



Dedicated to Promoting the Equestrian Sport of Dressage in USDF Region 8

## The Central Vermont Dressage Association

www.cvda.org

# The Half Halt

The Newsletter of the Central Vermont Dressage Association

February 2024

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## President's Message

It has been a busy time for your CVDA Board and committees since our November 2023 issue! You, our members, have been busy as well, renewing your memberships, filling out the CVDA Survey (see results article below) and attending our Winter Webinars. Thank you!

Our Education Committee, led by Terri Satterlee, has been hard at work planning our 2024 clinics, webinars and a new offering: Development Day lunch talks. We have three informal, educational talks lined up for this season (see topics below). We hope you will bring your lunch, whether you are already at Development Day or in the area, and come learn with us. The committee is also hiring clinicians for three clinics. To date, we have confirmed Joy Congdon for June 1, which will be a one-day clinic designed to introduce lower-level horses and riders to their first clinic experience. Joy will also allot some time to her auditor audience at this clinic, to enhance their learning.

Our Marketing and Publicity Committee, led by Amy Plavin, has been seeking our 2024 sponsorships, selecting CVDA "swag" for 2024 and sending you timely and useful communications via email and Facebook.

Our Shows Committee, led by Amy Bresky, has finalized our judges and volunteer secretaries and managers for 2024. Amy and her secretary/manager team are working with former CVDA president and show secretary, Shannon Hemingway, to learn our new Fox Village show management software. Their goal is a seamless transition for all from Equestrian Entries to Fox Village!

This is just part of what is going on behind the scenes, during the "quiet" winter months. Thank you to CVDA Board members and committee members for all of your hard work!

## 2024 Dates to Remember

Visit [cvda.org](https://cvda.org) for more information.

### Winter Educational Series

Concussion Rehabilitation, February 15

Pre-purchase Exams, March 12

### CVDA Grant Program Deadline

April 15

### Development Days

May 4, July 20, September 7

#### Development Day "Lunch and Learn"

Equine Nutrition: Triple Crown, May 4

Grooming for Success: Kaitlyn Drake, July 20

Equine Body Work: Heather Gallagher, September 7

### Schooling Shows

May 5, July 21, September 8

### Clinics

Joy Congdon I, June 1, Woodstock

Bill Warren, TBA

Joy Congdon II, TBA

## 2024 CVDA Grant Program

As part of CVDA's mission to "promote the art and sport of dressage," educational grants are available to help fund educational opportunities for members who have demonstrated a commitment to and/or excellence in the sport, as well as volunteerism within the organization. The CVDA Grant program supports qualified members in their educational advancement with the expectation that the membership and sport will benefit as a result of the knowledge and experience gained or program offered.

**The deadline for grant applications is April 15, 2024**, with applicants notified by April 30, 2024. Grant funds must be used by December 31, 2024. The maximum dollar amount per grant awarded through the CVDA Grant Program in 2024 will be \$2,000. The CVDA Board may choose to fund multiple grants at lesser amounts, while adhering to the \$2,000 overall limit.

For more information and a grant application, please visit [Central Vermont Dressage Association, Inc - Grants \(cvda.org\)](https://cvda.org/Inc-Grants).

## Meet the New CVDA Board Members

### Wendy Currie

I grew up in Vermont and loved horses from a young age, often reading about them under my covers at night with a flashlight. I vividly remember my tears at the end of *A Pony Called Lightning*. When I was 30, I purchased my first horse and have been immersed in horse care and lore since.



I have ridden with many local teachers including Deb Dean Smith, Robin Anderson, Katherine Bruce, Jane Ashley, Sally Swift, Pam Goodrich, David Donnelly, as well as George Williams, Sara Geike, Gunnar Ostergaard and Iris Eppinger. In later years, I became interested in a more classical style of riding and training and today I ride my 21-year-old homebred Trakehner with Sheila McLevedge. I have a dream of competing when Jagger's and my ages equal 100.

Horses have been my love, my passion, my exercise and my therapy for the last 40 years. I am honored to share some of my time and expertise with CVDA. Afterall, CVDA nurtured my passion!

### **Sarah DeGrasse**

Many CVDA members have met Sarah in at least one of her dressage community roles: teacher, trainer, volunteer and competitor.

