

CHAIRMANS REPORT – AGM 2019

On behalf of the Board of Directors I extend a warm welcome to those members who have taken the opportunity to attend the AGM and visit Tasmania. It is our pleasure to meet our Tasmanian members and we thank you for your hospitality.

This was my final year on the Board and I am proud to say we have attained some great goals, again positioning the Society in a good position going forward. It was a huge year of highs and lows. At times the challenges were beyond belief and put a huge strain on the Board members. I commend them for their professional approach to all matters.

During the past 6 years I have been very proud of being a part of, and a leader of, a Board that was strong enough to take the hard line when necessary and compassionate enough to consider what was best for the breed.

To assist the Board in making decisions that may have litigious outcomes, we are very fortunate to have gained the support of MinterEllison, the largest provider of legal services in Australia. The firm has been named one of Top 10 Law Firms in the Asia Pacific region since 2016. I thank them for their support and the pro bono agreement. The Society always considers its legal position very seriously before making any decision that may result in litigation. In this day and age, unfortunately, this is responsible action.

With a membership base on the scale of the AHSA there are naturally differing opinions. It seems at times that there is more division and disquiet among our members than ever, with misperceptions levied against members, against decisions, against rules, against the varying disciplines, against winning or losing and even against the standard of the Arabian itself. As the years progress and the use of social media continues to grow, it becomes increasingly difficult for the Board to positively promote membership, involvement in the industry and, ultimately, the Arabian horse as the breed of choice. Unfortunately false, intentionally misleading or irresponsibly misrepresented online content can not only damage the equine industry and the Society's reputation, it has upset and discouraged members, dissuaded potential members from joining and irreparably damaged the stature of the Arabian horse, not only in Australia, but around the world, given the global impact of social media content.

On the up side of Social Media, we have disseminated information to our members with 383 information posts on the 'Members Only Page' and 245 promotional posts on the 'Promotions page'. This deliberate action in 2019 has been a good effort in keeping the members informed. Furthermore, we produced two very informative Member Bulletins, along with two, always improving, editions of the AHN.

The new honorary awards created have been very well received and we hope will gather momentum as the years go on. The quality of the entries in every category was exceptionally high, with the ultimate award recipients very deserving of the honours. These awards are to recognise horses that race, compete in endurance and promote the Arabian to the greater equine world. These nominees are tremendous ambassadors for the breed, breaking down the barriers between other disciplines and across all levels of equine sport and recreation. We strongly encourage members to nominate their worthy contenders for the 2020 version of these prestigious awards, with nominations opening later in the year.

The WAHO Conference provides an opportunity for the host country to promote themselves to the world along with networking with likeminded people and organisations from the international community. The work involved in producing this event is enormous however the promotional value now and into the future is unlimited. The event was a huge success and the pre and post conference tours gave opportunities for many Arabian breeders and owners to present their horses and their programmes to international and Australasian guests all across Australia as well as in New Zealand.

I feel I must recap some of the things that have been achieved over the past six years. I bring attention to these accomplishments not for accolades, but more for the Board and the members to focus on the enormity of what has been achieved in a short time, rather than call attention to those areas where the membership feels the Society has fallen short. More often than not, it seems easier for us all to concentrate on the latter.

Achievements in the past 6 years:

