughout the planning and execution of your horse show to involve the community. This will also in turn get the show more involved in the city. Bennett strongly supports that using local suppliers is a great way to connect the community to your horse show. He suggests looking at every aspect of your show where you spend money to have something produced and then ask yourself if you can spend that money locally? Enlist your connections with the department of tourism or commerce to find local trophy makers, printers and places you can get your show supplies.



Specific examples Bennett can lend is the production and distribution of the Shelbyville Horse Show Poster, “the show committee offered to make donations to organizations such as the “women’s club” of Shelbyville, KY in turn for their support and distribution of the event posters.” Another example of how Shelbyville integrates community organizations in the operational needs of the show is by having the local high school band boosters volunteer as ticket takers in return for a donation from the show. They also have the national anthem performed by the alternating local high school bands or choirs.

The more volunteer groups you can engage and invite to participate, be featured or benefit in your show, the more other local traffic you will attract to your event. The more ties you can create at your show to make them interested in attending like seeing their grandchild perform the anthem, to see their high school class present a trophy, to see their sister's charity club pass out programs are ways to generate interest in attending through volunteers.



### **Vendor and Volunteer check list**

- Identify and communicate with area department of tourism office, or committee members to benefit your show being in town
- What business can you use locally for producing things for the planning of your show?
  - Trophies
  - Posters
  - Supplies
  - Volunteers
- Communicate with local leadership all the production you can bring to local vendors
- Establish a volunteer network through local schools, clubs and charitable organizations
  - Work to provide a donation, service hours or recognition to those groups for their service

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# Growing Attendance with Sponsorship

Your sponsorship program is another area to strengthen the connection between the horse show and the local community which will add to the social experience. Sponsors can help add value to trophy presentations, hospitality events, and entertainment. The more creative you can get with sponsors not only helping to cover the cost of your show but they also add attendance by bringing members of the community to the show creating that social setting that becomes a place to gather and enjoy themselves. The Horses become the entertainment for the community. Look at the areas of your venue where you could add hospitality or additional aspects like better trophies or giveaways for exhibitors and spectators that could be adapted to a sponsorship program or value. Work with local businesses and organizations to see what they have interest in supporting at your show. Also, increase their involvement by inviting them out to the show. For example, you can offer the opportunity to present their trophy and a photo from the show photographer to all sponsors. This is a small token to show your appreciation and something for them to display at their business for continued promotion of your event. If your show can be classified as a 501c3, this would allow for additional donations to help add value and attendance incentives to your horse show.







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## Sponsorship Checklist

- Have you used your sponsorship program to create a social experience for the community?
- Have you approached local car dealers about bringing cars to have on display at your show?
- Do you have local offices with high traffic like doctors, insurance sales, or banks as trophy sponsors?
- Do you have unique trophies for every class?
- Have you made trophy sponsorship available to groups like class reunions or small clubs and invited them to present at the show?
- Is your show classified as a 501c3?
- Do you have a community connection strong enough where county or city sees value in sponsorship?
- Do you have a diverse and wide financial range of sponsorship options?
  - o class sponsors, halter sponsors, ribbon, division sponsors, evening sponsors, or hospitality sponsor?
- Do you have signage or areas of the show where you can have sponsor banners placed or logos put on programs or tickets?
- Do you have an area at the show where sponsors can bring guests to enjoy the show and be recognized?

# Enhancing Attendance Through Hospitality and Education

Most non-exhibitors don't come to a horse show to see horses they come to be a part of a social event. A show should make persistent and direct efforts go out to the public to make them feel welcomed and informed. If you think about events that bring in massive attendance sporting games, concerts, car races, and horse racing, there are many activities before and during these events that get people interested and keep people engaged during the performance. Creating interest before the show with events and opportunities is crucial to getting the general public in the stands.

The example Bennett refers to when he talks about the promotion of his shows is to treat it the way the city of Louisville does the Kentucky Derby. The city of Louisville creates a jubilee of events leading up to the Derby to entertain the public and promote the race. Also, examples within the show horse industry such as the US Arabian Nationals and US Polo Association where they present their horses and professionals at other regional events to the public. In Scottsdale, local Arabian barns bring strings of horses both to exhibit and to have as petting ponies during intermissions of the polo matches. During this opportunity, they bring invitations and tickets to the horse show and other hospitality events happening around the show.





