

Buckeye Horse Park – The Whole Story

The Buckeye Horse Park is based on 3 principles:

- Education: To provide learning opportunities for the novice, advanced and professional horse enthusiast through various training opportunities, clinics and other events.
- Competition: To provide competitive opportunities for both amateur and professional riders/handlers, to provide the organization and supervision for all BHP sponsored shows/events, and to provide recognized competitions for organizations such as Pony Club and 4-H, as well as local district and national equestrian groups and associations.
- Environments & Community Development: To preserve and upgrade public property and wetlands, to provide scenic grounds and rustic facilities for community use, to promote youth and family related activities, and to promote area businesses by bringing out-of-state visitors to the Park for various equine related activities.

Four years ago after Mr. Aaron Young was hired as Executive Director at MCMP, I as President of BHPA and the secretary decided to visit Mr. Young and introduce ourselves. In the past, directors at MCMP came to a BHPA Board Meeting or an event at the Horse Park. Mr. Young has never extended that courtesy to BHPA. At our meeting he informed us that leasing Park property to another non-profit is a big “no-no”. I told him that we had a 25 year lease with a guaranteed renewal of 25 years. He replied in a very hostile way, “Leases are broken every day.” I tried to explain to him that many hours of work by many people had gone into the development. My words fell on deaf ears.

When BHPA started the organization in 1992, we met for two years fund raising and searching for a home. Susan Dicken from Millcreek came to us and told us about the property now known as Buckeye Horse Park. A 25-year lease was agreed upon. The farm was a mess of falling down buildings, every kind of wire all over the fields, barb wire, chicken wire and pig wire. Old tires, broken glass and junk was everywhere. The fields had not been mowed for a long time and the mosquitos and ticks had taken over the land. Volunteers spent two years of weekends just cleaning up the farm.

BHPA built our first riding arena by selling fence sections to individual horse lovers. Our first barn was built by selling stalls in the barn. Our second barn was built with funds from the local Pony Club with money from Gail Dennison’s will. Our all-purpose building was built from funds donated by Gail Dennison through Mahoning County 4-H. The covered pavilion was donated by Mr. Centofanti, who owned the Ford Tractor dealership in Canfield. We were given a grant from the Youngstown Foundation to install a permanent porta-jon. Up & Over Hunter Association has donated money over the years to improve BHP.

Over the years as we raised funds through cross country events, hunter paces, hunter shows, 50/50 raffles, open shows, tack swaps, silent auctions and many other fundraising efforts, we have built the park with no tax payer money. I did a little research and over the 25 years we have made \$331,000 of capital improvements to the property. That does not include up to code underground electric and a new well and water service to the buildings and a sound system to all the barns and buildings. The trails have been built by BHPA and many of them have been improved with the help of a contractor hired by Millcreek using funds donated by an anonymous donor who has given Buckeye Horse Park \$30,000 over the last several years.

One dream for BHPA was to add an indoor arena. Four years ago, I as President of BHPA, I wrote to Mr. Young telling him of our plans and requesting permission to fund raise for this endeavor. He sent an e-mail with his permission providing MCMP Board approve the building plans. That has always been a

condition of every improvement we have built at the Park. We moved forward with fund raising by hosting a Derby Party, not on Millcreek property, and raised a total of approximately \$25,000 in 3 years. There were cash donations specifically given for an indoor arena. BHPA does not want our reputation ruined by accepting donations for something that will never happen.

Now our lease has expired. The executive committee met with Mr. Young on two different occasions to try to negotiate a new lease. The first meeting we talked about the old lease. He now says that MCMP will never approve an indoor arena. The reason is "we do not want to compete with Canfield Fair." He said that at least four times in that meeting. Why would Mr. Young have any concerns about Canfield Fairgrounds? He told us that the old lease was not in our best interests. Then he offered to extend the old lease for 60 days until we could come to a new lease agreement. We did not agree to extend the old lease. We received a new lease and met for the second time with Mr. Young. At the second meeting Mr. Young also informed us of his plan to tear down the house on the property. BHP holds meetings there all year long. Mr. Young told us perhaps we could lease a room at the MillCreek offices for our meetings. BHPA suggested that a salvage company be allowed to save the solid wood doors, original light fixtures and hardwood floors that are sought after for renovations. Mr. Young told us he did not care about those things.

