



## **Friends of Lord Stirling Stable Statement July 31, 2020**

Due to N.J. Governor Phil Murphy's various Executive Orders, as well as significant financial constraints on all county parks, in March 2020 the Somerset County Park Commission made the difficult decision to suspend many Park Commission programs for a month, and then in mid-April revised that to suspending all programming for the year. This includes cancelling all equestrian activities, significantly reducing the herd of lesson horses, and reducing part-time staffing for the remainder of 2020.

The Park Commission is developing plans to reopen the Stable for lessons and other programming in 2021. As plans evolve and decisions progress, the Friends of Lord Stirling Stable (FLSS) remains in support of reopening the Stable in 2021 as an equestrian riding facility for new and returning riders of all ages.

FLSS is a New Jersey 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Its mission is to 1) promote, support, and supplement the educational and recreational programs of Lord Stirling Park Riding Stable, which is part of the Somerset County Park Commission.; 2) educate the general public as to the benefits and facilities available at Lord Stirling Park Riding Stable and the Somerset County Park Commission. 3) educate the general public on outdoor recreation, including walking, hiking, birding, and horseback riding; and 4) carry out any and all activities in furtherance of the previous statements. Following are frequently asked questions about the future of the Stable:

### **Frequently Asked Questions:**

#### **What are the plans for the Stable's reopening in 2021?**

The Park Commission has stated that its fervent hope is for the Stable to reopen in 2021 as an equestrian facility and has formed a committee to develop a plan for the Stable's future use. When the plan is in place, it will be shared with the public. At this time, FLSS supports the Park Commission's decision and remains confident that LSS will reopen as an equestrian riding facility in 2021. Obviously, the pandemic must be under control.

#### **Why couldn't the Stable re-open in the Fall if COVID-19 restrictions are lifted?**

#### **Wouldn't the income from lessons and activities help?**

Although it might seem logical that the Stable would generate revenue if lessons and hacking were allowed for the remainder of the year, the truth is that it would actually cost more to re-open. Registration and rental fees would not cover the costs to sustain operations. In fact, fixed costs of the Stable, such as veterinary, dental, farrier, feed, and bedding continue to rise annually at a rate that outpaces fees charged by the Stable. Fees would need to be substantially raised to help offset the costs, while still not fully covering all expenses.

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## What happened to the horses?

Prior to the onset of COVID-19, a decision had already been made to retire a few horses and to downsize the herd by ten horses. This decision was based on the decline in ridership over the last couple of years. When the Governor issued Executive Order 118 closing the parks and public golf courses, after much discussion, the Park Commission made the decision to suspend all programming for the remainder of 2020. The strongest influences in their decision were participant and staff safety and financial constraints. Decreasing the size of the herd was not a decision that the Commission wanted to make, but believed was prudent in light of the circumstances it was facing.

Because LSS is a government-owned and operated facility, there are only three ways that LSS can remove a horse from the herd: place the horse in the Friends of Lord Stirling Stable School Horse Retirement Program if the horse meets the program's qualifications; sell the horse to a licensed livestock/horse dealer; or send it to a public horse auction.

The total dispersal of Lord Stirling Stable's remaining herd of lesson horses was carefully managed by the LSS staff and volunteer committee members of the FLSS School Horse Retirement Program. Staff and volunteers worked countless days and hours to ensure that qualified horses went into the Retirement Program. Horses that were retired or close to retirement were "adopted" into wonderful homes. Some horses were purchased by friends and families and are now permanently boarding at LSS. Others were purchased by LSS riders, staff and former staff, and still others were purchased by nearby friends of the Stable.

Staff and volunteers also put a lot of effort into pre-arranging for Pond Hill sales of horses to riders who were interested in opening their homes to them. Pond Hill is the Stable's primary dealer in Vermont for lease or purchase and is where more than 80 percent of the lesson horses were purchased. Pond Hill is known and well respected nationwide and has been operated by the same family for five generations.

## What can riders do to support the stable?

The most important thing that riders can do is to support the Friends of Lord Stirling Stable. Anyone can make a general donation to FLSS by visiting [www.flss.org](http://www.flss.org). Donations will be used to assist the Stable with funding for special requests that are outside the current budgeting by the Park Commission, such as a horse purchase, as has been done in the past.

You also can write to the Somerset County Park Commission Secretary-Director Geoffrey Soriano at [gsoriano@scparcs.org](mailto:gsoriano@scparcs.org) and express your thoughts and personal experiences. Sharing what LSS means to you personally is a wonderful way to show your support for LSS and it allows the Park Commission to hear just how important it is to our riders. Somerset County residents can also write to the Somerset County Freeholders' office at [FreeholdersOffice@co.somerset.nj.us](mailto:FreeholdersOffice@co.somerset.nj.us).

Once the Stable reopens, the biggest support the riders can give to the Park Commission and the Stable is to register for classes.



### **How will LSS obtain new horses?**

It has yet to be determined if lesson horses will be purchased as in the past or leased from another source.

### **What staff is currently employed at the Stable?**

Instructors and the majority of the part-time barn staff have been laid off, since there is no programming. The Park Commission made the decision that seasonal maintenance staff and summer programming staff in County parks would not be hired in 2020, excepting those necessary to maintain the golf courses, due to financial constraints. The Stable has a minimal crew of part-time staff to fill shifts and cover when a full-time Stable worker is out. All fulltime Stable staff are still employed.

### **How long has Lord Stirling Stable been in operation?**

For more than 50 years, LSS has offered a full complement of riding and other family-focused activities for people of all ages. In 2015, LSS was recognized as a Gold Medal Horse Farm by the New Jersey Equine Environmental Stewardship Program for its dedication to environmental sustainability and management. The Stable is currently one of only six horse farms in the state to ever earn such recognition.