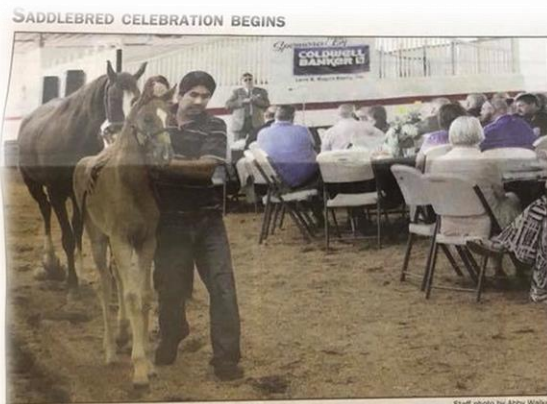
For Shelbyville, they host several events leading up to the show, a Classic Car Show at the Shelby County Fairgrounds and a Shelbyville Horse Show Kick-Off breakfast that are hosted and sponsored by members of the Shelby County Development Cooperation group where attendees visit Undulata Farm and are the American Saddlebred is presented while they attend the networking breakfast. Tickets are sold separately for, and the revenue does not go to the show, but they get the community excited about the event. At a younger show such as a Shenandoah Classic Horse Show starting with a “Breakfast with the Saddlebreds” is a welcoming hospitality event that makes the public feel welcome — providing coffee and donuts near the primary horse work area to host a meet and greet with local organizations. This brought in the public to see our breed. This opportunity allowed locals to see what the purpose of the show was and meet the horses. In addition to getting the people to the show grounds, it provided an opportunity for education. Many trainers and exhibitors stopped by to answer questions of the public about the horses and also took groups on barn tours to allow them to meet horses that would be showing.





Hospitality at the show is just as important as the promotion before the event. Designating spaces and partners at your show to have food and beverage and allow the community to socialize with each other is the formula for success for many other equine events.

Combining the improved community engagement with more entertainment activities are crucial for expanding your attendance. You are strengthening your community connections by offering your show as an avenue for hosting groups and family fun. The more your show can be a social gathering and showcase for the community the more media and attendance interest a show will generate. Bennett shared that with the Shelbyville Horse Show for all the hospitality they offer they only hope to break even on cost, but it is the most critical aspect of getting people to the show. Investing in hospitality and entertainment for the public consumer should be a top priority of every show that wants to grow their attendance numbers.



Host Hoppy Bennett showed the crowd three Saddlebred horses, including this mare and a young foal, during Thursday's 22nd Shelbyville Horse Show Jubilee Kickoff Breakfast. Staff photos by Abby Walker

### Breakfast kicks off 22<sup>nd</sup> Jubilee

Speakers, horses highlight morning event, celebration continues Saturday

**Shelbyville Horse Show Jubilee events**

**FRIDAY, through next week**  
 South-A1 Show at Science Hill Inn, 10:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

**SATURDAY**  
 10 a.m. - 3 p.m. - Big Green Egg Fest in parking lot of Kroger's Plaza and Hooper. Tickets are \$15.  
 7 - 9 p.m. - "Horsin' Round with the Aes" near 5th and Main St.  
 8:30 p.m. - Ice Cream Eating Contest near 5th and Main St.  
 7 - 10 p.m. - Street Party Concert featuring act B at 5th and Main St.

**By ABBY WALKER**  
 Shelbyville News Staff Writer  
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Sunny weather and cool temperatures greeted Shelby countians as they arrived at Udistata Farms Thursday morning for the 22nd annual Kick-Off Jubilee Breakfast.

The event began at 7:30 a.m. with music by Lewis Mathis, then attendees devoured a decadent breakfast served by caterer 2 Country Chics, including biscuits, gravy, sausage, souffles, cantaloupe and a beverage of choice. Once most finished their meals, the presentations began.

County Extension Agent for Agriculture and Natural Resources Corinne Bolton started by welcoming the crowd, with Simpsonville Mayor Steve Eden, Shelbyville Mayor Tom Hardesty and Shelby County Judge-Executive Dan Iden each adding their own greetings.

