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Chicago Rider Experiences USHJA Emerging Athletes Program

By: **Brenda Mueller**

Anna Hallene, 18, of Hinsdale, IL, finished second in the US Hunter Jumper Association's Emerging Athletes Program National Training Session. The program is a series of training sessions in which riders must earn their way to each session. After successfully completing the three levels, Hallene earned a spot in the 2011 US Equestrian Federation's George H. Morris Horsemastership Training Session at the Palm Beach International Equestrian Center in Wellington, FL, this past January.



*Anna Hallene at the George H. Morris Horsemastership Clinic
 Photo by Jana DiCarlo*

What is the EAP?

The Emerging Athletes Program (EAP) is organized by the United States Hunter Jumper Association (USHJA) as a means of raising horsemen for the future of our industry and the future of our teams representing the US.

"The mission of the Emerging Athletes Program (EAP) is to develop complete horsemen by implementing a system of identifying and nurturing talented young riders and providing them with support and assistance in achieving their full potential. This program creates opportunities for young riders to advance their education in their pursuit to become professionals within our industry." (from [USHJA.org](#))

The training sessions include riding and horsecare. Riders are not allowed to have grooms and must care for their horses with the guidance of various industry professionals teaching them about everything from vet care and nutrition to stable management.

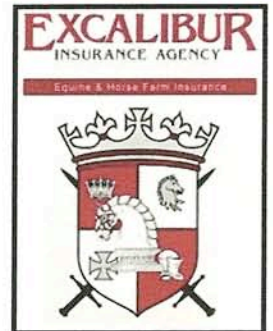
Anna Hallene, who rides with trainers Peter and Beth Kennedy of Stanley Luke Farm, shares her experience with the EAP.

How did you find out about the program?

I first found out about the program when I saw the Level One session being taught by Melanie Smith Taylor at Lamplight in the summer of 2009. After I audited that clinic, I looked up the EAP online, and decided to apply for the next year.

Where were the sessions held and who taught?

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The Level One session for Zone 5 was held at Lochmoor Stables in Lebanon, Ohio, and was taught by Melanie Smith Taylor. The Level Two session was held at Brookwood Farm in Antioch, Illinois and was taught by Julie Winkel. Mindy Bower was also a clinician at Level Two, where she worked with us on horsemanship and groundwork. The National training session was held at Suzie Schoellkopf's Buffalo Therapeutic Riding Center, and taught by Peter Wylde. Again, Mindy was there to work with us on groundwork and horsemanship. Though she wasn't teaching at every level, Melanie was also present for each session, as well.

Were you nervous?

I really wasn't nervous at any time. I knew that all I could do was ride my best, and try to learn as much as I could at each clinic. I think what the EAP is looking for is riders that listen to what each of the clinicians have to say, and then take what they say and *apply* that to their riding, which is what I really tried to do each time. The only time I got a little nervous was when we got to ride on the grass field at Rush's place. I was on my six year old horse, Corey, who was a little green at the time and had only been on grass once before. He had kind of run off with me that time, so I wasn't sure how he would be. But he ended up being great!

How did Peter and Beth prep you for the clinics?

Although I ride with both Pete and Beth, I mostly trained with Beth before the EAP. She worked with me on riding both exercises, as well as full courses. After the Level One and Two clinics, she helped me work on taking what I learned and applying it to my riding. I got to practice on my own horses, as well as any other horse that I could swing my leg over at the barn. Before the National session, Beth took me to a few other barns so that I could practice riding different horses in different atmospheres, since at the Level Three everyone rides horses provided by the USHJA.

What did you like best about the clinics?

Truly, I loved everything about the clinics. The EAP is such an awesome program, and I loved getting to know all of the clinicians, and getting the chance to really pick their brains and learn from them. They were all so willing to help, and really wanted to see each rider succeed. I also really enjoyed learning about horsemanship and groundwork from Mindy Bower. I think it is an aspect of riding that is sort of neglected in the hunter/jumper industry, and it was really cool to see how the groundwork we did carried over to how our horses felt while riding. It was also really fun getting to know all of the other riders who participated in the program, as I hadn't met many of them before. I'd definitely have to say that one of the coolest experiences for me as a result of the EAP was getting the chance to ride with George Morris at the George H. Morris Horsemastership Training Session after being the runner-up at the EAP Nationals. That was such an amazing opportunity, and something that I would have never gotten to do had it not been for the EAP.