- Secured the financial position of the Society, transforming from imminent disaster at the brink of insolvency, to the best financial position the AHSA has enjoyed for close to 30 years. This has allowed the Society to maintain, for the most part, fee stabilisation even with external rising costs. This is not reflective of the property sale, as the surplus of the sale has been safely and responsibly invested.
- Purchased a building that is appreciating (growing in value), while unburdening ourselves from a building that was in extremely bad repair, requiring a huge maintenance budget.
- Created a new database that has been purpose built and upgraded to a user friendly and modern platform which provides the members with a service second to none. This service also allows members to do more transactions online PLUS provides a stable record keeping environment for our core business: The Registry. This updated system also allows for the possibility of further income streams. The outdated, degenerating and unsupported system hosted overseas that we inherited, with the potential of a system crash that would have rendered the Society office inoperable for a considerable time and the possibility of non-recovery of all data, has been effectively and seamlessly eliminated.
- Created a new online Studbook that is unquestionably one of the very best in the equine industry, provided without a service fee to members and the worldwide equine community. This state-of-the-art studbook incorporates requests from members that have been received over the past several years.
- Developed a new show application that provides full access to a web-based online show management and entry system. This show app has the ability to increase the AHSA income stream as a service offered not only to affiliates, but potentially other breeds and show societies.
- Upgraded all office equipment including computer hardware and software as well as printing facilities in line with our needs with the potential to store documents electronically and provide a quick turnaround to service to members. Five years ago, the staff computers were outdated and inefficient with programs that were no longer supported. There were printing contracts in place that were incurring unnecessarily high payments.
- Introduced a new accounting program which meets government and auditor standards. The implementation and training of the staff in the use of the program and ongoing support has been provided by Board members at no cost to the Society. What we inherited was an archaic program that most people had never heard of, had no accountability, and was not supported.
- Established a marked decrease in operating expenses with the optimisation of staff and Board expenses. This includes more shared accommodation, more director expenses covered by the individual directors.
- Secured the Company identity with registering of Trademarks.
- Reinvigorated the staff in their positions
- Put aside funds to fully cover all staff entitlements. We inherited a situation where staff entitlements could not have been covered if the need arose.
- Created the Arabian Horse Judges & Officials Guilds of Australia Pty Ltd and The Arabian Horse Shows & Events Company of Australia Pty Ltd, collectively referred to as the Companies, to service the industry and assist/protect the AHSA
- Raised the professional standard of judges and officials education and accreditation in Australasia, including the implementation of the annual Judges, Members & Enthusiasts Congress
- Brought the RPSB registry, and its subsequent income, under the AHSA umbrella providing a much-needed income stream, with no impact on our member services.
- Established the API Register to recognise the Arabian contribution to a larger number of equine athletes and provide a further income stream for the Society and the Affiliates.
- Created both a Promotional and Members Facebook page to disseminate information providing members with 383 information posts and to the greater community 245 promotional posts
- Introduced the very popular Race Horse and Endurance Horse of the Year, Race Horse & Endurance Lifetime Achievement, and annual Ambassador Awards.

- Established an Australian National Championships that is now self-funding, for seven consecutive years, enabling a viable continuation of the premier continental event for the breed. This has been a huge turnaround from previous decades when the Championships operated at a continuous massive loss of tens of thousand dollars each year.
- Launched the Australian Arabian Youth National Championships, an initiative that has invigorated youth participation across Australia & New Zealand
- Successfully hosted the third WAHO Conference in Australia, more than an other member country, positively exposing global breeders and industry professionals to the Arabian & Arabian Derivative horses of Australia & New Zealand
- Collaborated with Sharon Meyers and Vink Publishing to create the definitive history of the Arabian horse in Australia and New Zealand, *Hoofprints in History*

In closing I would like to thank the staff. They ride the waves as we, the Board do, in a very professional manner. They give willingly of their time to assist outside of their working hours. They care. It has been a pleasure working with them. To the Board members I have worked with - it is unlikely the 10 people from very different walks of life will always agree, nor should they. I have developed some wonderful friendships over the years. Being on the Board has certainly enlightened me as to my real friends are, for which I am grateful.

On a final note, it is my sincere wish for the AHSA that members use social media responsibly. Ask yourself, before you post anything,

- how do these words reflect upon myself as a civil, civically responsible person?
- how do these words reflect upon the Society to which I am granted membership as a privilege?
- how do these words reflect upon the Arabian horse, a breed I profess to love and wish to share with others?

If the words you intend to share, words that will follow you online in perpetuity and become a permanent part of your digital profile, are harmful to any of the above the conscientious response is to refrain and address any issue via the proper channels of communication. Please realise that members who serve on the Board, to give back to the industry as volunteers, giving considerably of their own time and resources, are people with the same passion as every other member and are doing their best for the whole of the membership. Every bit of time and energy spent discrediting, blaming, criticizing or maligning Board members and other industry volunteers is time shamefully wasted, causing irreparable damage to fellow members, to the Society, and ultimately, the Arabian breed. Instead, I implore you to use your time and energy in active engagement, reaching out to the Society to offer your assistance however and whenever possible, and to doing whatever you can in your local community to introduce the Arabian horse to more people, as positively and proactively as possible.

The Society is NOT, nor has it ever been, just the Board. The Society is ALL of us, working together to promote and protect this precious and ancient breed, of which we are the modern-day stewards. All members can, and should, have an important role to play. Our ultimate responsibility is to the Arabian horse.

Leonie Williamson

CHAIRMAN