

Footings Unlimited Donates New Footing for Arenas at Gladstone in Preparation for USET Foundation Dressage Festival of Champions

In preparation for the USET Foundation's Dressage Festival of Champions, three arenas at the Foundation's Gladstone headquarters in New Jersey have undergone renovations. Footings Unlimited, based in Chicago, Illinois, donated one of the company's topnotch footing products for two warm-up arenas and the main arena where competition will be held June 15-18 for the USET Foundation Dressage Festival of Champions featuring the 2006 Collecting Gaits Farm USEF National Grand Prix Championship / World Equestrian Games Selection Trials and the USEF National Intermediaire I Championship Presented by Paul Miller, Inc.

Footings Unlimited is the world's largest supplier of arena riding surfaces, offering 60 different combinations of arena additives and finished surfaces. For the Gladstone arenas, Footings Unlimited donated 'EuroFelt' – the trade name for a product that is a combination of a flat rubber product called RX and textile fibers.

“The combination of flat rubber and textiles gives sand a great deal of stability and keeps it from moving out from under the hoof,” explained Wayne Gregory, General Manager of Footings Unlimited. To illustrate what the product does, Gregory used the analogy of sand at the beach. “EuroFelt changes the texture and structure of the footing so that it feels more like you're walking on sand down at the shoreline versus back in the dunes. It keeps the hoof up but yet it allows for the toe to break over. The key to EuroFelt is that it gives the footing stability and concussion-reduction without rebound.”

New Jersey contractor Mike Morris and his company Michael Morris Associates worked with Footings Unlimited to complete the ring renovation, supplying the heavy equipment – front-end loaders and graders, plus manpower and new sand. The renovation entailed stripping out all of the existing sand, laser-leveling the base, installing new sand and again laser-leveling the arenas. The EuroFelt footing was then installed, mixed in, and the arenas were laser-leveled once again.

Laser-leveling the arenas at each stage was critical, according to Gregory. “If it is three inches lower in one part or two inches higher in another, then you've got to get all that leveled after each installation of material. It must be perfectly consistent across the arena, especially at this level. You simply have to have the best playing field that you can. While a quarter-inch difference in a base might not make a difference to an average rider, to a high level dressage horse, all of a sudden going from 2-inches to 2-1/4-inches of sand could actually be a problem.”

Stability and consistency of the footing is important in all disciplines explains Gregory, who is working with USET Foundation staff to create a renovation plan for all of the Gladstone arenas. “One of the main things we're trying to accomplish at Gladstone is to basically take the footing out of the performance equation so that when the rider and horse are out there, they're focusing on what they need to do. If the horse is confident that the footing is consistent, it can focus on its performance rather than how stable or how deep the footing is going to be at its next step. In an ideal situation, the footing should be an absolute neutral – it doesn't affect the mind of the horse or the rider – they are simply out there to perform. Everybody says you have to have good footing – what is good footing? It's stable, has low sheer, and has concussion reduction, but the ideal footing is the footing that doesn't enter into the competition.”

Gregory noted that he made his generous donation of new footing for three arenas at Gladstone as a 'thank-you'. Gladstone was the site of the first major dressage show that Footings Unlimited set up a vendor booth at 15 years ago when the company started. “The clientele at Gladstone and the business we generated there jump-started the company. Going there is a little bit like going home,” he said. Gregory also feels patriotic about the historic grounds, which also inspired his donation. “Gladstone is a tremendous facility. It represents the United States and our teams, so it really should have the best footing and the best of everything in the country. It really should be the showcase for not only American teams but also American products.”

Footings Unlimited® is a worldwide arena surfaces company focused on developing and marketing new footings to improve the well-being of both rider and horse. Launched in 1980, the company is headquartered in Chicago, Illinois, and has 17 offices and warehouses located throughout North America. Footings Unlimited offers 60 different footing products that can reduce dust, improve drainage, reduce shock, eliminate packing, modify sheer, improve uniformity of density, reduce maintenance, modify take-off resistance, or increase/decrease depth. For more information, contact Footings Unlimited, One Magnificent Mile, 980 N. Michigan Ave. Suite 1400, Chicago, Illinois 60611. Telephone 888-893-6607 or 1-800-972-7251 or visit <http://www.footingsunlimited.com>