How did the clinics help you and what goals do you have after the clinics?

I really think that the EAP helped to greatly improve my riding, and each of the different clinics gave me different things to work on. At the Level One and Two clinics, Melanie and Julie helped me with my young horse, and gave me some tools to work with him to get him listening better. Julie helped to fix my position so that I would be more effective in my riding, something that has made a big difference for me. At Level Three, Peter had some great exercises that helped us get to know our horses, while making them more responsive and getting them to jump better. Each clinic gave me a slightly different perspective, and different tools that I can take and apply to any horse I'm riding. I've also taken exercises from each of the EAP clinics and tried to implement them into my riding at home.

A theme throughout the EAP was to get riders to look at things from their horse's perspective. When walking and talking about the courses we talked a lot about how our horse would understand the questions being asked of them. How does a certain jump look to your horse? How could you best ride a line to set your horse up for success? How can you position your aids to make what you're asking your horse extremely clear? This has since helped me a lot when thinking about how to ride a course. Whereas before, I might have just walk a course to get the strides, I can now walk the course, break it up, and think, "How can I best ride this course for this individual horse?"

After the EAP, my goal is to continue to ride better and keep learning more. My ultimate goal is to someday work as a professional rider and trainer in this industry, and I really feel that the EAP helped get me started in the right direction toward that.

If you could give someone a pointer on how to succeed in the clinics, what would you tell them?

Riders need to recognize that your trainer can only do so much to help you. They can help you with the riding aspects, but they can't learn the other material for you. The rest falls on the rider, who needs to take the initiative to learn the horsemanship, pay attention, and study different books to prepare for the written tests. Ask questions, and show the clinicians that you are interested in learning! Also, it's really important to show the clinicians that you can apply what you are learning. Even if you're not perfect, they want you to show them that you are teachable and are putting in an honest effort to take what they are saying and make it a part of your riding.

During the clinics, riders are responsible for every aspect of their horse's care, from feeding, to grooming and tacking, to cleaning your horse's stall. At Level Two and Three you also have to warm up and school your horse without help from a trainer or clinician. I think it's really important that riders not only know how to take care of their own horses, but also how to school them intelligently. So make sure you not only know how to care for your horse, but also how to school your own horse,

and why you jump the jumps that you do in the schooling ring!

Tell me a good story about one of your experiences.

When I was at the GHM Training Session, I passed out for some unknown reason during a vet presentation, and landed on the demonstration horse's hoof. I was fine, but I had to go to the hospital (in an ambulance!) just to make sure I was ok. The next day of the clinic was the no stirrups day, and George was positive that I wouldn't come back for that. But I did - with a big black eye, too!

Would you recommend the program to others?

I definitely would! The EAP is such a fantastic program, and I got so much out of it. I hope that other riders will apply for it in the future, as I feel that it really has so much to offer.

A Trainer's Perspective

"The concept of having the focus for these young riders be on becoming complete horsemen rather than just successful in the show ring is something that we need to see more of for the future of our sport. So much emphasis was put on care of the horse...no grooms allowed...as well as written tests that challenged the kids to think and study and the natural horsemanship with Mindy was so enlightening. The professionals that donated their time and expertise to the kids were incredible and we are thrilled to know that Melanie and Julie as well as Peter will be there again for the next group of dedicated young riders this year. Having the top two finishers, Kate and Anna, each earn a spot in Georges Horsemastership Clinic in Wellington was an amazing way to wrap the whole experience up. That was five intensive days of continuing education for all of us that were there," remarks trainer Beth Kennedy.

Hallene is currently a senior at Laurel Springs School, an online college prep high school. Next year she plans to attend University of Richmond in Virginia. She has three horses, Corey, Owen, and Monty.

"Corey is the one I rode at the EAP, and I've had him for a little over a year now. He's seven this year and I hope to move him up to the Low Amateur Owner Jumpers this summer. Owen is my other jumper, he's turning eight this year, and I've had him for almost three years now. I also plan on moving him up to the Low A/O's this summer. Monty is my sort-of project horse, who I've been showing in the hunters. My mom is going to take him over next year when I go to college, so I am just working on getting him ready for her this year,"Hallene stated.

Another Chicago area rider making it to level III was Lauren Ditallo.

The first level 1 training session for zone 5 is scheduled for May 28-29 at the Andrews Academy in Willoughby, OH. For more information and application instructions for the EAP go to USHJA.org.

