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Laurels at Landhope: Opportunity Scholarship Sponsor

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BY NANCY WEST

OPPORTUNITY SCHOLARSHIP SPONSOR

Jamie O'Rourke comes from a long line of equestrians that includes polo players, hunter-jumper riders, fox hunters and show-horse enthusiasts. His mother, Mary O'Rourke, has been running horse shows and events for 60 years. Since 1986 they have built The Laurels at Landhope Combined Driving Event from a small club event with 15 entries inside a 40-mile radius of Chester County to the most prestigious major international event of its kind, with 100 entries from 23 states and throughout the world. Held annually in West Grove, Pa., The Laurels at Landhope is recognized by the Federation Equestre Internationale, the international governing body for all Olympic equestrian disciplines.

The fastest-growing equestrian sport in the country, combined driving is grounded in British tradition. It involves a unique partnership between horse or pony and driver that relies on training and trust and features the elegance of dressage, the excitement of cross-country racing and an intricate test of skill and precision.

Each year, The Laurels at Landhope uses the proceeds of the Combined Driving Event to support organizations that promote animal welfare and the preservation of open space. "Both are essential to the equestrian way of life," said Jamie O'Rourke, who also designs cross-country courses, judges national and international horse shows and events and serves as an equestrian event consultant.



| Maureen Holowinski, V'08, and friends.

One of The Laurels's long-time beneficiaries has been the School of Veterinary Medicine's New Bolton Center, which Jamie described as a "local treasure that we consider the top vet school in the world." Last year, The Laurels began focusing its contributions on supporting a veterinary student through the School's Opportunity Scholarship Program, which has provided more than \$900,000 in scholarship funds since it began in 1998. What also distinguishes this program is its mentoring component, whereby each student is matched with a mentor whose interests are similar to those of the student.

"We need quality veterinarians and research and science that will improve the quality of life for our horses and enable them to live longer," said Jamie. "So it's extremely important to encourage young people who are studying to become veterinarians by providing financial and moral support."

The Laurels's dedication to the equestrian world made **Maureen Holowinski, V'08**, a natural choice for the recipient of this scholarship. Introduced to horses as a child by her mother, Maureen said she was hooked the first time she rode at age 10. "I learned to ride on hunter jumpers so I especially love show horses. They are phenomenal athletes. I'm interested in studying lameness and orthopedics—anything that keeps a horse performing well."

A 2004 graduate of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Maureen chose Penn in part because of New Bolton Center's reputation and the fact that it offered the highest caseload of horses—particularly sport horses. In 2005 she had the opportunity to spend the summer at New Bolton as the recipient of the distinguished Csaba Vedlik Equine Scholarship.

Maureen said she was also attracted to Penn by the Opportunity Scholarship Program. "Just the thought that the School offers a scholarship with personal support from the sponsors as well as a mentor really impressed me. It's a great feeling to know that The Laurels at Landhope is sponsoring my scholarship and that the O'Rourkes and others will be rooting for me throughout my four years at

Penn. Having a mentor is also very valuable and it sets this scholarship apart from others.”

Maureen considers herself fortunate to be mentored by **Elaine Hammel, V'60**, emeritus associate professor of medicine at the School. A veterinary pioneer, Dr. Hammel was the first woman to lead the School's William Boucher Field Service Program. She was also the first woman ever appointed to an academic post in ambulatory veterinary medicine in the country.

Dr. Hammel thoroughly enjoys her role as mentor. “I like working with young people,” she said. “It’s rewarding to have the chance to help students as they make important decisions about their career paths. Maureen is a mover and a shaker with the potential to be a leader in whatever she chooses to do. I encourage her and others to keep an open mind about all the possibilities and take full advan-

tage of the wonderful education that Penn affords them.”

“It’s reassuring to know that I can turn to Dr. Hammel for advice whenever I need her,” said Maureen. “Having this scholarship is also motivating. It helps when you’re feeling stressed by all the work involved in your studies to know that people like the O’Rourkes and Dr. Hammel really believe in you. It also helps to know that Dr. Hammel went through the same courses and program I have undertaken.”

Jamie O’Rourke summarized the program well. “When you can focus on one individual and watch that student’s progress, you can see very clearly how your contributions are having a real result and making a difference for someone. We believe that Maureen has a bright future in equine medicine and it’s very rewarding to support her efforts to become a veterinarian.”



Courtesy of Jamie O'Rourke

Jamie O'Rourke at an equestrian competition.