

Dreams Are Realized at the Devon Horse Show Grounds

Two USHJA Foundation 'Making A Dream' grant recipients receive once-in-a-lifetime experiences.

The Devon Horse Show grounds in Devon, Pennsylvania, famously known for being "Where Champions Meet," recently became a place where dreams were made for two young equestrians during the Brandywine Horse Shows.

Sophia Koolwick, 19, of Bloomfield, Michigan, and Adam Edgar, 17, of Leesburg, Virginia, both grew up riding horses, and they dreamed of an opportunity in this sport that seemed out of reach until the USHJA Foundation stepped in to bring those dreams closer to reality.

Sophia Koolwick

Koolwick started riding when she was 5 years old, and her interest in horses was spurred when she took a pony ride at a birthday party at age 3. By the time Koolwick was in high school, she could count on one hand the number of local competitions at which she'd competed, and she'd never had the opportunity to show at a United States Equestrian Federation-rated competition.

"It's been frustrating as a parent to not be able to provide her with the fullness that the sport offers," said Koolwick's mother Annalisa Sokol, who works hard as a single mother to give her daughter opportunities in the sport. "I remember asking her about that while watching her peers have the experience of

horse showing, and she told me, 'As long as I ride, I'm happy.'

"My parents are divorced," said Koolwick. "My mom and I are partners in facing the world. She's always felt bad that she couldn't afford as much, but she's given it her 110 percent."

That extra effort included supporting her daughter's dreams every way she could.

"Sophia came to my farm with a unique goal," wrote Koolwick's trainer Gerri McHugh, of Trinity Farms, in her recommendation for the grant. "She was determined to secure a position on a Division 1 college equestrian team. I was surprised at her determination and optimism, considering she had had little opportunity to compete at the USEF-rated shows and even limited experience on the



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Sophia Koolwick loved competing at the Brandywine Horse Shows Week 1, a USEF-rated competition.

local level. I knew that most D1 schools expected not only participation in the 'Big Eq' classes, but consistent success!

"I wasn't sure this goal was within reach," McHugh continued. "I was wrong. Sophia had set a different course for herself. She signed up and attended multiple clinics and competitions specifically geared toward coaches recruiting for college teams. She prepared herself for these events as others would prepare for Maclay Regionals or USEF Medal Finals."

Koolwick even founded her high school's equestrian team. It should have come as no surprise that her dedication paid off.

"She worked very hard to get there," said Sokol. "She was going to go to a different college, and I told her, 'You're going to

this camp at Oklahoma State; this is our last-ditch effort.' She didn't want me to spend the money. She called me the last day of the camp and said, 'Mom, the coach just offered me a spot on the team.' We were both crying. What a blessing."

This was just the first dream to come true for Koolwick.

Sokol found the USHJA Foundation "Making A Dream" grant application online and decided to nominate her daughter for the opportunity she'd always dreamed of: showing at a rated competition.

Koolwick knew her mother had nominated her, but never expected she would receive the grant. "I was with all my friends when I got the call," recalled Koolwick. "I was in tears. My friends were all so excited for me."

Through the grant, Koolwick received the opportunity to compete at a USEF-rated competition. When she arrived at the Brandywine Horse Shows for Week I at Devon, Koolwick was blown away. She was paired with Steel City, a stunning gray American Warmblood owned by Elaine Beard Hendricks. USHJA Certified Trainer Troy Hendricks of Kimber-View Stables trained Koolwick all weekend and even took her out to his farm nearby, where she was able to "flat" horses and have even more time in the saddle. For Koolwick, showing Steel City in the Adult Amateur Hunters was the best part of the experience. She placed third in the North American League Adult Amateur Hunter Classic and fourth in the Ariat Adult Medal.

"Steel City is the best," she said. "Riding him in the Classic was amazing, and he couldn't have been better. Riding him was definitely the highlight."

Since her experience at Brandywine, Koolwick finished the summer working at horse shows with USHJA Certified Trainer Hillary Johnson of Lowell, Michigan. She noted that the experience gave her great connections that she was able to maintain while working this summer.

Koolwick credited her mom and McHugh with helping everything come together for her. In addition, she said, "I want to thank everyone at the USHJA Foundation and everyone who was part of the grant. It was such a great experience."

Now, Koolwick is back at school and starting her sophomore year—which, will, of course, include a lot of riding and studying.

"I'm very thankful that my daughter has the passion for horses—just to have a passion

in life is a gift," said Sokol. "I just love to watch her riding. She's very good, and she loves it."

Adam Edgar

Edgar, like Koolwick, started riding at a young age. His mother Nicola Cattle grew up in England and rode Jumpers, and they had a barn when he was young. He didn't become passionate about riding until his mother won riding lessons for him in a raffle, and at about 8 or 9 he discovered his love for horses.

Cattle is a single mother, and Edgar has two siblings: a brother in college and a younger sister. From the beginning, Edgar worked hard to find opportunities in the sport. Not only did he have a great work ethic, but he also had a real talent.

Edgar's trainer at the time, Carol Eichner, recognized his aptitude right off the bat.

"I met Adam when he was 12 years old, eventing a friend's very challenging rescue pony," wrote Eichner in a glowing recommendation of Edgar. "Adam proved to be a gifted and natural rider. Horse professionals noticed not just Adam's natural gift, but his enthusiasm for his friends' success and his gratitude for all those who helped him at every step."

Edgar rode several ponies for Eichner, always doing an outstanding job. When he took a position as a working student for Bill Schaub of Over The Hill Farm, the opportunities continued. He's had wins across the country on various mounts from ponies to Junior Hunters.

"I've never really owned my own horse. I always had to catch ride," he said, noting that he actually prefers riding for other people. "I really like riding under pressure. When I'm riding for someone else, I always want

to give 110 percent. I love how happy it makes the owners when their horses do well."

It's paid off in spades for Edgar, leading to his nomination and selection for a "Making A Dream" grant to help him get to that looming goal: competing in the US Junior Hunter Championships.

"I was so excited when I found out!" said Edgar.

Edgar was paired with the lovely bay Holsteiner gelding UpCountry Charmer, owned by Jamie Stryker, for the US Junior Hunter Championships—East Coast, which took place at the historic Devon Show Grounds in July. He trained with Schaub

just wanted me to have fun. You know, 'ride to win but ride to have fun.' And 'Charmer' was perfect. He really took care of me!"

Edgar and Charmer placed fifth overall in the Large Junior, 16-17, section, with a fifth place in the Classic Round and 10th in the Handy.

"I want to thank Bill Schaub and Mollie Sewell, who helped me get the grant and everyone at the USHJA Foundation. It's definitely a horse show I won't ever forget," said Edgar.

Edgar hopes that his experience shows others that even if you don't have all the resources, you can still excel in



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Adam Edgar's dream was to compete at the US Junior Hunter Finals—East, and with UpCountry Charmer he placed fifth overall in the Large Junior, 16-17, section.

and Mollie Sewell for the weekend.

"It was special to ride for myself. I don't usually get to do that," said Edgar of the experience. "Everyone was so nice and

the sport.

For more information about the USHJA Foundation "Making A Dream" grant, please visit www.ushjafoundation.org.