

## Hey Neighbor



# For The Love Of Horses

By Frank J. Buchman

## Breed Offers Youth Learning Responsibilities Colorful Pony Takes Valley Center Youth To National Spotlight

"POAs help young people learn responsibility and self-discipline. They help teach respect for animals and people, and keep lots of kids out of trouble."

It was an emphatic statement made by Kyle Hillard, 15, in talking about what the colorful ponies have done for many youth, himself included.

The Valley Center High School freshman was speaking from experience. He was a town kid, whose family's

lifestyle changed dramatically when he acquired his first Pony of the Americas five years ago.

"I really got my first small horse from my uncle, Craig Bright, and learned how to take care of horses. But that one was too small to ride," related Hillard, son of Jeff and Donna Hillard.

"My four cousins, Craig and Kay Bright's daughters, were involved in showing POAs, and I bought my first POA, a 12-year-old gelding

called Mr. Goodbar, from the Jim Keever family at Hutchinson," Hillard continued.

Although Mr. Goodbar was trained to ride and drive, Hillard and his dad, with advice from other family members and friends, have made considerable advancement.

"Last year was really a climax for us," Hillard admitted. "Goodbar and I were high point in the nation in youth cart, and my dad and Goodbar were also high

point in the open cart division."

While it may not sound as impressive, an additional special accomplishment for Hillard and his now 17-year-old black pony, with an Appaloosa blanket, was placing sixth in the nation for the year in 13-18 games competition. "That was total points for all the games," he qualified.

For those unfamiliar with POA terminology, games are the same as gymkhana in some groups, and speed or racing events in other associations. Games include pole bending, straight barrels, cloverleaf, keyhole, flag race, handy horse, go-go race, scurry, figure eight barrels, single pole, Texas rollback, figure eight stake and combination race.

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Driving obviously is their "cup of tea," and Hillard proved it time and again en

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Dad Jeff Hillard also drove Goodbar to win the Regional show and placed fourth at the International show.

Claiming world high point titles takes lots of miles to accumulate points. "We went to 39 shows in four states last year," Hillard tallied.

Not only do the Hillards drive Goodbar at shows, but they also have family outings in the cart. "I have been driving in the Miss Kansas Pageant parade at Pratt with my 95-year-old great-grandma, Evelyn Hillard, too," shared the owner. They also participated in a special POA session at the recent EquiFest of Kansas in Wichita.

Excitement builds when game time comes at shows, and Hillard and Goodbar certainly have a vast cheering section for their runs.

Actually, it's doubtful that anybody attending any of the '39 shows last year wouldn't recognize the team.

That's not only from the loud applause which arises when Hillard and Goodbar enter the arena, but as well for their matching outfits. Hillard always has a bright orange shirt and helmet-cover on, and Goodbar is equipped with matching-colored bridle, blanket and four leg wraps.

"I call it our war uniform," Hillard described.

He is out for war, but it's all in good sport. "I want to win, but I want everybody to do well. They cheer for me, and I root for them," Hillard recognized. "That's one of the really nice things about POAs and the families own-

ing and showing them. Everybody always helps and encourages each other all of the time."

Hillard's favorite game is the flag race, where barrels are set in a cloverleaf pat-

tern, so the rider must run around the outside of the barrels, grab a flag from a can on the first barrel and "stick it" in a can on the third barrel. Fastest time

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wins, but having a successful "stick it" is easier said than done.

"I was able to 'stick it' at 16 shows, but I was just too tense at the International show and even missed picking the flag up," Hillard reminisced.

His second favorite game is the keyhole race, in which he must run Goodbar down to a 20-foot diameter keyhole drawn with a chalk line in the center of the arena, turn around without touching the line and run back. "My average is about 4.8 seconds, but my fastest time ever was 3.8 seconds," Hillard remarked.

The only classes Hillard and Goodbar don't participate in are those requiring them to put on English riding tack and apparel. "I just refuse to do that, but I started racing in scurry last year, where Goodbar has to jump over low obstacles," Hillard

acknowledged.