Sarah's passion for dressage was ignited at an early age while she was working with local dressage instructor Heidi Hauri-Gill. During this period, she took advantage of many opportunities to learn



dressage through CVDA clinics, shows, and continuing education. In addition to these local offerings, Sarah worked extensively with Lendon Gray throughout her young rider years as an active member of Dressage4Kids. She participated in the Dressage4Kids TEAM program, Winter Intensive Training program and Courtney King-Dye's Horse Mastership programs. Dressage4Kids opened many opportunities for Sarah to work with top professionals throughout the Northeast and Southeast.

After completing her Bachelor's in Equine Science at the University of New Hampshire, Sarah moved home to Lebanon, New Hampshire and began building her business while pursuing her MBA. Sarah is a USDF Bronze and Silver Medalist and holds a USDF Gold Diploma. She enjoys working with a wide range of horse and rider levels in the fundamentals of classical dressage, along with natural horsemanship. Sarah's approach is kind and systematic, making training educational and enjoyable for both horse and student.

"I was thrilled to be approached about joining the CVDA board," Sarah said. "CVDA held many firsts in my dressage career and will always hold a special place in my heart." Sarah is thankful to give back to an organization that provided her with so much education and experience, and CVDA is equally thankful to have her on our Board of Directors!

### **Heather Gallagher**

Horses have been a part of my life from a very young age. I began riding at 10 years old. My parents used to drop me off at the barn before school so I could help with feeding and turn out. I took the bus to school with my riding instructor's kids and then the bus back to the barn for riding instruction and more chores before being picked up for homework and dinner.

It wasn't until I moved to New Hampshire in 2000 and got a job conditioning endurance horses for Steve and Dinah Rojek that I had my first dressage lesson. It was then that I realized I had learned many bad habits from the hunter/jumper world I had left behind in Connecticut. I fell in love with dressage and have been riding and learning the art of it ever since.

In 2002, I became a certified practitioner of equine trigger point myotherapy and red light therapy. Presently, I am working on my MagnaWave certification and plan on learning the modality of taping next. I work throughout the Upper Valley of New Hampshire and Vermont but no longer travel outside of that area. I believe dressage and the biomechanics of both horse and rider go hand in hand. I look forward to learning more about the 'sport' of dressage.

I live in Cornish with my husband, Gwyn and two dogs, where we run a Gallagher Tree Service and Many Summers Farm, a small grass-based farm with cattle and sheep. I have three horses, all at different stages of training, that keep me on my toes and I have been fortunate to reconnect with Shelia McLevedge, a trainer who shares the same passion for classical dressage as I do.

I have a Lusitano mare, Maddie, bred by Sasha Dow and ridden by Carly Sisson, that I hope to get out this year at CVDA schooling shows, an Irish Sport horse, Hawk, who I am currently rehabbing and Obi, my QH, who is working at second level and schooling some third level movements.

## How to be a Good Clinic Guest

CVDA has benefitted immensely through the years from many generous facility owners who host our clinics. Riders and auditors are generally very appreciative of their hospitality and attentive to being a good "farmguest." As we look ahead to 2024, here are a few tips for continuing these great relationships.

### Riding and Stabling

- Allow plenty of time to get to the clinic, check in with your clinic manager or host, and generally get your bearings. This way, you and your horse will be warmed up, relaxed and ready for your ride time.
- Be honest with yourself (and your host) about your horse. Does he or she kick the walls? Chew wood? Behave in a way that is disruptive to other horses or people? If so, be sure to check with your manager or host to see how they feel about having your horse as a guest.
- Find out where you should put your stuff. In the tack room? In an empty stall? In the aisle? Try to leave as much as possible in your trailer.
- Pick up after yourself. Most farms have trash and recycling receptacles, or take it home. Sweep the aisle in front of your stall regularly and before you leave. If you pick hooves in the aisle, sweep it up. Put the wheelbarrow and tools back where they came from.
- Ask about using crossties, or if you should tack up in the stall.
- Ask about using the wash stall, and, if using, sweep up the detritus. Make sure the water is turned off when done.



*Lisa Curry Mair confers with clinician Jane Karol*



- If working out of your trailer, whether in a field or around a barn/arena, pick up your manure and take it home with you.

