

shouldn't dump them because they're not functional. Don't give them away to somebody; put them down."

For years the Lambs have run a horse adoption program. And this is where the kids come in.

Some kids can't afford to ride. They can't afford quality mounts. "How can you compete against that beautiful warm blood that floats above the ground?" asks Sally. "So here's a kid who is working her heart out and the horse she's on is probably going to get hurt because they're asking too much out of it. That's not fair." So, she formed a foundation that adopts horses and gives them to the kids. "That's their horse," she continues. "As long as they want to keep it, it's theirs. If they don't want it, they have to give it back and I give it to another kid." She pauses. "It really has made a huge difference."

This past summer, they loaded up six kids and horses and took them to Montgomery Alabama to compete in the 4-H Southern Regional Horse Show. "They did really good," gloats Sally. "They kicked tail." Thirteen states sent 40 of their best riders. But each of the six from here landed in the top 10 of her division...that's out of 300-400 kids in each class!

"All the states, from Florida to Texas, they know where Orange County Virginia is," adds David. "Virginia kids, from Orange County, people from all over the country, this place was it, because they were the kids you had to beat. For years, the Virginia kids have excelled all over the country."



Photos by Phil Audibert

Above, Sally Lamb, dressed in English riding gear, crosses the Rapidan River near Montford on her way home from a day of foxhunting. Below, taking one of her young charges under her wing, Sally Lamb is the Field Master of a local foxhunt. She's trying to improve the image of this equine sport, saying "we're working on more kids, more people and being more approachable."



One day maybe 10 years ago, David answered the phone. The state police were on the line. There's a broken down horse van on Afton Mountain. In the van is THE Black Stallion. At the wheel of the truck is John Quellos.

David hooked up to the horse trailer and took both actors, human and equine, to Washington for the International Horse Show. All David wanted for this service was 60 tickets so all the 4-H kids could get in free.

There are parents in Orange County so fiercely loyal to the Lambs that they would do anything to help them. There are kids who might be in some serious trouble right now were it not for the Lambs. When David and Sally first met, when she was a school teacher, she already had two troubled teenagers living with her. She told David he'd better get used to it. He did...no problem.

Over the years, they built Oakland Heights Farm into "a local hub for 4-H Equine." But now, after having grown up in the 4-H program himself in Craig County, after hosting annual 4-H Benefit Horse Shows, after being 4-H leaders for decades, after running all over the country taking kids and horses to shows, after donating their time, money, and space, they have had to give it up, leaving a gaping hole in the program.

It all boils down to something called "Risk Management," (see sidebar) that ironically puts the Lamb's business and home at risk if they continue as 4-H volunteers. "We don't want to lose our farm because of their rules," says Sally ruefully

She pauses a moment and reassures. "We will NEVER stop working with kids. It's not going to happen. A lot of these kids deserve to go to these bigger shows, these better shows, and they will."

Just about then the cars start rolling up the driveway...moms, who have picked up their kids at school and are now taking them to their riding lesson at Oakland Heights. Horses and kids... David and Sally walk out to greet them.

Horses and kids



Photo by Phil Audibert

David and Sally Lamb pose at ring side with two of their "adopted" kids, Kim Mitchell, left, and Jessica Knight.

It is 1965. Sally Lamb is taking Presidential candidate, Barry Goldwater around Virginia Tech, and they have to go through a doorway that has a metal grate for a doormat. "Back in those days we had really high heels," she says with a hint of what's to come. "Guess what happens to Sally. My heel got stuck in the thing. I had to step out of my shoes. I had Barry Goldwater down on his hands and knees with his body guards getting my shoe out of the grate."

Sally rips off one of her trademark war whoop laughs. "That's twice I've been reminded where I came from."

The other time she was being crowned Homecoming Queen at Culpeper High School when she stepped on

the principal's foot. He didn't realize how close he was to the microphone. "Get off of my foot! Get off of my foot!" he screamed for all to hear. Another big guffaw. "It really brings you down to where you belong."

That's the great thing about Sally and David Lamb...no pretenses, no airs, no bull. Like the time Gwyneth Paltrow showed up at their stable off Route 15 between Orange and Gordonsville. She needed a riding lesson so she could play a scene involving horses in the HBO bomb "Hush" which was filmed locally. "She was kind of an air head," smirks David. "She came over here one day, puffing on a cigarette. She was kind of irritating. And I walked across there and said, 'scuse

me ma'am, I didn't get your name." He chuckles at the memory. "I just thought she needed to get a little more humble before she came down here."

