

USDF's Influence on My Life

Perspectives from one of the USDF's best-known members

By Maryal Barnett

Lowell Boomer, the late USDF founder, once told me that his vision for the organization was to serve and educate riders, instructor/trainers, and judges. Little did I realize at the time that I would end up fitting into each of those broad categories.

In the mid-1970s, as an adult-amateur rider, I traveled to Cleveland with my husband, Charlie, to attend what would be the first of many USDF conventions. It was a raucous event, with

Early on, my main interest in the USDF was as a rider. The USDF provided me with educational events that fulfilled my desire and need to improve my skills. After all, if I was ever going to win any USDF awards, I certainly needed to improve. The awards system was the carrot for me at that time.

I was struggling as a dressage professional when Charlie came home in 1979 with the news that there was

those annual instructor seminars from their inception until they morphed into the USDF National Dressage Symposiums. They taught me not only what to teach, but also how to teach. The program gave me the background I needed to go on to conduct USDF Regional Workshops and later to be accepted as a faculty member and examiner for the USDF Instructor Certification Program.

During this time, I was also learning to be a dressage judge through the American Horse Shows Association (now US Equestrian). The AHSA program, which was in its infancy, required some classroom education, as well as apprenticing with and being evaluated by senior judges—helpful steps, but not really enough. Much of a dressage judge's education at the time came from trial and error, and prospective judges were largely on their own.

Some farsighted USDF members saw the need for a more comprehensive program to better prepare our judges, and the USDF L Education Program was born. This program for training dressage judges is now the most respected in the world. Shortly after the L program's establishment, I was accepted as a member of the faculty. What an honor and responsibility!

Serving on the faculty of the USDF Instructor/Trainer and L Programs has been so very special to me. Both programs have enabled me not only to teach, but also to continue to learn. Much thanks to the USDF for making it possible for me and so many others. Our founder, Lowell Boomer, would be very proud of the progress that has been made in the fulfillment of his vision.



A LIFETIME OF GIVING: Receiving the USDF Lifetime Achievement Award in 2014 from then USDF Historical Recognition Committee chair Anne Moss (left) and USDF president George Williams (right)

many passionate Board of Governors delegates making important decisions for the future of dressage. Charlie and I were hooked. From then on, one or both of us attended all but one USDF convention. Charlie enjoyed the political aspect, while I was more interested in the educational offerings. If only one of us could attend, the one who had the opportunity to go would come home and tell the other all that went on.

going to be an opportunity for me to educate myself as an instructor: the USDF-sponsored Violet Hopkins Seminar for Dressage Instructors. I immediately sent in my application and was accepted. It was at the Hopkins seminars—first with Col. Aage Sommer, and later with Maj. Anders Lindgren—that I realized what I didn't know about dressage. There was so much to learn. I attended

In 2014, Maryal Barnett, of Holt, Michigan, received the USDF Lifetime Achievement Award in recognition of her many extraordinary volunteer contributions. Besides her extensive USDF involvement, she also chairs The Dressage Foundation's Board of Directors.