Hillard has been recognized as the high point 13-18 rider in the Kansas POA Club for the past two years.

Life changed for the Hillard family when they got POAs. "My parents purchased a six-acre tract with a home on it near Valley Center, so we had a place to keep my POA," Hillard recalled. "They sold the existing home to my grandma, Shirley Grunder, who lives in it, and we built a new home."

Other critters on the acreage include chickens for laying eggs, which Hillard gathers daily, along with two dogs, which he's trained to do a few tricks.

There are also a couple of other POAs: a young stallion and a mare. "They aren't trained yet, but my uncle and I are going to get them started," Hillard guaranteed. "Craig, who only lives about 10 minutes away,

has trained horses, so he's going to tell me how, and I'm going to do the riding."

All of the family is involved in POA leadership. Jeff Hillard served the past year as president of the state group and now serves as a director. Donna is the show secretary, a position served for the past two years, and uncle and aunt Craig and Kay Bright continue as directors after being in other leadership posts, as well. Everybody, Kyle included, helps in whatever needs done at shows.

Biggest supporter of all has to be grandma Shirley Grunder, a former resident of the Riley area. "She seldom misses a show and is always cheering and urging all of us grandchildren on in every class," Hillard credited.

That support is actually given by Grunder to one and all at the Kansas shows. She makes sure refreshments

are set up early in the morning and throughout the day for everybody on the grounds. Likewise, Grunder assists whenever help is needed in any part of show operation.

"I really couldn't do any of this without encouragement and help from all of my family," Hillard stressed.

With only three years of youth eligibility left in POA competition, Hillard admitted that the family will likely go to fewer shows in the future. "Travel expenses have become so costly that we won't go as much, but I'll keep going to shows close to home," he contended.

Active in his school's marching band and other activities, Hillard looks to a profession in heating and air conditioning service, after attending trade school. "I'll always live in the country, that's for sure, and I'll always keep Goodbar until he passes away.

"There isn't any better way for children to learn about care of animals, be associated with other people and try your hardest all of the time,

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## SIDEBAR

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### **WHAT IS POA?**

*The Pony of the Americas breed was founded in 1954 in Iowa. Among the breeds influencing the original POAs were Arabian, Thoroughbred, Quarter Horse, Appaloosa, Welsh Pony and Shetland Pony.*

*Possessing the attractive coloration of the Appaloosa Horse from blankets to leopard spots, the POA is a rugged, athletic pony ranging from 46 to 56 inches at the withers.*

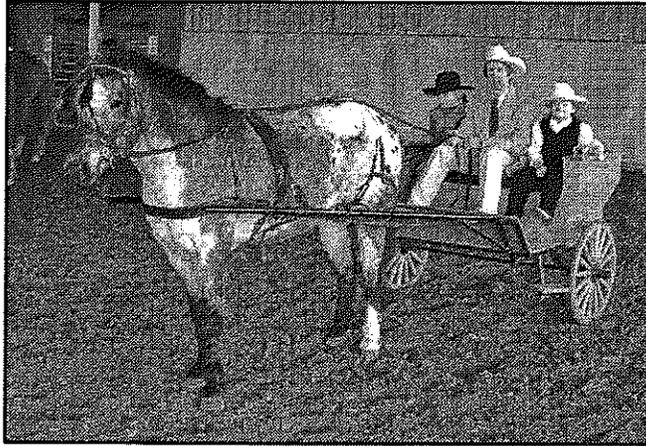
*With a gentle disposition, the ponies have speed for games and jumping as well as the intelligence and patience for showmanship and equitation. Small size makes it easy for parents to match a child to a pony, but they're highly competitive in many horse circles.*

*There are about 50,000 registered POAs across the country, with more than 40 POA state clubs and chapters. These clubs offer a variety of events including play days, shows, clinics, cookouts, trail rides and awards banquets.*

*Additionally, several regional shows are conducted annually as well as the International POA Show, the breed's main event of the year.*

*Pony of the Americas Club, Inc., is headquartered at 5240 Elmwood Ave., Indianapolis, IN 46203-5990. Phone number is 317-788-0107*

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