

# 5 essentials for equestrian amenities

*Developments that offer equestrian amenities are catching on all over North America, but managing them requires these five essentials.*

By Alejandra Abella

Horses have a unique emotional pull for people and, in the United States, the majority are used for recreational purposes. Kids are frequently the first to walk wide-eyed through the barn, but mom and dad soon follow and it isn't long before the horses become a part of their family. The barn becomes a family hang-out, much like at a country club or a resort, where every member of the family finds something fun to do.

So how do you get that resort or country club feeling at the stables? After all, if you are paying for a service – like boarding your horse or taking lessons – shouldn't you expect the same service that you receive from other service providers like your favourite restaurant or hotel? At communi-

ties that offer an equestrian centre as an amenity, or at resorts with an equestrian program, horse lovers expect the same quality and level of service that they receive at the spa, golf club, or the swim centre.

Equestrian centres have traditionally belonged to private individuals for whom, more often than not, the horse farm also is where they reside and work, and often their sole means of income. As sole proprietors, they have the right to determine who they want for a client, and to determine and implement policies to suit their needs. But, the needs of the sole proprietor or operator are usually not in line with the needs of a residential community or resort. If an equestrian amenity in a community or resort is going to be seen as a valuable asset, it must

follow five essentials to operate correctly and efficiently, meeting the unique needs of its customers.

**1. Customer service:** Guests don't expect to hear about the bad day a resort concierge just had when approaching him with a request, nor would the manager of a restaurant tell its clientele that he just changed the reservation policy five minutes ago so a guest is no longer in the book. Not understanding the important role that customer service plays in a community or resort equestrian amenity means not understanding that clients are what makes the world go around....and the horses. In a community or resort, clients live around the corner or guests have selected the location to spend their hard-earned dollars and the little free time they have. Customer service for these clients is not an option; it's essential and it's what they are paying for when they buy a lot or go on vacation.

**2. Quality care and standards:** Horses are part of the family, but most people can't keep them at home so they trust their barn to give them the same level of care they would give themselves. Quality care and standards, as well as staff certification and training, are absolutely necessary in an equestrian amenity because when dealing with horses you are dealing with someone's family member. That is how their owners feel and let's remember they are around the corner – every day. A private facility may not have the time or finances required to continually maintain the highest standards of care and to develop and enforce policies and procedures, but in a residential or resort setting it is essential.

**3. Feedback and accountability:** In most commercial equestrian centres the owner is also the head trainer and the operator. If that person will not tend to a client's grievances there is nowhere higher to go. Clients want the ability to provide feedback and expect



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accountability. With a single operator the buck doesn't go very far before it stops and, too frequently, with no resolution. However, a professional management company is structured to give clients the necessary channels for feedback and the assurance that the client is satisfied.

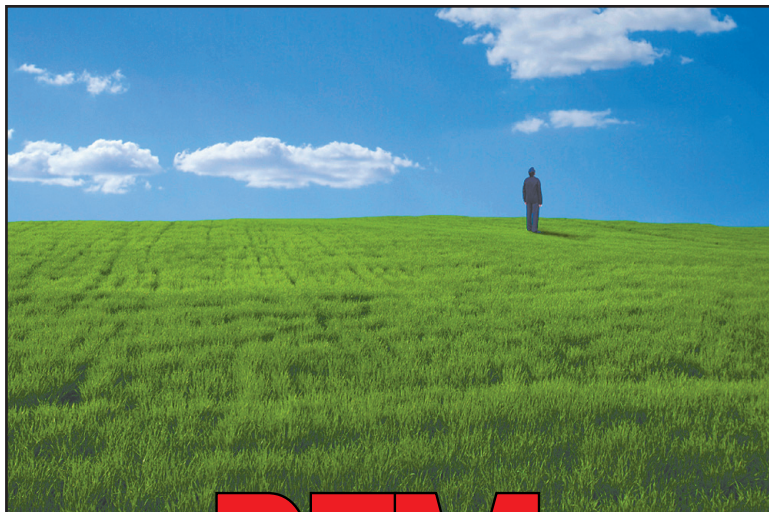
**4. Continuity and management support:** Running an equestrian facility is a full-time job, and who has time to create new programs, update the website, send out newsletters and think of new activities for equestrians and non-equestrians alike? The equestrian management company can successfully do the job. With a professional management company supporting the staff, the barn manager can do what he or she does best – manage – and the riding instructors can do what they do best – teach. Then, when these professionals need time off for illness or some unforeseen life change, the professional management company is there to provide trained and certified staff to pick up the slack or replace them.

**5. Efficiency:** An efficiently run equestrian facility watches out for the bottom line. Doing things twice when a task can be done once translates to extra labour

hours and salaries. Homeowners association (HOA) fees and resort rates go up when labour costs rise, and clients know they are the ones who will eventually pay for these additional expenses. In a community or resort setting, people often retreat to the barn to escape the daily rat race. The last thing they want to see is a badly run business. They want to experience an operation that runs efficiently at all times, where they can leave nice comments on the comment book, enjoy the latest barn event while their horse is peacefully tucked away in his stall, and be treated as if they own the place. Essentially, they do.

Alejandra Abella is with Equestrian Services, LLC in Charlottesville, VA. Founded in 2000, Equestrian Services, LLC, plans, designs and manages equestrian amenities for communities and resorts, worldwide. The company offers the only branding opportunities, under the Karen and David O'Connor and John Lyons names, for builders and developers offering equestrian amenities. Equestrian Services provides comprehensive services from feasibility studies to equestrian facility management. [www.equestrianservicesllc.com](http://www.equestrianservicesllc.com).

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