

Here's the Dirt

But Shhhhh ... It's a Secret Recipe



From just about any place on the 1,700-acre Texas Rose Horse Park, the views are expansive and pastoral.

Good businesses are built on solid principles, but any world-class endeavor will usually have a few closely held secrets that offer an edge over the competition. Kathy and Robert Brunson, owners of the Texas Rose Horse Park (TRHP), hold close their own secret, and strangely enough, it's a blend of sand, clay and who-knows-what. This special mix is but one of their secrets to offering top-notch courses, arenas and tracks for all types of equestrian events. As Kathy explained, in the world of equestrian competition, getting the footing right is as much science now as it is art.

Footing is also of primary importance for the safety and well-being of both the horses and riders who compete. Additionally, a good surface is one of the hallmarks of a premier venue, and all of the sought-after venues use their own special mixtures. Well-respected in the equestrian community, the Brunsons go to great lengths to ensure good footing in their indoor arena, including laser leveling, sifting, sealing, watering and working it every single day, even when it's not in use.

However, the Brunsons did not always have a secret recipe. That came with time. They've zeroed in on years of learning and experience.

Growing up in McAllen, Kathy always cherished her teen years spent with her horse. So when she met and married Robert after graduating from high school, she felt particular heartache at having to sell her horse when they started their family. But, with the vow of marriage, Robert also promised Kathy that once they were established she could have a horse again. A few years passed before they were able to accomplish it, but when their daughter Kimberly was 6 and son Brian was 5, Robert bought Kathy a 6-year-old registered quarter horse named Miss Shell's Swen.

At the time, Swen was boarded in Coppel at a small facility while the Brunsons lived some distance away in Farmers Branch. Kathy loved having her horse, but as any animal lover, she considered Swen family and dreamed of a place they could all live together. The Brunsons sold their Farmers Branch home and leased their first boarding and

training facility on a 40-acre ranch in Coppel. To turn the land into a viable ranch, Robert had to trade his golf clubs for a chainsaw so he could start the process of clearing and refurbishing.

Once they got the ranch spruced up, the Brunsons joined the Pony Club, a youth equestrian organization, and began attending various events with client families. At one such event, Kimberly fell in love with English riding activities, such as dressage, cross-country and standing jumping. Ever the supportive parents, Kathy and Robert embarked on acquiring a horse with whom Kimberly could compete.

Throughout this time, the two had full-time jobs—Kathy as a quality assurance analyst and Robert as a fireman. As a working family, the Brunsons had to find an affordable horse for Kimberly. It was difficult because trained competition horses are usually extremely expensive. They shopped around and found a deal on a young thoroughbred named Bed of Roses, but it was up to them to get her trained. In those first years of competition, Kathy said they'd pull up to the competitions with their self-trained bargain horse and compete against grand reserves and grand champions, who had the best pedigrees and trainers. They held their own despite being the underdog. As Kimberly's wins racked up, their ranch—Wagon Wheel Ranch—began to build a reputation.

Meanwhile, both Robert and Kathy held down their regular jobs; however, fate intervened.

Robert was in a serious auto accident that left him unable to work as a firefighter, and then Kathy was laid off from her job when the company instituted massive layoffs. While some would let those challenges get them down, Kathy said they just decided their hobby, side-business and passion would be "a REAL business now!" Getting to work, they diversified, providing horses for corporate parties and special events while continuing with training and boarding.

Soon they were off to bigger things, moving their facility to Grapevine. They worked there successfully for years as the town grew up around them. Before long, they counted



TOP LEFT: Vibrant and energetic, Kathy Brunson spends little time in the skybox that overlooks the arena. She's more likely to be found traversing the grounds, tending projects. TOP RIGHT: If horses could talk, this beauty would likely say the hay is high and sweet at Texas Rose Horse Park. BOTTOM: Sergio is one of Kimberly Brunson's star performers and is lucky to live at Texas Rose Horse Park, where the barn accommodations are downright luxurious by equine standards.

their immediate neighbors as the Grapevine Mills Mall and the Gaylord Hotel. Through the years, the Gaylord Hotel made overtures, trying to buy their property. Kathy and Robert had found their stride and were comfortable with the business, which had expanded to include 400 students, eight riding instructors and all types of special-events business, from trail rides to corporate parties. But they also wanted to establish a much larger facility that could host events. In 2006, they accepted the Gaylord Hotel's offer and began looking for their dream property. Initially, they weren't looking in East Texas, but when a real-estate agent showed them a 1,700-acre property in Tyler, they saw potential based on the proximity to Interstate 20 as well as the spectacular layout of the property itself.