### Auditing

- Ask where to park if signs aren't already set out.
- Bring a chair; there may be no seating set up.
- Sit quietly during lessons and silence your phone; talking is disruptive to your fellow auditors as well as to the clinician and riders.
- Check on how to ask questions of the clinician. There may be a Q&A at some point, so write your question(s) down.

For all, don't forget to have fun! For more information about auditing, see "Tips for Successfully Auditing Clinics" in the August 2023 *Half Halt* ([CVDA Half Halt August 2023.pdf](#)).

- Lynn Freeman, CVDA member, and Katherine Roe, CVDA President

Your clinic manager and/or farm host will work together to give you the information you need ahead of your arrival and will provide signage on-site to further assist.

Each facility is unique, so check in with your manager upon arrival – we love to answer questions and make sure that host and guests are happy!

## CVDA 2023 Survey

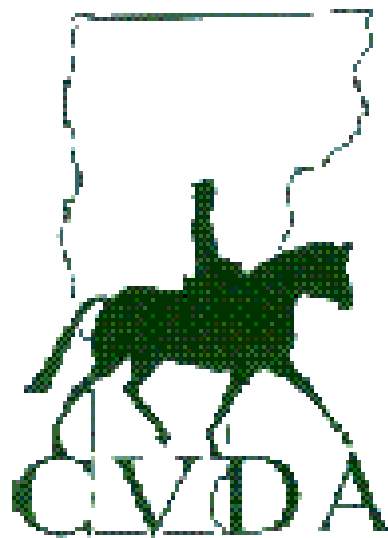
In order to move forward and make plans for this coming year, the CVDA board put a Member Survey together and sent it out to our membership (current and recently lapsed) at the end of 2023.

The survey's questions were chosen to help the Board determine our members' needs and interests. Some questions included were: How do you get CVDA communications? What part of your CVDA membership is important to you? What type of CVDA recognition do you value?

We wanted to know if you participated in our schooling shows, development days and clinics. For our riding clinics, knowing how you preferred them to be organized helps us to plan one- or two-day mounted sessions, a lesson format or a symposium format which is geared for auditing. Cost, location and clinician preferences enable us to pursue various clinicians and locations you would be interested in and what you are comfortable paying. Other information, such as what focus or what topics you would like in a clinic, gives the board an idea of which clinicians and topics best help you and your horse. We also wanted to gather information on our members' interests for our unmounted educational events (webinars and unmounted clinics).

This survey was enlightening and gave the Board excellent data for what direction CVDA should go in for a successful 2024. Please read on for the highlights.

- Sheila McLevedge, CVDA Vice-president



## Survey Response Highlights

Thank you! CVDA sent out 208 surveys and received 69 responses during the busy holiday season. This was an impressive 33% return rate, which far exceeded the average 10% rate expected from such surveys. Many of you also took the time to leave constructive and supportive comments. We are truly grateful for all of your efforts!

### **Length of membership:**

53% of you have been members for five or more years, with the largest group being those who have been members for 10 or more years. That solid base of long-term members is bolstered by 47% of respondents who range from new members to up to five years.

### **Most important CVDA offering:**

Clinics and seminars, development days and shows tied for the most important CVDA offering. Group membership to USDF came next, distantly followed by social networking and events, our awards program, and our grant program.

### **Level of training:**

68% of respondents are working from Training Level through Third Level, which nicely fits with CVDA's focus on education and our development day/schooling show format. Most instructors, not surprisingly, also responded that they prefer to teach levels starting from brand-new-to-dressage up through Third Level.

### **CVDA communications:**

93% of survey respondents read our email blasts; 75% read the quarterly Half Halt; 56% read Facebook posts. Instagram came in at less than 1%.

### **CVDA recognition programs:**

Respondents ranked high score ribbons and first place prizes at CVDA shows as their favorite means of recognition, followed by (in descending order),

high score ribbons at GMHA recognized shows, annual volunteer and sportsmanship awards and year-end high score awards.

### **Annual Meeting format:**

A Sunday luncheon edged out Sunday afternoon light refreshments, followed by online meeting, then Saturday evening dinner.

### **CVDA shows and clinics; recognized shows:**

77% of respondents show in CVDA schooling shows, 64% at recognized shows and 56% had ridden in a CVDA clinic. Cost was the number one reason people did not ride in a clinic, followed by location and choice of clinician. Respondents chose a two-day clinic format designed for rider education over a symposium designed for auditors, though there was support for both a one-day clinic and a symposium.

