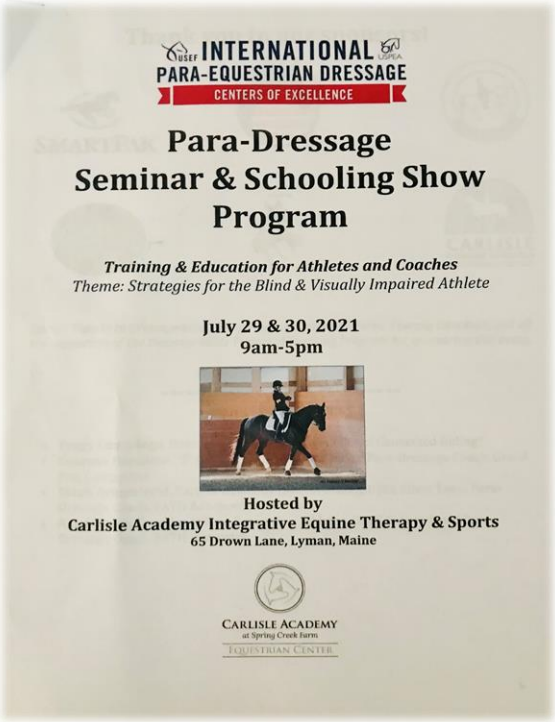


## July 29-30th 2021
## In Summary, we achieved 'Half Steps' towards Piaffe!
## And the start of something special!

With great effort and collaboration with Para Equestrian Athletes, LLC and Carlisle Academy Integrative Equine Therapy and Sports, together we were able to successfully share an incredibly special seminar for **Para Equestrian Athletes with Vision Impairments and Blindness.**

Para Equestrian Athletes was advantageous in securing a generous grant from Lendon Gray's Dressage4Kids Training4Teaching program and along with our *wonderful sponsors*; Carlisle Charitable Foundation, Faith & Family Foundation, Planson, Smartpak, Cadence Equine Sports Alliance, Deborah McAlexander, Jennifer Wu and Jere Gray Photography made it possible to host a first of its kind clinic and schooling dressage show directed at **'Strategies for the Blind and Visually Impaired Para Equestrian Athlete'**

Peggy Cummings & Marcia Springston'Dillon

Our theme was biomechanics and kinesthetic learning. Our first day started with International clinician and biomechanics expert **Peggy Cummings**. She enabled our riders to understand and achieve a more balanced and connected seat through careful unmounted and mounted exercises.

Carlisle Volunteer, Coach Kathleen Elliott, Para Athlete Lilly Russo and Peggy Cummings

Michelle LaBarre

**Michelle LaBarre** expanded our knowledge with kinesthetic learning and guided us with hands on exercises utilizing a plethora of props to improve our 'feel'.

Jennifer Wu

'Yoga with Holly' assisted our riders in achieving mind and body relaxation through combined physical poses, controlled breathing and meditation .

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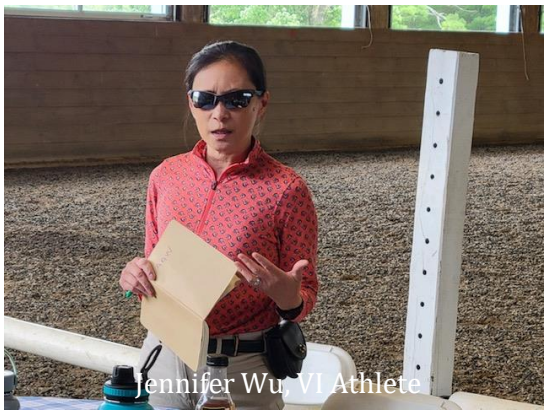
Jennifer Wu, VI Athlete

**Jennifer Wu** spoke passionately about fundraising with 'heart strings' vs 'strings attached' and inspired our athletes to seek out sponsors who share the same passion and support for their Para sport track.

Lisa Toaldo, USEF Technical Delegate

**Lisa Toaldo**, a USEF technical delegate brought awareness to the challenges that blind athletes encounter at show grounds and offered solutions on how to manage and prepare for successful competitions.

