

Sonoma County Events

A Wine Country Mini Cavalia

Written by Wanda Smith



Sue Tomasini performs bridleless Western Dressage

On a warm, breezy Saturday afternoon in early May, the California Equestrian Park and Event Center (CEPEC) hosted the first of its capital fund raising campaigns at the Draper Ranch in Santa Rosa. Guests came from across California and as far away as Oklahoma and Texas. And many were relatively new to the horse world. Our goal was to present "a taste of CEPEC," which means we aimed to portray the quality and versatility of entertainment and venues that CEPEC will someday host. From the guests' comments, it appeared we achieved our goal.

The event began with guests being welcomed to the Ranch with complementary CEPEC visor and drink tickets. They then proceeded to a BBQ lunch provided by *Simply Scrumptious* catering. Grilled ribs, chicken, corn, salads, chili, and cupcakes were enjoyed by all in the reception hall and garden. The wine, which was donated by Paint Horse Winery and beer by Lagunitas Brewery, provided an appreciated complement to the lunch.

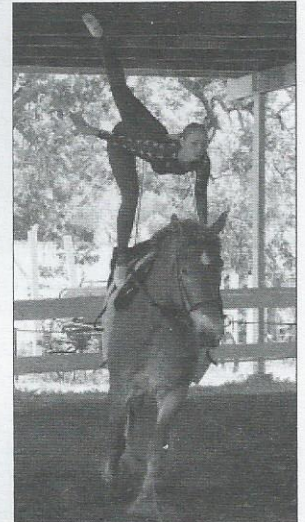
After lunch and throughout the day, guests could peruse the Silent Auction items in the reception hall. The auction showcased over thirty-three items including an oil painting, giclées, and prints of horses, vacation lodging in Hawaii and Puerto Rico, as well as tickets to a Giants game, the San Francisco Opera, Jack London Park's *Broadway Under the Stars*, ballooning over Sonoma County, a hosted day at the Sonoma County Fair Races, and the Grand Prix Races at Sonoma County Parkway. Donors of other auction items included: Christopher Queen Galleries, Jay Palm's Saddle Shop, Rosso, Palazzo, and Wild Goat Bistro restaurants, The Kenwood Press, and Zanetti Performance Horses.

Visitors got a glimpse of venues and events planned for the CEPEC complex which were displayed on tri-fold posters. They included Western and English riding, Polo, Carriage Driving, and Eventing, as well as facilities such as a conditioning track, veterinary and education centers, horse camp ground, and a museum.

The band *Whiskey and Honey* rocked the afternoon away with the

country music of Miranda Lambert, Zack Brown, Blake Shelton, Lady Antebellum, and Whiskey and Honey's newly released CD. The female fiddler played the *Devil Went Down to Georgia* so hot, it felt like the grounds would catch fire! *Whiskey and Honey* was chosen for The CEPEC Benefit because they are one of the few bay area groups that play popular country rock with both male and female lead singers. They also taught line dancing, which many spectators "tried to learn." It was great fun and everyone loved *Whiskey and Honey's* music.

During band intermissions, entertainment was provided by youths from the *Petaluma Junior Drill Team* and the *Novato Morning Star Vaulters* and by Western Dressage rider Susan Tomasini. The kids on the drill team were immaculately turned out with their crisp outfits, glittered horses, and synchronized riding that charmed the audience. Susan's Dressage exhibition was also impressive, but when she removed her horse's bridle and repeated their Dressage performance, the crowd was awed. As if that wasn't exciting enough, the eleven vaulters left everyone breathless. When one of the smallest girls scaled a huge horse and then did a flip causing me to say "Oh my God," the fellow next to me responded, "I say that every time I see her perform. She's my daughter." He was a definitely a very proud dad. The grand vaulting finale was a back flip off the back of a horse by the oldest member of the vaulting team. A spectator commented that he should audition for *Cavalia*.



Morning Star Vaulters

The Draper Ranch was a great venue for the event, because of its BBQ facility, concert lawn, gardens, covered reception area, and arena providing a welcome relief from the afternoon sun. The many garden alcoves allowed guests to sit surrounded by the vast array of beautiful flowers and lovely water ways. One attendee was heard commenting, "This ranch is so beautiful, in my next life I want to come back as a horse and live here."

As the sun dropped behind the Draper barns, the event ended with tunes of *Whiskey and Honey* and the events of the day being replayed in our heads.

CEPEC would like to thank the event participants, sponsors, donors, volunteers, band, caterers, performers, and especially the Drapers for providing a lovely venue for the CEPEC Spring Fund-raiser. Additional photos of the benefit can be viewed at www.cepec.us/benefitphotos.htm.

Wanda has owned horses for over four decades, managed a Quarter Horse breeding ranch in the Santa Cruz Mountains and in Guerneville, and showed Cutting horses. She has recently branched out into the Dressage world with her horse Chime. Wanda is the author of Horses of the Wine Country and the Executive Director of CEPEC (www.cepec.us).