### **Clinician preferences, cost and location:**

The survey asked respondents to select two from a long list of clinicians suggested to the CVDA Education Committee by members and board members. Joy Congdon, who many development day and show riders previously suggested based on their experience with her there, was the top choice, followed closely by Janet Foy, George Williams, Stephen Hayes, Lauren Sprieser and JJ Tate. CVDA will take these results into account as clinician schedules and costs allow (respondents preferred a range of \$100-\$200/per clinic lesson). Windsor County, Vermont/Upper Valley of VT/NH was the top choice for a clinic location. As for a preferred clinic focus, respondents chose "Improving the horse through the Training Scale" and "Dressage exercises" as their top two.

### **Unmounted educational sessions:**

Online is the new normal! Online webinars were the most popular, and the most popular topics were (in descending order): veterinary topics, horse care and nutrition, sports psychology, rider fitness and show preparation and tips. Under live events, only rider

### **And the Winner Is ...**

The CVDA Survey was anonymous, but respondents could leave their name if they wanted to be entered into a drawing for a free class at a CVDA Development Day or schooling show. Congratulations, **Sue Miller!**

fitness found a following. (Maybe it is more fun to suffer workouts together?)

**Comments/suggestions:**

Training for volunteers/volunteer recognition;  
Western dressage clinic/education; different modalities for horse health: massage, chiropractic, reiki, etc.; improve auditor experience at clinics; learn so much auditing at clinics; freestyle clinic; how horses learn and reaching them emotionally;

keep events amateur-friendly and affordable; likes two-day clinic to expose horse to new environment in low key way; likes one-day clinic for affordability and convenience; info on bit design and use and updates on rule changes; like email blasts for timely info and Half Halt for education and people news. Again, many thanks to all of you who took the time to fill out our survey!

- Katherine Roe, CVDA President

## Joy Over Perfect

Central Vermont Dressage Association recently hosted its first in a series of Winter Webinar offerings. Thirty-four attendees preregistered for the webinar, which convened via Zoom on a snowy January evening. No driving required!

Joy Over Perfect, subtitled: “Why Happy Riders Ride Better,” was presented by Andrea Monsarrat Waldo, a US Eventing Association Certified Instructor and former psychotherapist. Andrea has developed a Stressless Riding Program, from which came the idea for this particular webinar. She emphasized how, “In our quests to be better riders, we sometimes lose sight of how reconnecting with that love and joy in riding will actually improve your riding faster than driving yourself to be perfect all the time.”

Some gems from her talk include:

- How perfectionism blocks our enjoyment, creates tension in our horses and ourselves and leads to indecisiveness and lack of confidence.
- That medals and ribbons have no intrinsic value, but caring about our horses does.
- Choose presence over perfection.
- Get excited about the little advances – the things that are a little bit better than yesterday.
- Replace criticism with curiosity.
- Ask “What is the next right thing?” instead of focusing on the ultimate goal.
- Your worth as a rider is not determined by your ability, but by the honest, caring and hard work you put into your riding and your relationship with your horse.

Andrea’s book, *Brain Training for Riders*, is available from Vermont’s Trafalgar Square Books.

- Wendy Currie, CVDA Board

### Get Brain Training for Riders at 20% Off!

CVDA members can select a CVDA member coupon on Trafalgar’s website, [Trafalgar Square Books \(trafalgarbooks.com\)](https://trafalgarbooks.com), and receive 20% off the print, eBook and audiobook versions of Trafalgar’s many wonderful riding books. Many thanks to Trafalgar, a long-time supporter of CVDA!

## Kathy Connelly Clinic

CVDA hosted the legendary Kathy Connelly for two days in August, 2023, at the beautiful Pirouette Farm in Norwich, Vermont. I was lucky enough to be able to watch quite a bit while volunteering. I found that Kathy had so many short statements that were easy to remember and focus on and I used my phone to take fast notes. I've tried to group them by topic but many do blend, as this dressage thing is very fluid.

I recommend reading and re-reading these slowly to digest each. There's a lot to think through in each of these short phrases. I find myself going back to them over and over.

