



Middlefield

by Lisa Peterson

## Farm Feature

# Epic Farm Mother and Daughter

Jill Kulmann's early success in the horse community centered on breeding Welsh ponies. Today her business, Epic Farm in Middlefield, is a family-run operation with a robust hunter/jumper program claiming year-end awards and championships for its satisfied customers.

Jill grew up in Easton with a pony in her backyard and lessons on fancy ponies at nearby Sweetbrier Farm. "I had to have one," Jill says. "I wanted a fancy pony like Marvel-Us, Bonnie, or Sprite. I guess I never got over that."

In 2000, she purchased 32 acres in Virginia and began to establish a breeding program of Welsh and Welsh/Thoroughbred ponies. "I got into the breeding because I bought some project ponies and one didn't work out," Jill says. That pony — Molly, a.k.a. Rosecroft Smart Cookie — came from a famous line and became Jill's foundation broodmare. Eventually, Jill teamed up with famed horseman Richard Taylor, whom she credits as her mentor and for her pony-breeding achievements, such as many wins at Devon and the Pony Finals.

Ten years later, in 2010, Jill wanted a barn back home in Connecticut. She discovered a 27-acre parcel on Cherry Hill Road in Middlefield; Epic Farm officially opened with a driveway, some fields turned into paddocks, and shed-row barns to house the ponies, who came up from Virginia.

A few years later, Jill quit her full-time job as a computer programmer. Soon she was making plans to build a beautiful barn, a spacious indoor arena, and a unique working space within the complex: "It's so amazing to be able to come here, to say this is what I do, this is my office," she says.

### Like Mother Like Daughter

Today Jill manages Epic with her daughter, Jaime Richard, who is also head trainer.

Jaime had her first pony when she was just four years old; she grew up rid-

ing in the Children's Hunters and Junior Hunters, at Simsbury's Folly Farm and the Farmington Polo Club. She also rode many of the ponies Jill owned and bred — one of them was that foundation broodmare, Rosecroft Smart Cookie — and even competed in

Jaekle Centre. Jaime returned to her home state in 2009, just before her mom bought the Epic Farm land.

The farm eventually added an outdoor ring and for two years the pair operated with just that, using the ponies they had bred in Virginia. In the meantime, Jaime, who lives down the street, had two children: Emilia and Jagger.

Emi, now six, has already won multiple championships (framed photos of her winning ribbons on their home-bred Royal Treasure hang on the walls of the barn) and Jagger, at the advanced age of three, recently debuted in the Lead Line division.

Last year Emi won the year-end CHJA and CHSA Short Stirrup Hunter awards last year. "You can't get her off a horse," Jaime says. "She's just so focused."

This family atmosphere is part of what draws riders to the facility, and the clientele isn't just children: Mothers take lessons with Jill as their daughters learn from Jaime, and an extended family of cousins come to the barn. "Even trainers bring their kids here for lessons," says Jaime, and there are dressage riders who take advantage of the boarding, and for a fee, bring in their own instructors.

"We do lots of local shows, HITS Saugerties, and the Vermont Summer Festival," says Jaime. "Our goal is to go to the Winter Equestrian Festival in Wellington, Florida."

The barn's 2016 show calendar includes stops at Old Salem Farm, the Pines Farm, the Fairfield County Hunt Club, the Westbrook Hunt Club, the Mystic Valley Hunt Club, and AA-rated shows. Jill and Jaime plans to help their riders get to compete at the finals of the Connecticut Hunter Jumper Association and the Connecticut Horse Show Association.

### The New Barn Is Epic

Sitting majestically in the middle of grass fields and a dozen paddocks, with



Lisa Peterson

Jaime Richard and Jill Kulmann.

the Medal/Maclays.

At 15, Jaime developed a passion for snowboarding and put horses on the back burner. She went on to support herself as a professional snowboarding athlete for more than a decade, and even competed in the X Games.

"I wanted to hang out more with friends from school and I started competing in snowboarding," Jaime says. "Snowboarding also made it possible for me to travel and compete around the world. If it wasn't for snowboarding, I wouldn't be the trainer I am today."

Jaime started her equine career as a groom/assistant trainer/barn manager/rider in the Northeast, then moved to Tennessee to work as a head trainer at the South's well-known

a courtyard complete with a bronze statue of a girl and her pony, is Epic Farm's barn complex, built by King Construction of Pennsylvania and finished a little more than a year ago. The state-of-the-art barn has two 10-stall aisles that flank the courtyard. As you leave either one, you arrive in a bright, heated work area between the barn and the indoor arena. A horse and rider can go from the barn to the tack-up aisle to the indoor arena without encountering the cold wind or dark night of winter. The 11-foot-high ceilings, a fan in each stall, and cross ventilation keep the air fresh.

"Last winter was our first, and only once in that cold snap did we have to turn on the heaters on the automatic waterers," says Jaime. "It's neat: the horses keep it all warm in the unheated aisles." The layout promotes rest for the horses and ponies, as all grooming, bathing, and traffic to and from the arena is done away from the aisles. Each horse has a 12' x 12' stall with a full-view door into the indoor aisle. Every stall also has a dutch door with a window to the courtyard and across the open lands.

Each of the four groom/wash stalls, conveniently located across an aisle from the tack rooms, has rubber footing, hot water, infrared heaters, and bright lighting. Jill and Jaime each have an aisle with their students and clients, and each aisle has its own 12' x 20' tack room. For riders there are three heated bathrooms, one with a shower and dressing area.

The centerpiece of the complex is the 204' x 84' indoor arena, with fluffy white footing and an elevated 12' x 24' heated viewing lounge complete with a kitchen and dining table. In the summer, 20 roll-up windows let in natural light and fresh air. On the outside of the viewing lounge is a covered porch to sit and relax while watching the farm's activities.

"This is the best place ever!" Jill says. 🐾

Lisa Peterson's lifelong involvement with horses spans teaching equitation and horsemanship as well as riding to hounds, hunter/jumper horse shows, and hunter paces. A weekly columnist for the *Newtown Bee*, she also blogs about horses, hounds, and history. She lives in Newtown with her husband and three Norwegian elkhound show dogs.

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