Exceptions to the proposed lease are as follows:

1. Response to the Proposed Rent of \$3,600 per year, while reducing our leased property in half. Without the income from leasing the property to Up & Over Hunter Association for their two shows and Pony Club for their tri-state rally as well as the three hunter shows put on by Buckeye Horse Park Association, we would operate in a deficit. These events require horses to be housed at the Park for overnight. The Up & Over show is a two-day event held in the spring and in the fall. The pony club rally is a two-day event, arriving on a Friday night through Sunday evening. The horses are brought in before these events to get them used to the facility and schooling. Hunter trainers are not going to bring their horses and students without sufficient time to acclimate and work their horses. As for Buckeye's hunter shows, horses arrive on Friday, are schooled and housed overnight for competition on Saturday. There is a night watchman at the events. Some Pony Club advisors and children come from far away and stay overnight. They could not possibly travel back and forth.

The history of Buckeye Horse Park and Pony Club started 25 years ago. Pony Club is the largest equestrian educational organization in the world. The cornerstones of the foundation are education, safety, sportsmanship, stewardship and FUN. Members learn riding and the care of horses through mounted sports. The skills, habits and values instilled through horsemanship will apply to every part of a member's life.

Up & Over Hunter Association has also been a huge supporter of Buckeye Horse Park. They have made donations to our building fund and volunteered at our events for 25 years, as well as partnering with Buckeye in many ways. The funds they earn with their shows are used for year-end awards to equestrians that participate in Up & Over approved shows. They are not a registered non-profit but the members participate for the love of the sport and receive no monetary reward.

2. In Kind Services. The lease requires Buckeye mandatory participation in at least two events to promote Vickers Nature Preserve. To agree, it would be necessary to know what these events would entail. Our Board of Directors work hard to put on the events at Buckeye. Is it fair to ask our Board and

volunteers to give more? Mr. Young's suggestion was to have a meet the horse day at BHP and invite the public to come and ride a horse. BHP does not own any horses. His suggestion is we bring our personally owned horses and give rides. Can you imagine the liability for individual horse owners?

3. Buckeye Horse Park has done the work to make and maintain the trails. Buckeye Horse Park was instrumental in researching grants and wrote the grant for marking the trails with MillCreek's approval and assistance. There is a clause in the proposed lease restricting equestrian use of the trails at any time. Why would the Landlord prohibit equestrian use and why would we agree to it? Trail riders and hikers have commented how well the trails have been maintained.

5. MCMP requires Buckeye Horse Park to have Worker's Compensation covering employees and volunteers. Buckeye Horse Park has no employees. Buckeye does use subcontractors for help with mowing. Subcontractors are responsible for their own taxes and insurance. Worker's Compensation does not have a policy for volunteers that are not paid.

6. There is a Mutual Non-Disparagement statement. This clause is just insulting. Buckeye Horse Park Board of Directors have handled themselves in a professional manner and will continue to do so.

To summarize Buckeye Horse Park Association position. The proposed lease and stipulations would cripple Buckeye Horse Park. Restrictions on adding to the Park or limiting our events would prevent Buckeye Horse Park from maintaining the Park. The Landlord was aware of our desire for an indoor riding arena, approved via e-mail our intentions to fund raise for an indoor and has retracted their approval. Landlord has denied overnight stays. The original lease stated our intention to have overnight camping for events. The Landlord quoted \$3600 per year for rent while reducing the acreage considerably. And Buckeye Horse Park does not agree with the amount.

Within a week of our second meeting with Mr. Young he sent an e-mail to our President, locked us out of BHP and then another e-mail giving BHPA a detailed account of an end to our relationship. MCMP requested a meeting of with both party's lawyers, BHP President and Treasurer and the MCMP accountant. MCMP wants to invoke the old lease that requires BHP to turn over any assets left over not reinvested in the Park. How can they hold BHP to terms of a lease that they and we allowed to expire? The results of this meeting was that both lawyers would meet and draft a lease that was agreeable to both parties. This was May 14th. Thursday evening, June 6, President of BHPA, received a phone call from newscaster Stan Boney. He told her that MCMP Board voted to end all negotiations with BHPA. BHPA attorney contacted the MCMP attorney who was not aware of this development and in fact was still working on the proposed lease.

I want to restate the BHPA was built and maintained with no taxpayer monies. Why would MCMP take over the maintenance and cost when they were receiving rent and free maintenance of the Horse Park and the trails on the property. The big question is why does MCMP continue to support a director who has caused more dissention about MCMP than any director in the last 25 years and risking the public support of the MCMP.

Sally Kish

Past President Buckeye Horse Park Association