

Merriehill Farm

People's Choice Trainer of the Year

BY JENNY GREY

Perhaps the best compliment a trainer can receive is to have clients who have been with them for years and who plan to be there for the foreseeable future. Merriehill has many such clients and their input tells a remarkable story of what has fueled their success.

Team Merriehill now comprises Stan and Paulette Bodnar, their sons, Mark and Whitney and Whitney's wife, Jessica. The farm was originally founded in 1960 by the Staehnkes, Paulette's parents. The operation moved to Marenngo, Illinois, in 1971 and has been there ever since. The Staehnke family, including Paulette's brother, Mark, went to a horse show in Thunder Bay, Ontario where they met Stan, who was only 18 years old at the time. Stan wanted to move to the USA and the wish came true when he was hired by Merriehill as a groom. Paulette, who had shown horses all of her life, taught Stan to ride saddle seat. Prior to that he only knew how to ride western. One thing led to another; Paulette and Stan married and were joined by Mark

and Whitney who would eventually become key members of the team.

Merriehill is a huge operation with 40 to 50 horses in training during the show season. Every member of Team Merriehill is critical to its success and each has an important role to

play. Most of the horses are worked by Stan, Whitney and Jessica with Mark acting as the ground person for all of them. Paulette is also a very talented horseman but she unselfishly stepped back to run the business full time when Mark and Whitney were old enough to

become trainers. Jessie has brought an important dimension to the business. In following the training philosophy that each horse should be placed in the division where it will excel, part of what she does is develop the hunters. Paulette is the glue that holds the business together. Her many years of experience and her encyclopedic knowledge of the Morgan breed make her an invaluable asset who is greatly appreciated by both family and clients. This hard working team is also hands on in the other aspects of farm management and they feed, help clean stalls and do the bulk of the farm maintenance themselves.

Merriehill client feedback is remarkably consistent with comments like "Each horse is treated as an individual and they 'listen' to what the horse is trying to tell them".



It was truly a team victory as the Bodnar Family of Merriehill Farm was chosen the People's Choice Trainer Of The Year.



The clients of Merriehill Farm join in the team spirit as they did in Oklahoma 2010.



Oklahoma 2010 provided a grand finale for Team Merriehill as three-year-old Cingate Starry Night was named Pleasure Driving World Champion and four-year-old Merriehill Home Stretch was named Park Harness World Champion.