Sarah Armentrout, Peggy Cummings & Susanne Hamilton

"S" Judge **Susanne Hamilton** headed our Para dressage schooling show and fix a test. Susanne worked intricately with our athletes. Understanding their individual challenges and producing positive changes to their techniques for increased test accuracy.

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***Meet our Vision Impaired and Blind Para Athletes…***

"This clinic hosted by Carlisle Academy and Para Equestrian for visually impaired and blind riders was invaluable for riders, coaches and assistants for vi riders. All of us learned pathways to better riding, more accuracy in the dressage court, working with living letters, preparations for and experiences at show grounds, and the importance of communication and solving problems by thinking outside the box. We showed that at all levels of para dressage from intro to grade five blindness is a challenge which can be overcome with teamwork and communication. I look forward to the next event and hope that these lessons will be incorporated into para coach certification." Dr. Suzanne Ament (VA), Grade V Para Athlete

"I'd say the VI rider's clinic was truly an amazing opportunity. I got to work with amazing coaches, meet wonderful people, and all of it was optimal for blind and visually impaired riders. If I could change anything, I'd make it longer!" Libby Russo (CA), Grade V Para Athlete

"I have been to symposiums before, but this one, generously sponsored by Dressage4Kids, is the first time I have ever had the opportunity to learn as much from the people attending as I did from the clinicians themselves. Make no mistake, the clinicians were fantastic educators and I have come home with many fantastic new tools for my training toolbox. But this is the first time I have ever had a clinic focused on Blind and Visually Impaired riders like myself. And it is the first time I have ever been in the company of other blind and visually impaired riders. Watching them learn and cope and challenge themselves was an inspiration. The bravery they exhibited and the open conversation about how our visual limitations are something to contend with, but not something that has to limit us , is something I will carry with me forever. I am so grateful that our group is considered worth the special attention, worth the sponsorship. We are a small group,, but we are a mighty group. And I think one of the things we learned coming together like this is that we will all thrive in part because we have each other to lean on. Thank you so much for your support of visually impaired and blind riders. We will travel many miles on what we learned." Michelle LaBarre (NY), Grade V Para Athlete

An important component of learning how to truly ride a horse and being an effective rider is understanding biomechanics. Neutral position leads to relaxation in Human which transmits to Horse and results in a harmonious relationship between the two in and out of the saddle. A relaxed body and mind results in not having to work so hard to move your horse forward so that you are able to just ride. At one point while riding, I recall exclaiming, "I'm not working, I'm really riding!" Jennifer Wu (AL), Vision Impaired Athlete

"The VI rider clinic at Carlisle Academy this summer was a wonderful opportunity for us to train together, to share details and techniques of riding with no or low vision. Prior to that we had had several introductory zoom meetings where we were able to learn each other's voices and experiences a bit. The in-person clinic was so very much more helpful, to have training from professionals and to share our techniques experiences and successes with one another. We were able to do even more sharing between our rides and during meals. I am very grateful to have had this experience and know that it has greatly improved my riding and showing skills." Marcia Springston'Dillon (VA), Grade IV Para Athlete

**July 29-30th 2021**

**In Summary, we achieved 'Half Steps' towards Piaffe!**

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We super exceeded our expectations! Our goal of developing conversations and furthering along Para equestrian and especially those athletes with vision impairments and blindness was achieved. This was not a one-off clinic but a series of future events to further promote and advocate for Para Equestrians.

**With appreciation to our wonderful sponsors; Carlisle Charitable Foundation, Faith & Family Foundation, Smartpak, Planson, Cadence Equine Sports Alliance, Deborah McAlexander, Jennifer Wu and Jere Gray Photography.**

**All our volunteers, our Living Letters and all those 'behind the scenes' –**

**You all made this incredibly special event possible!**

Jennifer Wu, AL – Vision Impaired Athlete

Michelle LaBarre, NY - Grade V

Dr. Suzanne Ament, VA – Grade V

Lilly Russo, CA - Grade V

Sarah Armentrout
Ana O'Brien

Marcia Springston'Dillon, VA – Grade IV

# Thank you to our sponsors!

## Special thanks also to

***Dressage4Kids Training4Teaching Program***

***Tuny Page and Stillpoint Farm, Theresa Davidson, Jennifer Wu, Deborah McAlexander***

***Jere Gray Photography***