

# Carol Holden's Success Is a Result of Attention to Detail



**Carol Holden (above, with Sam Huff, and below right) is president of the West Virginia Breeders Classic. Her involvement in horses goes back to her days growing up on the family horse farm in Pennsylvania.**

**by JOY SMITH**  
*For Middleburg Life*

Most nights, about mid-evening, at Huff Farm/Sporting Life Stable just west of Middleburg, Carol Holden can be found down at the barn on carrot patrol.

On the off chance there are two or three people reading this who are not familiar with the term "carrot patrol," we'll explain.

Carrot patrol is the equine equivalent of checking the kids at the end of the day, making sure no one has tangled with a fence or otherwise hurt themselves. But more importantly, the patrol is treat time, patting and conversation time, and tucking them in for the night time.

The health and well-being of their more than twenty thoroughbreds are the top priority each day for Carol Holden and Sam Huff. With five live foals on the ground, this has been a good year.

With 22 years invested in their operation, the results of their diligent care and attention can be seen in their paddocks and barns.

Carol Holden, president of the West Virginia Breeders Classics (WVBC), is also an officer of the Virginia Thoroughbred Association (VTA) and a member of the Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association (TOBA).

The world of the horse has been Carol's world since her earliest memories, and she is deeply honored and proud to work in her professional roles. Some might have predicted her equine career.

But not Carol.

Even though she was born and raised on the family horse farm in Chester County, Pa., she always believed horses would be her avocation, not her vocation. She spent her childhood and teen years riding horses, working with horses, and helping to care for horses. She loved doing that, but she didn't consider those activities to be her career destination.

And so, when she went to Washington College in Chester Town, Md., she majored in one of her intellectual interests, international studies. Said Carol, "I graduated with too much education and too little experience."

The time was the mid-1970s and, when she set out to find a job, she quickly learned that her field of experience was a lifetime of horse care and training. Carol headed for the horse world and found a job.

Though her parents, Edith and Warren Holden Sr., had raised their two sons and one daughter on a horse farm, somehow they hadn't expected their only daughter to begin her business career as a hot walker at Dover Downs.

Not many women worked at racetracks back then. But they knew Carol and, if she chose to begin her



future at the track, they knew her determined nature would take her where she wanted to go from there.

Carol was paid \$70 per week and she ponied horses to make extra money. After five years of jobs at racetracks, including horseman's bookkeeper, groom, and photographer, Carol had seen all she wanted of the backside of racetracks and she decided to take a job with a prestigious thoroughbred farm.

For several years, she was the jack-of-all-trades at Rocketts Mill Farm in Doswell, Virginia. There, she drove the truck, helped the vets, handled sales consignments, maintained broodmare records, researched pedigrees and bought horses for herself and her partners.

By 1980, Carol had founded her company, Thoroughbred Management Services. She was in the business of buying two-year-olds-in-training each spring and putting together groups of investors who wanted to own shares of potential superstars. At that time, as in 2008, syndicates and partnerships were the most affordable ways to own race horses.

By 1982, she had established, with friends, a minimum-investment partnership in a horse later named "Owned By All."

That endeavor was a great story back then. Thirty shares were sold for \$300 each. The filly, which cost \$6,200, became a stakes winner worth several hundreds of thousands of dollars. Carol built her business on the success of that partnership.

In 1984, Carol had been hired to be the administrator of the West Virginia Thoroughbred Development Fund. (This affiliation became extremely important two years down the road.) She was able to function well there while continuing her syndication business from her own office in Middleburg.

During those years, Carol gained enough recognition as a successful business woman to be written up in newspapers and chosen as the subject of magazine articles.

At about the same time, Sam Huff was investigating the horse business as a possible investment resource. He had been in marketing with the Marriott Corporation for many years, in addition to his famed pro football career with the New York Giants and the Washington Redskins.

In a meeting with his accountant, Sam asked what the accountant knew about horses. In reply, the accountant picked up a magazine that happened to be on his desk. He handed the magazine with an article about Carol in it to Sam and said, "Why don't you call her? She sounds like she knows what she's doing."

Not only did Sam call Carol, he showed up an hour early for their first appointment.

Carol and Sam spent the next couple of years as business associates. Carol continued building her syndicated thoroughbred ownership company buying and selling horses, and she continued working with the West Virginia Thoroughbred Development Fund.

Sam continued working with Marriott, promoting the Redskins and traveling far and wide on speaking tours. He also continued getting educated about the greater world of the horse.

Earlier, during the years when he was investing in real estate, Sam had purchased farm property just west of Middleburg. By 1986, he had decided to relocate his home from the D.C. area to Virginia Hunt Country and to build a house and establish a horse farm on that property.

Later, in the fall of 1986, Sam and Carol attended the running of the Maryland Million. While there, Sam's promotional brain kicked in and he asked, "Why can't we do something like this in West Virginia?" Carol's answer was something like, "I don't know, let's ask the people who did this how they did it."

They asked, and received lots of reasons why West Virginia couldn't have a major thoroughbred event like the Maryland Million. They also got some valuable information on how to begin.

Well, guess what. . .

Their approach to that challenge pretty much describes how the Carol Holden and Sam Huff partnership has thrived since day one.

As Sam said, "I do the promoting and Carol takes care of the details. If we have a dispute, we take it to the kitchen table where we resolve the problem."

Details?! Carol Holden? If there is anything you want to know about what's going on with horses, worldwide, ask Carol. If there is anything you want to know about the West Virginia Breeders Classics, ask Carol. Her research and fund of knowledge is awe-inspiring. (Twenty years of reporting the horse news on her radio show Trackside has generated a huge information resource.)

The premiere West Virginia Breeders Classics Event was held in June of 1987 (less than an year after the Maryland Million), with five races offering \$200,000 in purses.

This year, on Oct. 18, the 22nd annual West Virginia Breeders Classics will hold nine races, offering \$1,875,000 in purses, at the Charles Town Race Track. Post time is 7:15 p.m.

And, just three years away, is the big celebration event for the silver anniversary of the West Virginia Breeders Classics. So much to plan, so much to do, details, details.

Carol continues her carrot patrols each evening at Huff Farm/Sporting Life Stable. As she visits and treats the thoroughbreds she and her partner own, is Carol making plans for the future? Does she wonder what might lie ahead for their thoroughbreds? Is there another "Big Talkin' Man," or a promising filly, waiting to be discovered? Is Carol working out the details?

Bet on it!