

# MORMON PIONEER NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA (MPNHA)

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## The power of the horse - Equestrian Center

MT. PLEASANT—The power of the horse is drawing the old world and the new world together in Mt. Pleasant City.

The Cleone Peterson Eccles Equestrian Center is a place where the horse is king, says Monte Bona, director of the Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area (MPNHA) and the Mt. Pleasant Community Development and Renewal Agency (CFDA).

A poem titled “The Power of the Horse” is painted in big words on a wall at the ConToy Arena, the indoor riding facility in the equestrian arena—an homage to the role the horse played in the settlement of the West.

Now, in a modern setting, the horse is playing a role in Mt. Pleasant’s economic development by facilitating equestrian competition in a big way.

The facility is one of the few in the West with enough land to accommodate hundreds of horses and riders, many of whom travel around the country to compete.

Like the pioneers who settled Sanpete, the horses that make the pilgrimage to the ConToy equestrian events are often of European stock. Many of the horses originated in Ireland, England or Germany.

Twice each year, flocks of riders descend on the equestrian center and arena, filling the 200-plus horse stalls and putting their horses and riding skills to the test on the dressage, jumping and cross-country courses on site.

The horses are usually meticulously groomed and trained. It’s not uncommon for horses to have a value of \$100,000, and on a big day, \$20 million in horseflesh will populate the facility.

With them comes an influx of economic activity, as visitors buy gas, food and lodging from Sanpete businesses.

“This is becoming a very significant equestrian center,” Bona says. “It has a tremendous local impact, bringing people from all around the western United States. We are very grateful to the partners who helped to fund it, including the George S. and Dolores Dore’ Eccles Foundation.”



ROBERT STEVENS / MESSENGER PHOTO

**Five winners from the spring equestrian event May 3-5 at the Cleone Peterson Eccles Equestrian Center in Mt. Pleasant, Sanpete County, Utah. From left are Kayla Stone on Atlanta, Dan Michaels riding Landon III, MaryBeth Hansen on Zip Wyatt, Vick Baker on Got the Last Call, and Kirsi Husa riding Invited to Jet.**

Lani Taylor, who organizes events for the arena, says the facility is a perfect place to gather and compete. And more expansions and accommodations are planned.

“Jack and Gaylynn Widdison (facility coordinators) and the Eccles Foundation have been absolutely tremendous at making sure that we are continually growing every year,” Taylor says.

Mindy Hussey is a trainer who travels across the U.S. with her daughter, from show to show, competing at events and being involved in the national equestrian community. The pair travel to dozens of events each year, but make sure never to miss the big spring and fall events in Mt. Pleasant.

“We love coming here every year,” she says. “We are so grateful that Mt. Pleasant has this facility, and to all the organizers who put it together. The community here is so beautiful, and everyone welcomes us.”

The spring event for 2019 wrapped up on Sunday, May 5. More than 140 horses were registered. Riders and horses completed in dressage, a competition in which they receive scores based essentially on how they look as they perform various gaits and moves.

Another component of the event is jumping, where horses and riders are scored on their grace as they surmount various obstacles. In a third competition the horses and riders traverse a cross country course set up on the equestrian center grounds. The course includes a variety of obstacles. Cross country riding is judged primarily based on time, with score deductions for mistakes. A comparable event with similar competitions will be held in the fall.

With plans already made to expand the facility, the events will get bigger and bigger, Taylor says, attracting people not just from the United States from the worldwide horse community as well.



ROBERT STEVENS / MESSENGER PHOTO

**A competitor gallops through a water feature during the twice-annual equestrian competition at the Cleone Peterson Eccles Equestrian Center in Mt. Pleasant, Sanpete County, Utah. Development of the center, which includes the indoor ConToy Arena, has been supported by the George S. and Dolores Dore' Eccles Foundation and the Mormon Pioneer National Heritage Area, among other donors.**

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About the MPNHA:

The Mormon Pioneer Heritage Area is a federally designated area of central and southern Utah running along the beautiful and historic U.S. Highway 89 — including the All-American Road Utah State Route 12, and Capitol Reef Scenic Byway Utah State Route 24, which both intersect with U.S. 89 and together form the MPNHA's Boulder Loop. The area includes the counties of Sanpete, Sevier, Piute, Wayne, Garfield and Kane.