



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **John Nicholson announces Retirement from The Virginia Horse Center Foundation. The Foundation Plans Leadership Transition**

Lexington, Virginia. After six years of recovery, growth, and progress for the Virginia Horse Center Foundation (VHC), John Nicholson announced that he planned to retire, giving the Board of Directors (BOD) an opportunity to develop a leadership transition plan. As a result of the pandemic, the planned transition was delayed by one year and is being announced today.

"I am honored to have served as The Virginia Horse Center's Chief Executive Officer," said John Nicholson. "And I will continue to work in this role until the future leader is in place. I would like to thank the team of incredibly hardworking employees of the VHCF. It has been a privilege to work with a truly remarkable group of people."

Under Nicholson's leadership VHCF's financial stability was restored, enabling it to thrive at a time when its survival was in question. Nicholson and his team attracted new horse shows, recruited new Board Members, and garnered the support of the equestrian community. Most recently, VHC raised millions of dollars to fund newly added renovations and upgrades, guided by VHCF's first-ever Master Plan.

Gardy Bloemers, President of the BOD said, "On behalf of the entire BOD, I would like to thank John for his more than six years of service with the Virginia Horse Center Foundation (VHCF). Seven years ago, our organization faced two very serious problems: a leadership void and financial instability. It would be hard to imagine what would have happened to VHC had we not found John."

Former Board President, Ernie Oare, shared, "I was able to recruit former Kentucky Horse Park CEO John Nicholson to initially serve as a consultant and subsequently to become our full-time CEO. Together with a strong team, John skillfully led the facility out of a crisis to a position of prominence in the Commonwealth and national equestrian communities."

Board Vice President Kenny Wheeler said, "All of us are incredibly grateful to John for stepping in to lead at a time when we needed specific expertise and help. The situation was pretty dismal. His vast experience and ability to connect with the horse industry, and the localities of Lexington and Rockbridge County, as well as Commonwealth leaders, enabled us to turn this ship in the right direction."

During Nicholson's tenure he worked with both management and the elected leaders of Lexington and Rockbridge to increase the local occupancy tax allocated to meet the debt service on VHCF's \$11.5 million mortgage from the US Department of Agriculture. Obtaining non-operating resources to meet annual debt service payments was the first step in returning VHCF to financial stability.

Spencer Suter, Rockbridge County Administrator, added, "John was the shot in the arm that VHCF needed at such a critical time. It is no coincidence that his arrival heralded a period of organizational healing and financial recovery. His ability to seamlessly develop relationships and earn trust was clearly a catalyst in revitalizing a critical component of our community."

John Nicholson concluded, "I would like to thank the Board of Directors for its leadership, and the community of Rockbridge and Lexington for its partnership over the past six years. I strongly believe in the future of the VHCF. I am proud that many of our goals have been accomplished. The VHCF has a bright future and I look forward to seeing its continued success."

President Bloemers appointed a Board subcommittee in December of 2020 to lead the search for VHCF's next leader with the goal of filling the position in mid-2021. The search committee has created a robust and transparent process to identify the most capable person to lead the VHCF forward. We are looking for a mission-driven and experienced business leader who is skilled in executing strategic plans, developing and leading staff and fostering a positive and empowering culture. Please find the [Executive Director job description here](#).

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The Virginia Horse Center Foundation is a 501(c)3 organization which provides a world-class facility, hosting regional, national, and international equestrian events in Lexington, Virginia.

The Virginia Horse Center Foundation envisions a unique, bucolic landmark to honor and celebrate the timeless, special bond between mankind and the horse through safe, fair, and spirited equestrian competition.

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