This year's Jubilee also featured a

PLEASE see JUBILEE on Page A6

### Shelby Tourism earns economic engine award

**By ABBY WALKER**  
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This year's Shelbyville Horse Show Jubilee Kick-Off Breakfast featured a special moment as Hank Phillips, President of the Kentucky Travel Industry Association, made his way to the front to begin a presentation about tourism in Kentucky.

Phillips noted that tourism is a \$15 billion industry in Kentucky, with nearly 200,000 supported by tourism across the state. He then went on to share that the association created a new award to recognize leaders of tourism across Kentucky - the Kentucky Economic Engine Award. The award was designed to recognize counties across Kentucky that have a significant tourism impact on the state - based on both revenue and job creation. Phillips then presented to Shelby KY Tourism Executive Director Katie Fuessmeyer.

"You are richly deserving of the award based on the economic impact of tourism. This county, last year, generated over one and a half million dollars of economic activity due to tourism. Tourism in Shelby County supports

PLEASE see TOURISM on Page A6

### Suetholz opens Shelby office



Staff photo by Glen Jennings  
 Dave Suetholz greets visitors at his new office in downtown Shelbyville.

### 20th District Senate candidate focuses on labor, compassion

**By GLEN JENNINGS**  
 Shelbyville News Community Writer  
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Democratic candidate for the 20<sup>th</sup> District Senate Dave Suetholz has opened an office on Main Street in Shelbyville.

Suetholz, who is running against incumbent Paul Hornback (R-Shelbyville), now has a presence at 638 Main Street in Shelby County.

To celebrate the opening of his new office, Suetholz hosted a party in the new space before moving it to the Science Hill Inn, where he and several allies, including District 41 Representative Atica Scott and local Democratic Party vice-chair Bill Young, spoke about the candidate's plans and goals for his campaign.

The message focused hard on organized labor and also spoke on subjects such as education and social justice, touting specific planks in Suetholz's platform such as repealing charter school legislation and increasing the minimum wage.

"I need Dave [Suetholz] in Frankfort because we need more advocates for organized labor," Scott said. "We need

PLEASE see SUETHOLZ on Page A5

WEATHER				DEATHS	INDEX
Today	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Jerry Karpolis, Shelbyville Dane McKinley, Taylorville John Nethevy, Taylorville Kenneth White, Shelbyville	Faith B4-5 Classifieds B5-6 Looking Back B7 Youth B8
Partly cloudy 62/61	Partly cloudy 67/62	Partly cloudy 63/65	Rain 60% 76/64		

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## Promotion and Hospitality Check List

- Find ways to incorporate your show promotion at other related community events such as polo matches, festivals or fairs.
  - Example: Arabian Nationals spends all year bringing Arabian horses to all of the polo matches in the Scottsdale area for petting stations and pony rides during the “stomping divots” portion of the event. This introduces the public to the breed but also is an opportunity to share their show information and dates of other upcoming Arabian events in the area.
- Work with the community leaders to plan hospitality gatherings for the community at your show
  - A welcome line for meeting local politicians in a special event 30 minutes before the show
- Create build up hospitality or educational events leading up to your show, like Derby Jubilee
  - Coffee and Donuts reception for the community to watch horses work
- Get a list of things to do in the area for your show guests from the department of tourism
- Work with the dept. of tourism to provide a welcome package from local businesses to give to trainers, exhibitors of the show so they will spend money at local shops, restaurants.
- Communicate to the individuals in the horse industry such as trainers, principal owners, and officials what you are working to create at your horse show and ask for their support.

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# Expand and Sustain Attendance with Commitment to Entertainment

To grow attendance, you must approach the horse show as the entertainment for the significant social event that is the “horse show.” Bennett strongly believes that the shows that commit to designing and scheduling to be a source of entertainment and social experience first, and horse show second are the ones that will generate attendance. Only the most significant sporting events in the world or movie blockbusters can afford to be longer than two hours and attract an audience. To begin with isolate one day or session you can focus on to modify and promote to elevate attendance. From there, as you are able expand your entertainment and promotional efforts to more sessions.

As a manager or planning committee it is essential to support the industry, but not at the cost of sacrificing the value of your event to the public. If you can create opportunities and policies for scheduling changes that allow for only the most necessary or worthwhile classes to be added or altered, it will significantly help to be able to grow attendance. Bennett institutes a policy in all of his prize lists. He has provided two of his policies from the Shelbyville Horse Show below.