### General Concepts to Ride By

- When a horse does not do what we think we asked, we need to figure out how to be clearer. The horse can then understand what exactly we are asking them to do. In the end, how they go (for better or worse) is what they are feeling from us. They go the way we ride them.
- No matter how well we ride, we can still strive to ride even better.
- Do less to get more and always do the right thing by your horse.
- Be steady and ready.
- Get it and keep it.
- Your seat is the whole deal – it is where your balance box intersects with your horse's balance box.
- Our daily responsibility is to convey a gentle and honest feel of the horse through the reins. If we make the bit a nice place to go, then our horses will want to go there.
- Horses like leaders, not masters. Your job is to communicate to your horse "how" it can be done better, in an inviting way.
- My basic training philosophy is simple. It's not the horse's fault, it's not your fault, it's no one's fault... so, no blame, no guilt, no shame. This clears the path for a simpatico relationship.
- It's more about doing small things than big things.
- Make changes in increments.
- Your greatest joy and, therefore, your greatest strength with your horse is to love him. With trust, he will love you back and then everything is possible.
- When in doubt and things are not going well, think twice, ride once and leave them alone. It is never about winning. It's about finishing the ride leaving your horses feeling good about themselves. It is always going to be better tomorrow when you do not ruin their yesterday.

### Thinking in Percentages

There are three important categories to evaluate to achieve a positive and organized training session. Everything you are doing well is one of these categories and everything that needs to be better is in one of these three categories.

- Is my horse forward and light to the leg as a state of mind?
- Is my horse straight?
- Is my horse listening to the half halts?

Rather than just answering yes or no which is too broad spectrum and not precise enough, think in percentages. For example, "Well, he could be about 15% more forward and light to the leg as a state of



mind and though he feels straight to the left, I feel he could be about 10% straighter to the right.” Or, “Overall, the half halts feel fairly good but I need to be 10% clearer in my half halt in the canter. If I improve that, he can carry more weight behind in order to be prepared for the flying change.” Remember, it is all about us riding better so that the aids are clearer to them.

### Our Position

- Relax and settle in to the balance box to establish and then sustain the duality with your horse’s balance box.
- If you have a habit of looking down, put a ribbon in his mane where you will see it to remind you that you can correct that habit. Once you have corrected that issue, you can use the same technique to correct others.
- Posture is essential for a correct and effective seat. Sit staying wide in the front of your upper body and relax your neck so that your chin does not posture too far forward.
- Avoid your elbows coming in front of hips with reins that are too short.
- Ride with good connection in the bridle, with a gentle breathing contact.
- Think of your inside knee as the line you are traveling in.
- Your eyes are the pencil to draw the map of where you are going.

### Half Halt

Half halts will be effective when the horse and rider are synchronized without tension, but with breathing aids. This requires that the aids are correct though partnership and volition.

- Half halt technique redefined (this is a key element that Kathy explained to each rider)
- Excellent references written by Kathy to explain her half halt technique in detail: Dressage Today Half Halt Article

<https://dressagetoday.com/instruction/half-halts-simplified-kathy-connelly-dressage/>

Dressage Today Half Halt Podcast

<https://dressagetoday.com/podcast/dressage-today-podcast-half-halts-simplified/>

### Connection

Connection is what every creature on the planet is seeking. There are myriad modalities to define connection: voice, seat and interaction of leg and rein aids. The most important concept is “FEEL.” It’s something we can’t buy or chop-chop put in place. It is the sacred bond between two souls of a different species. Kathy is covering this very thoroughly in the book she is writing for Trafalgar Press on long lining.

### Horse’s Alignment

- Straightness is shoulder fore, which is when the inside hind leg travels on a line that goes between the horse’s two front legs.



*Kathy Connelly and Joy Congdon (Anna Noelle Rockwell)*

- Finish the turn onto the line of travel for the rest of your life!

### Rein and Whip Details

- Think breathing reins, not pulling reins.
- Too short a step means you are using more rein than needed.
- If reins are too short when the neck is long, then horse will brace.
- The outside rein, with a tiny lift and coordinated with a correct and effective seat, will increase the engagement and bring the shoulders more uphill.
- The whip amplifies, the spur refines.
- In general, carry the whip on the inside walk and trot, on the outside in the canter.
- Trunkae - right behind girth, most sensitive place for whip use.
- Bounce the whip for a flick, not a smack.

