

# Dear Friends,

**MUCH OF WHAT WE DO AT THE VIRGINIA HORSE CENTER** involves choosing winners. The ultimate objective is to win a blue ribbon, no matter what sport, breed or discipline.

Unequivocally, the Virginia Horse Center is a winner. It is a winner because it enjoys the strength of its many friends, has overcome adversity, and is charting an exciting ambitious course for a great future.

The last year has seen historical developments for the Virginia Horse Center. Our partnership with Rockbridge County and the City of Lexington reached new heights with the expansion of the local lodging tax, enthusiastically approved by both the city and the county. These additional funds have made it possible, for the first time in recent memory, to address the much needed deferred maintenance needs of the Virginia Horse Center. These funds do not cover all of our needs, but is a huge step forward. These funds have also made possible the development of a master plan for the physical layout, infrastructure and the environmental viability of the facility.

In addition to enjoying a congenial partnership with the City of Lexington and Rockbridge County, we are actively reaching out to the Commonwealth of Virginia as well as agencies of the Federal government, examining every possibility for partnerships, funding and investments. Our robust message is that the Virginia Horse Center is an important contributor to the economic vitality of Virginia and the Eastern Seaboard. For the first time in a long time, that message is being well received.

Other developments were the creation of a comprehensive Strategic Plan, an inaugural Board Retreat, and new events welcomed in the past 12 months. The future is bright and the upbeat atmosphere surrounding the Virginia Horse Center is positive.

On a personal note, it is an honor to be the Chief Executive Officer of the Virginia Horse Center. Having worked in management of equestrian facilities for more than a quarter of a century, I am proud to say that there are no better people anywhere than the remarkable team at the Virginia Horse Center. These exceptional people, led by Chief Operating Officer Leigh Anne Claywell, along with Chief Financial Officer Sandra Thomas, enjoy the respect of horse people throughout the country. They not only perform their duties with great competence, but also with graciousness worthy of Virginia.

Having completed my first full year in an executive team with Leigh Anne and Sandra, it has been a great privilege working with these extraordinary professionals. In the past year they have risen to the occasion more than once in challenging times and often challenging circumstances.

We are also honored to welcome Jennifer Donovan to our team to coordinate our fundraising and development efforts. Her strong professional background, as well as experience as a rider herself, has already served to reengage our old friends and to win new friends.

After 17 years of proudly leading the Kentucky Horse Park as its Executive Director, and eventually making the decision to retire, holding a similar position never occurred to me. However, having witnessed Ernie Oare's passion and leadership, as well as seeing the dedication of the Virginia Horse



John Nicholson

Center's Board of Directors, I became convinced of the enormous potential of the Virginia Horse Center. It was an honor to be asked to become a part of the Virginia Horse Center family. These are exciting times.

The Virginia Horse Center will succeed as never before. We will succeed because we will foster safe, fair, and spirited equestrian competition. We will succeed because we honor Virginia and the heritage of her land. We will succeed because we honor the horse and value the people who cherish them.

The best days for the Virginia Horse Center are yet to come, and I look forward to welcoming you here to be a part of it.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'John Nicholson'.

John Nicholson  
Chief Executive Officer  
Virginia Horse Center Foundation