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“CLASS CHANGES AND CANCELLATIONS The Horse Show Committee reserves the right to cancel any class where there are less than four entries (the property of different owners) and to combine or divide any class or classes, should the best interest of the show require it. In case of cancellation, entry fees shall be refunded.”

“THE SHELBYVILLE HORSE SHOW POLICY ON ADDING CLASSES The Shelbyville Horse Show will honor the request to add classes if the following requirements are met. A \$5,000 deposit is to be made to The Shelbyville Horse Show to guarantee that there will be at least 8 entries in the class – if there are, \$3,000 of the deposit will be returned, if not the deposit is forfeited to the Shelbyville Horse Show. For more information, contact R.H. Bennett 502/664-0870.”



An issue plaguing many horse shows is music. In the modern day, many spectators comment that if popular music could be played via a DJ or playlist, it would attract more spectators. At this time any show that is being webcast or streamed, the use of copyrighted music is not allowed. For USEF shows an exclusive license is available to allow for copyrighted music to be played to a live audience. Unfortunately, even with the USEF license the recording or live streaming of the show with that copyrighted music is still not allowed. To combat this issue live musicians, music services, or scheduling popular music to only be played during non-streamed portions of the show can be used to entertain spectators.

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## Entertainment Checklist

- Is each of your sessions no longer than two and a half hours?
- Do you have a defined policy for adding classes or changes in class schedule?
- Does your schedule allow for exhibitors and show attendees to enjoy the local area?
- If there is a break in your schedule during the show, do you have spectator entertainment planned?
  - T-shirt Toss
  - Raffle drawings
  - Freestyle breed exhibition to fun music
  - Judging text in competitions
- Do you have extra entertainment planned for any evening/weekend sessions?
  - Outside ring activities for adults
    - Food Trucks
    - Wine, Beer, or Bourbon Sampling
    - Horse Selfie Station
    - Riding lesson sign-up
    - Guided barn/tack room tours
    - Meet an exhibitor Q&A
    - Bring a friend incentive for local exhibitors
  - Outside ring activities for youth
    - Pet a pony station
    - Riding lesson sign-up
    - Mechanical riding horse
    - Bouncy horse races
    - Snow cones
    - Shadow the judge for a class raffle
- Does your organist or keyboard player have a healthy selection of popular songs to play?
- Do you have someone who can fill the webcasting breaks between classes or line-ups with popular recorded music?

# Power of Promotion

Now that you have had the opportunity to analyze your shows community relations, hospitality, sponsorship, and entertainment operations it's time to let the people know and promote the great show you have planned! In the ultra-accessible world of today avenues for promotion have never been so abundant. Below you will find a list of to-do's and suggestions that can assist you navigate the promotional waters!



## Community Promotion Checklist

- Do you have contacts for all local organizations that could make a field trip to your show?
  - Local elementary schools
  - Summer camps
  - Church camps
  - FFA and 4H chapters
  - Boy/Girl Scout chapters
  - Boys & Girls Clubs
  - Senior Centers
  - Veteran's Groups
- Do you have 6-month community promotion schedule
  - Posters and flyers in local businesses and community centers
  - Events calendar listings, group invites with local groups
  - Ads on local radio, during high school sport webcasts, newspaper
  - local barns hosting promo events



## Social Media Promotion Checklist

- Does your show have a website, Facebook and Instagram?
  - o If yes, is it a business profile?
  - o Do you have a budget for social promotion?
  - o Social promotion
    - Facebook Ads
    - Boosted posts
    - Post video or graphic ads on local parent and community groups pages
    - Local influencers and public figures mentioning event or sharing your social media posts
    - Create contests with prizes for attending
    - Do you have a young charter or show volunteer group that can cover the show daily and promote coming to the show to the local community for the weekend or evening performances?



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## In Closing

We hope this "Fill the Stands" Playbook will be helpful in working with your show committee to plan an event that will excite the community and attract spectators. We want to thank R.H. Bennett and Cece Hagan for their time and devotion to our breed. Please send us any additional suggestions that you may have to contribute to this endeavor. R.H. Bennett is happy to accommodate any additional questions from horse show managers and planning committees. We want our shows to be successful and fun for all involved!

Brought to you by the American Saddlebred Horse Association  
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