

## HITS-on-the-Hudson

Last year, equine enthusiasts from all over the country came to Saugerties, NY to celebrate the Grand Opening of HITS-on-the-Hudson, a brand new state-of-the-art 200+-acre horse show facility. HITS-on-the-Hudson is marking their second year with even more expansions to the already impressive facility, and some national championships being added to their circuit of shows. The highlight of this year's circuit will be the \$150,000 Rolex/USEF National Show Jumping Championship, June 8–12, in which the top riders in the United States will compete over three days for the coveted title of Rolex/USEF National Show Jumping Champion. And with the addition of the Junior Hunter Finals, to be held this year on August 1 and 2, the equine world is starting to recognize that HITS-on-the-Hudson is a place for championships.

The HITS-on-the-Hudson facility marks the accomplishment of a long-held ambition for Saugerties resident Tom Struzzieri, owner and President of Horse Shows In The Sun. "I've been involved in horse shows since 1977, when I first started running small horse shows," he said. "1981 was really my first foray into bigger horse shows, when I started running different winter circuits in Florida." At that time, those horse shows were a big part of how he paid his bills; today, HITS is the largest promoter of horse shows in the United States, with circuits in Ocala, FL; Indio, CA; Tucson, AZ; Culpeper, VA, and Saugerties, NY. The Ocala, Indio, Tucson and Culpeper facilities host an average of more than 4,500 horses and 12,000 horsemen at the same time and the Ocala and Indio facilities attract more than 35,000 spectators at a time.

It is, however, the Saugerties facility that has emerged as the crown jewel of all of the HITS facilities, and attendance promises to at least equal, if not exceed, that at other HITS venues. Situated on the site of a former golf course, the horse show facility took two years to complete. Tom oversaw the project from the turning of the first sod, and every aspect of the facility was designed to his exact specifications. "The fact that this was a facility that we could lay out from scratch was really an asset," said Tom. "Most places we looked at were existing facilities that we would have had to work around. In Saugerties, we basically had a blank page. There were some challenges—the principal being that the grounds are bisected by a stream—but that turned out to make these grounds unique, because we could connect everything with bridges. There were a lot of obstacles, but it was worth it."

The HITS-on-the-Hudson show grounds is a world-class facility designed to meet the highest standards of equestrian competition, while also offering many unique features. Most noteworthy are the five Hunter and three Jumper arenas, both surrounded by a native bluestone wall inside a grass berm with twin bridges arching over the entrances. While the Grand Prix arena is always the focal point at other horse shows, HITS-on-the-Hudson gives the Hunter division equal exposure. In addition to the arenas, there are eight all-weather performance rings and four practice rings. Tom has spent millions of dollars on a Eurofelt surface for the arenas, which combined with sand ensures that the horse's footing is secure in both rain and sun. A natural three-board fence will encircle the show grounds, finishing at the grand entrance. New in 2005, HITS has constructed a compound for high-performance horses. A permanent barn housing 90 stalls, each 12' x 12', sits separate from the rest of the show grounds, and forms the core of the facility. Adjacent to the barn is a 140' x 240' schooling ring surrounded by a natural stone wall. All-weather footing is featured in the schooling area, as well as in the 60' x 120' lunging area. The area is partially bounded by four-board fencing, with a natural stream that curves around the perimeter completing the enclosure. A gated entrance for the monitoring of credentials provides absolute security, and access to the Grand Prix arena via a special gate means that high-performance horses never have to leave the compound.

HITS has also constructed eight new permanent barns to the showgrounds, adding over 500 stalls for a grand total of nearly 1,200 permanent stalls. Additional tent stabling is also available, with about 1,500 or more portable stalls. "The large number of permanent barns and stalls make our facility pretty unique," said Tom. The HITS-on-the-Hudson showgrounds can comfortably accommodate more than 2,500 horses and 7,500 horsemen each week.

For spectators, A VIP pavilion overlooks both the Hunter and Jumper arenas, and a restaurant and dining courtyard offers patio seating as well as an enclosed dining area. Shopping will be available in two buildings sectioned off into vendor boutiques offering equine-themed merchandise from tack to 14K gold jewelry. To get away from it all, riders can take their horses on a 2.5-mile trail ride around the perimeter of the property.

The Hudson Valley has proven to be the ideal spot for a new horse show facility. “The businesses in the area have been overwhelmingly supportive,” said Tom. “The riders seem to like it, too. They’ve found that the Hudson Valley is an extremely hospitable area to come, with lots of dining and lodging options, and the riders get to see a lot of the area, too.” And the economic gain for the area will be undeniable: At HITS-on-the-Hudson’s previous venue in Ellenville, NY, a study concluded that the horse shows brought in about \$30 million to the local economy over the course of just one season.

Charities and charity events are also an integral part of every HITS horse show. HITS is leasing a portion of the HITS-on-the-Hudson site from Family of Woodstock, Inc., a not-for-profit organization that provides crisis intervention services throughout Ulster County. Family of Woodstock’s principal focus is crisis intervention, including emergency shelter and food, services to teens, childcare and comprehensive services for people with substance abuse problems, domestic violence issues, HIV/AIDS and people who are involved with the criminal justice system. The charity has more than 100,000 contacts each year through its hotline, social services programs and three walk-in centers. Approximately 180 people are on staff, along with 200 volunteers to meet the community needs. Family of Woodstock will pre-sell tickets to the Grand Prix events and are the ticket-takers on weekends—the charity will keep 100% of the proceeds from all tickets sold.

Spectators will be admitted free to HITS-on-the-Hudson Wednesday through Friday. Tickets are \$5 on Saturday and Sunday with the proceeds benefiting Family of Woodstock. Children under 12 will be admitted without charge, and parking is free.

The HITS-on-the-Hudson facility is located at 454 Washington Avenue Extension in Saugerties. For more information, please contact the HITS corporate office at 845 246 8833 or visit their Web site at [www.HitsShows.com](http://www.HitsShows.com).