Once they bought the place, they had to roll up their sleeves again, but by then they'd become experts at turning properties into viable businesses. With a clear vision and the able help of their by-now expert footing specialist—son Bryan—and accomplished trainer and competitor—daughter Kimberly—they got started.

In 2007, they held four shows and have galloped forward every year since. This year, they have more than 37 major shows, many smaller equestrian events as well as canine and musical events planned.

Their facilities now encompass five all-weather show rings, schooling areas, an arena club that overlooks the large enclosed area, and 350 12-by-12 horse stalls with individual water and electrical outlets. Emphasis is comfort for the horses, but owners and riders can also expect RV hookups, golf-cart rentals, trailer parking and security cameras.

As the Brunsons built the horse park, they also developed level footing for many other businesses. In the past year, more than 100,000 owners, riders, trainers, and spectators have visited TRHP. Because of this, the Brunsons have formed relationships with local hotels and businesses and offer package rates to visitors. They have also allowed various concessions to set up on their property, including a sandwich shop, coffee/smoothie place and tack store. They have also partnered to help promote a neighbor's business that rents small cabins on the property adjacent to the park. In addition to the vendors in place, they are looking for more businesses to cater to the steady crowds that visit.

The ripple effect in the community has been nothing short of phenomenal. Robert has calculated the economic bearing. In 2009, he said the park had a \$7 million impact on local businesses. The year before, the total was an estimated \$10 million.

Almost every equestrian event is free to spectators, and the calendar of events is growing long. In a heartfelt invitation to potential spectators, Kathy says, "I want them all to come out!" There is a type of horse-centered event for just about anyone—barrel racing every Tuesday, hunter/jumper events, competitive trail rides and choreographed drill-team competitions. Additionally, the park has become a venue for canine obedience and agility competitions, and there will be a family-oriented music festival on May 14. The Brunsons also run an equestrian summer camp, featuring weeklong beginner or intermediate lessons.

The Brunsons, with all of their efforts and community involvement, have built their dream of having a world-class equestrian facility while keeping it simple and family-oriented.

"It is very important, the impression you have on children," Kathy said. "When they have come here, and they don't want to leave, then you actually have done something. It's the best feeling in the world."

The Brunsons hope to develop an additional 1,200 acres that they've acquired as they pursue the next part of their dream. The plan is for a housing subdivision centered on equestrian pursuits, including walking and riding trails for residents. That way, whole families will be able to come and never have to leave.

Texas Rose Horse Park is at 14078 State Hwy. 110 N. in Tyler. Also, be sure to see the extensive calendar of events for TRHP, a Wood County Electric Cooperative member, by visiting www.texasrosehorsepark.com. You can also call the park at (903) 882-8696.

Prevent Home Electrical Fires

Fire departments across the nation responded to about 380,000 home-structure fires between 2003 and 2007, according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). One of the main causes of residential fires, whether sparked in houses, condominiums or apartments, was electrical distribution or lighting equipment.

Of the home electrical fires during that four-year period, 41 percent involved such equipment. Some culprits of those fires were:

- Wiring and related equipment;
- Lamps, light fixtures and light-bulbs;
- Cords and plugs; and
- Transformers and AC adapters.

Other potential electrical fire hazards include kitchen ranges, washers or dryers, fans, and space heaters. Fires involving electrical distribution or lighting equipment caused about \$709 million in direct damages, according to NFPA statistics.

Electrical failure or malfunction can cause home-structure fires, but some preventive measures can limit your risk. The NFPA recommends taking the following measures to avoid electrical shock and fire dangers:

- Swap out or fix damaged or loose cords.
- Don't run electrical cords across doorways or beneath rugs.
- Make sure your home has tamper-resistant outlets, especially in households with children.
- Think about having additional outlets installed by a technician to



Never run electrical cords beneath rugs.

eliminate the need for extension cords.