### Corner Training

Kathy says, "I am a solid believer in corner training as a recipe for so many strengths." Her recipe is: Starting in the walk along a wall or fence, go straight to the corner and halt in shoulder fore (which is straight – see Horse's Alignment), then open your hand and use just your inside leg and finish the turn. Once you are proficient at using a corner, you then can do the 90-degree turn at other letters. Remember to just use your inside leg. You can then trot into the corner, halt, then turn with inside rein and trot again. You can then add passade (trot pirouette) turns.

### The Ultimate Straightener

Renvers is the ultimate movement to train straightness in your horse when implemented properly. Begin in walk; when proficient at the walk continue in the trot. Kathy explained and demonstrated various exercises using this.

### The Halt and Walk

Kathy explained various exercises to achieve balanced and immobile halts from both the trot and canter. She also offered a number of exercises to gain true clarity of the walk, producing a clear "V" in the stride rather than having a tendency for lateral steps.

### The Trot

Quarter passade turns (trot pirouette) help with collection and balance - closing hind legs together then forward underneath (see Corner Training above). This develops a better collection. Kathy also reminded riders not to run past the rhythm.



*CVDA recently recognized outgoing President Shannon Hemingway with a watercolor by member Anna Noelle Rockwell.*

## The Canter

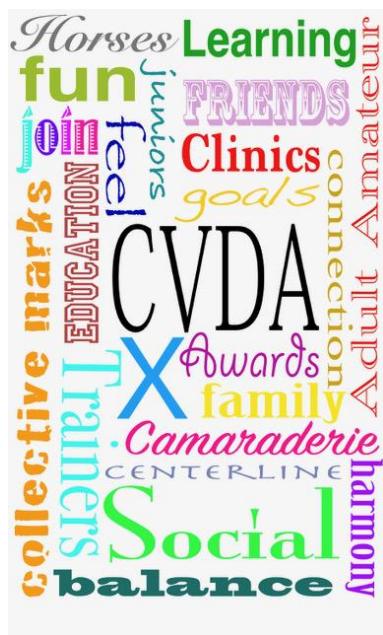
- Counter canter straightens the canter in the way that renvers helps to straighten the horse in the walk and trot.
- An effective exercise for canter balance is to half pass for a couple of steps and then continue on a straight line. This enables the hind legs to close together and then on the straightaway to come more underneath the center of the body. Practicing this properly improves the quality of the canter, its balance and the subsequent degree of collection needed. This is very important, for example, as the canter zig zag is a double coefficient in most FEI tests.
- The outside rein is key to the quality of the canter - it's the engagement, collecting and therefore the "roundness" rein.
- Take time in flying changes to establish a straight canter and hone a good balance for the flying change by first optimizing the balance in the simple changes through the walk.

There is so much valuable information - it is impossible to take it all in at once! I recommend printing this article out to read and re-read, to absorb as much as you can, at the level you are at.

Kathy has been incredibly generous with her time to read and thoroughly edit this piece for clarity, detail and accuracy. Huge thanks to her for sharing her wealth of knowledge with us and we look forward to devouring her new book on long lining when it comes out.

- Amy Bresky, CVDA Board and Kathy Connelly

## Join or Renew Your CVDA Membership



CVDA's membership year runs from November 1 to October 31 each year. You may renew your membership online at [CVDA \(cvda.org\)](https://cvda.org). If you prefer to mail a check, you can find contact information and membership level costs on our online membership form.

Your CVDA membership includes a Group Membership in the United States Dressage Federation (USDF) (December 1 - November 30). As a USDF Group Member you have many USDF benefits including:

- ✓ Compete in USEF/USDF sanctioned shows
- ✓ Earn USDF Rider Awards such as the Bronze, Silver & Gold medals
- ✓ Receive the *USDF Connection* magazine
- ✓ Earn USDF University credits
- ✓ Receive member discount rates for USDF events
- ✓ Eligible for Dressage Foundation grants requiring USDF and GMO membership

Thank you!

### Half Halt

Editor: **Katherine Roe**

Copy Editor: **Marin Haney**

Assisted by many wonderful volunteer contributors. Thank you!



## Thank you 2024 CVDA Sponsors!



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