

THE BEST YEARS ARE STILL TO COME VERMONT SUMMER FESTIVAL TURNS 25

BY LINDSAY BROCK/JUMP MEDIA



The Vermont Summer Festival showgrounds at Harold Beebe Farm in East Dorset, VT from above Photograph by Lisa Cueman

A quarter of a century ago, a tiny horse show sprouted up in the parking lot of a popular ski resort in Killington, VT. The show had a bit of the feel of a carnival at the base of a mountain; everything from footing to bathrooms was trucked in and the show attracted modest participant numbers from throughout Vermont, neighboring states in the Northeastern U.S., and Southeastern Canadian provinces. With that humble beginning, the Vermont Summer Festival was born.

From the moment the first horse set foot at the Vermont Summer Festival, its popularity swelled and expansion began. When the event outgrew its location in Killington, it stayed true to its Vermont roots and moved to yet another ski area parking lot at Sugarbush Resort in Warren, VT, just southwest of Waitsfield. It was there that the circuit caught the attention of John Ammerman.

Invited to judge at the event in Warren, Ammerman was intrigued. Soon after, he took the show over as manager and transitioned it to yet another location in Waitsfield.

One of show jumping's most respected judges for more than three decades, Ammerman was a U.S. Equestrian Federation "R" jumper judge and one of only two FEI "O" level judges in the U.S. He was inducted into the Show Jumping Hall of Fame in 2011 after serving the sport in several capacities in addition to managing the Vermont Summer Festival.

Ammerman managed the Washington International Horse Show for nearly three decades and also oversaw such shows as the Potomac

Horse Festival, Upperville Colt and Horse Show, Ox Ridge Charity Horse Show, and HITS Horse Shows in Indio, CA, and Ocala, FL. In addition, he ran a business that provided jump equipment to horse shows, and his jumps made appearances at the 1979 Pan American Games in San Juan, Puerto Rico, the 1980 World Cup Final in Baltimore, MD, and the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles, CA.

Internationally, Ammerman served on the ground jury at two Olympic Games and was President of the Ground Jury at various FEI World Cup Finals, Pan American Games, and CSIO Nations' Cup events in Washington, D.C. and New York, NY. He also served as Foreign Judge for CSIO Nations' Cups at two prestigious Canadian events, the Royal Horse Show in Toronto, ON, and the Spruce Meadows "Masters" in Calgary, AB.

"I am proud to say that after 25 years, we are still here and continuing to grow and thrive," said Ammerman of his tenure with the Vermont Summer Festival, now based in East Dorset, VT. "The show has experienced quite the evolution, including being based at two locations in one season."

After making a move to the Manchester area to better serve the largest concentration of their exhibitors, the Vermont Summer Festival still ran several weeks of the show in Waitsfield, presenting an interesting logistical hurdle.

"We would start in Manchester for a few weeks and then make an overnight move to Waitsfield and continue showing," said Ammerman, who now splits his time between Manchester, VT, and Ocala, FL, with his wife, Dotty, who continues to compete as an

amateur. "I think I contracted basically every tractor trailer in the state of Vermont to help with the move. They showed up and we literally broke down the show, loaded it all on the trucks, hauled it the 100 miles to Waitsfield, set it back up, and started showing again. It all happened in matter of hours, not weeks of days. It was quite the operation!"

After eventually securing six weeks of consecutive summer horse showing in East Dorset, the Vermont Summer Festival found a permanent home at Harold Beebe Farm. In turn, Ammerman transformed the boutique horse show and its location into a gem on the North American summer circuit.

"When we realized that the Manchester area is where we belonged, we put all our efforts into the show grounds," he said. "We made, and continue to make, improvements year after year. We put all our eggs in one basket and made it a pretty great basket."

Ammerman considers the Vermont Summer Festival a destination circuit with top competition coupled with an area that's rich with entertainment, dining, lodging, and shopping options for exhibitors to enjoy when not competing.

As the Vermont Summer Festival celebrates its 25th anniversary this year, the efforts of Ammerman and his entire team are not lost on visitors to the event. From riders to trainers to horse show moms and dads, the sentiment that the Vermont Summer Festival is an event that caters to happy horses and exhibitors is universal. From panoramic views of the rolling mountain of southern Vermont to endless options for after-hours entertainment, the Vermont Summer Festival is summer horse showing at its best.

Matthew Metell and Donchalant Photo by Andrew Ryback Photography



John Ammerman (right), pictured with his wife Dotty. Photo by David Mullinix

THE VERMONT SUMMER FESTIVAL BY THE NUMBERS

- When it started, the Vermont Summer festival included 200 stalls and two competition rings.
- Today, the event has grown to nearly 1,400 stalls and five competition rings offering hunter, jumper, and equitation competition.
- The East Dorset location includes 14 iconic blue and white stabling tents that can be spotted for miles in any direction.
- Each summer, the Vermont Summer Festival hires 20 seasonal crew members to impeccably maintain the grounds and the rings.
- Between five rings and adjacent warm-up and lunging areas, there are 750 tons of sand that are mixed with fiber to create footing. The fiber arrives in roughly 15 square bales totaling 80,000 lbs. in weight. In 2018, the base and footing in all rings will be upgraded and improved for the safety and enjoyment of horses and riders alike.
- Each summer, Eastern Hay and Grain, the official feed supplier of the Vermont Summer Festival, delivers 1,500 bales of hay (supplemented by other deliveries) and 1,000 bags of Purina grain for the hundreds of hungry horses that come and go each summer.
- The last delivery in the preparation of each season is the delivery of the stars of the show - the horses! They are trucked in from all corners of the country by the official horse carrier of the event, Johnson Horse Transportation.