- Don't overload outlets, and limit one high-wattage appliance to each.
- If you have problems with circuits tripping, fuses blowing or lights flickering or dimming, call an electrician. Warm switches or electrical outlets can also be a sign of a potential problem.
- Keep lamps on flat surfaces and away from flammable materials. Only use bulbs that match a lamp's recommended wattage.
- Get ground-fault circuit interrupters in the kitchen, bathrooms, laundry rooms and basement to prevent electrical shock caused by ground faults, and consider installing arc-fault circuit interrupters to prevent arcing faults in home electrical wiring.



WOOD COUNTY EC
honors the brave men and women who have given their lives so that we might live in a free and prosperous United States of America.

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Our office will be closed
 Monday, May 30, in observance of Memorial Day.

MAY IS NATIONAL ELECTRICAL SAFETY MONTH

Take the time this month to check your home for electrical hazards. A little pre-emptive work can prevent life-threatening situations and potential property loss due to fire. To learn more, take a home safety tour at <http://virtual.home.esfi.org>. There's also a wealth of safety knowledge available at TexasCoopPower.com/energy/safety and www.safeelectricity.org.

Each and every day, we want to help you keep your family safe. Sharing electrical safety tips is just another way we're looking out for you.

Electrical Home-Structure Fires—By the Numbers

72

percent of electrical-distribution- or lighting-equipment fires happened because of electrical failure or malfunction.

39

percent of civilian deaths from electrical home fires resulted from fires starting in the living room, family room or den.



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Nothing says 'I love you' better than a homemade card—but a great gift is also appreciated!

Mother's Day Energy Boost

Whether at work or leisure, mothers tend to stay busy, expending energy—both physical and electrical—at every turn. Doing a favor, like serving breakfast in bed or checking off a chore from her to-do list, can save mom some effort this Mother's Day, but giving her an energy-saving gift can help her conserve power. Here are some ideas that combine energy-efficiency products with a treat.

Solar-powered chargers recharge many types of portable electronics, such as cell phones and MP3 players, using energy from sunlight. Couple the charger with an MP3 player or a gift card for downloadable “mom” tunes.

Copper-bottomed pots and pans can be practical cooking tools because copper conducts energy and heat more efficiently than most materials. Drop a soup mix in the pot and offer to whip up Mother's Day dinner.

Oven calibrators allow chefs to know the true temperatures of their ovens so they can adjust. Having an accurate temperature can save energy, as an oven that runs hot and uses more energy than necessary can be scaled back. Using the precise temperature a recipe calls for could also improve baking results. Bake mom a Mother's Day cake in her newly calibrated oven.

Pressure cookers cook foods faster, saving energy—and mothers' valuable time. A cookbook with recipes for the new device would round out the gift.

Candles not only produce light without electricity, but also create a soothing ambience and make for a more traditional gift. Choose complementary candleholders to complete the presentation.

Throw blankets keep heat close to the body and might lessen the desire to turn up the heat during cold weather. An electric blanket, used sparingly, can also take the edge off the cold—and the electric bill.

Light-emitting diode (LED) reading lights sometimes come with clips so they can be attached to a book, eliminating the need to burn a lightbulb. Partner this gift with the latest bestseller from the bookstore.

A low-flow showerhead reduces water consumption, saving electricity and hot water. Tuck one in a basket with scented soaps and a new bathrobe.

CHECK YOUR GROUNDS

After months of being dormant, yards and gardens are beginning to grow again as the weather warms up. As you dust off your power tools, it's a good time to make sure you have protection against improper electric grounding.

Using electric power tools can pose a risk for electrocution if the equipment is not properly grounded. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission reports that 20 to 30 deaths occur each year from electric shock through power tools. That's because electricity flows through the path of least resistance, and when the grounding path to a tool is broken, electricity takes the next easiest path to the ground. That path could be a person's body.

Ground-fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) can effectively prevent powerful electric shocks. The devices work by detecting unbalanced incoming and outgoing electrical current—a sign of improper grounding—and disconnect power to the load line, or power tool.

While most homes built after 1973 have GFCIs built into receptacles outdoors and in bathrooms, garages and kitchens, some homes lack these safety devices. If your home does not have GFCIs, there are several kinds available that can be installed or easily plugged in.

Permanent GFCI devices can be installed at the circuit breaker or in an outlet. Portable devices can be plugged into existing outlets.

Before you use your power tools, confirm that your GFCI is working by following these steps:

1. Press the reset button on the GFCI.
2. Plug a nightlight into the GFCI outlet. The light should come on.
3. Push the test button. The light should turn off.
4. Push the reset button again. The light should turn back on.