

Friday, January 15 in Red Deer was the 4th annual Stable Owners Seminar presented by the Horse Industry Association of Alberta. This complimentary afternoon of education was developed specifically for the stable industry and is offered as part of the Alberta Stables Initiative. This year, 150 delegates attended the four sessions.

Kicking off this year's seminar was Scott Pickard of Business Infusions. His discussion on management software solutions was very well received by those in attendance. His experiences with developing software for some of the largest veterinary and animal care practices around the world made for a great perspective on management software for the stable industry. Scott discussed and stressed to the stable owner to not purchase software you don't need. Know what you want and know how the information can be used in your business so that you can maximize its benefit.

Following Scott was Lanier Cordell who is the author of *Equinomics: The Secret to Making Money in Your Horse Business*. She spoke on effective marketing tools for stables, using examples of advertising that were submitted by local Alberta stables. There was a great drive behind her message which was: be clear and target the right audience. She discussed the difference between a benefit and a feature and how to tell if your advertising is working. Lanier's presentation complemented Scott's and she had the crowd laughing, talking and asking great questions.

Just before the break there was a brief update from Heather Mitchell-Matheson about the progression of the Alberta Stables Initiative. Heather is the Program Coordinator for the Initiative and welcomed the opportunity to meet face to face with stable owners attending the seminar. For further details about this project and to get involved go to [www.findalbertastables.ca](http://www.findalbertastables.ca). a short break, the seminar went right back into session with a panel discussion on Finding, Selecting and Maintaining Lesson Horses. The four panel members brought different perspectives to the discussion.

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Ben Reed is the Director of Horse Programs at YMCA Camp Chief Hector. The dynamics of

having a very small budget, numerous first time riders, trail and arena programs, and maintaining a herd of between 80-100 head of sure-footed, safe horses is not without its challenges. Ben discussed the importance of being organized and having a filing system to keep track of records with a large herd. He talked about some of the differences in private purchase, seasonal leases, auctions, horse dealers and donation options for acquiring lesson horses.

Laurie Messner owns and operates Winning Strides, an equine facility in southern Alberta that offers boarding, English & western riding lessons and clinics. Laurie finds that through leasing programs and lease back options and making the matching of horses to students a top priority, she has great success. Laurie buys her lesson horses from horse people she respects to ensure her horses are fully trained and she is not needing to train horses and riders at the same time. Laurie likes to find competition horses that are retired but still capable of handling the work load.

Dr. Wayne Burwash has been a practicing equine veterinarian in his own practice, Equine Services Ltd., since 1977. He has worked with all kinds of horses from the FEI level to the everyday lesson pony. When purchasing lesson horses he maintains it's better to compromise on soundness than temperament by picking horses that are serviceably sound with solid minds. Pre-purchase exams, in general, are not very cost effective for lesson horses that are of average value to the stable. He stresses getting assurance from sellers as to health concerns in advance and feels that, as a stable operator, you should be well versed in horse soundness so that your judgement is adequate. He encourages having a good working relationship with a veterinarian that you can call for advice. Maintenance of lesson horses, whether they are many or few, is achieved through a quality feeding program, vaccination and deworming regimen that works for your horses and routine farrier and dental work.

The clear message the panel gave was that lesson horses can augment stable revenue but it is important to find a program that works for you and your clients. There are multiple ways and levels that stables can utilize lesson horses to enhance a stable business if they effectively balance cost vs benefit.

Last on the program was Dr. Bob Coleman from the University of Kentucky discussing alternative feed options for stables. Dr. Coleman has the education, experience and research behind him to help stable owners understand the alternatives. He helped them look into different, viable and economical options for our horses and how to feed them. There are some alternatives that are useable but, at the end of the day, the purchase of good quality hay makes the most economic sense and is usually easiest for the stable to manage.

The overall sentiment from people in attendance at this year's seminar was that they found the information very valuable to their business. The majority could relate to something each speaker brought to the table and most feel that this seminar should continue in the years to come. Join us next year January 14th, 2011 for another great line up of topics and speakers catering to the stable industry.