Gwyneth Paltrow is not the first famous person David and Sally have rubbed shoulders with. What about Christopher Reeve, who would fly his Lear jet down here to take riding lessons from the Lambs. Or, how about the load of trail horses the Lambs provided for Bruce Springsteen. Or, the U.S. Senators from Montana who rode David's horses down Constitution Avenue in the Presidential Inaugural Parade. Or the Representatives who went on his Congressional Trail Ride in Great Falls Park. Or the Delegates and State Senators who participate every year in the Legislative Trail Ride right here in Virginia.

And then there's the biggest celebrity of all...the little kid down the road who wants to ride but can't afford a horse. Or the teenager who was on the brink of some serious trouble, who the Lambs helped turn around. When asked how many children they have, they say, "Just one, Matt. But he has about 100 adopted brothers and sisters.

If you were to sum up this beloved couple in two words, those two words would have to be "Horses" and "Kids."

Let's talk about horses first. "I can't remember not fox-hunting. I can't remember not riding," says Sally as she recalls growing up near her grandfather's 1,600-acre farm in Culpeper County. Meanwhile, way down at the Southwest end of the state in Craig County, a young David Lamb was on his way to becoming a 4-H All-Star. By the time he was a teenager, his stable door was covered in rib-

bons. In fact it was on a 200-horse trail ride that these two met. He was the trail boss...she a pretty school teacher who loved to ride. "The poor girl was blessed," apes David. She remembers him stealing a watermelon from her.

Between the two of them they have this horse thing pretty well covered. David rides Western. He walks and rides around all day in chaps, cowboy boots, spurs and a big black hat, taking tourists on trail rides, tending to the farm, transporting horses. Sally rides English. Three days a week, she dresses up in jodhpurs, full-length riding boots, a stock, tweed jacket, canary vest and leads the "hill-toppers" in the foxhunt. Being Field Master for a foxhunt is a thankless task, but she claims she loves it.

"East meets West," says Sally of their divergent styles. "We work together but we do different things," echoes David.

Their equine paths cross, however when it comes to cutting horses. This is a competitive sport where a horse must separate and keep one cow away from the rest of the herd. "I love that," says Sally passionately. "If I could go out and do one sport, it'd probably be cutting horses." David, meanwhile, is on the Board of the National Cutting Horse Association, and is President of the Virginia Cutting Horse Association. Oh, and one more thing. He was just named Horseman of the Year by the Virginia Horse Council.

It was way back when after that 200-horse trail ride that they formed a partnership. It was to be a marriage forged by their mutual interest. They moved in the dead of winter to an unheated farmhouse with enough land to support

55 head of cattle and the seven horses they had between them. Their first job: to teach English and Western riding at a Young Women's Christian Association camp for girls. Guess who did what.

It was only when they moved to this area that David witnessed his first foxhunt. "No, that's not my thing. I don't do that foxhunting stuff," he drawls laconically. Sally, on the other hand calls foxhunting an addiction. "It's incurable. It's a puzzle every day you go out." She loves to listen to the hounds run, maybe even see a crafty fox making his escape. She comments that the ban on foxhunting in England was

brought on by the foxhunters themselves being disrespectful of landowners. "The way we can prevent those things is remembering where we came from," she cautions.

Remembering where we came from...it's a recurring theme with the Lambs.

Back to the story. David had taken on a job managing a 4,400-acre farm out on Barracks Road. The owner died and an Orange County legend by the name of Bud Peters helped lure the enterprising couple here.

They bought an abandoned Civil War era home and 138 acres on Route 15 and set to work raising cattle and horses and teaching people to ride.

Today there are 70 horses at any given moment at Oakland Heights Farm. They lease another 360 acres or so from neighbors. Sally handles horse sales. Their one full time employee, Susanne Clifford does most of the teaching, and David takes care of everything else including shepherding 4,000 tourists a year on trail rides. Their son Matt runs cattle with his Dad and on his own, and has a thriving fencing business.

Does it get busy around here? "I don't even want to think about it," says Sally, who moves to a huge cluttered dining room table and starts clearing the answering machine of phone messages. The machine holds 30 messages and is full by lunch time; full again by evening.

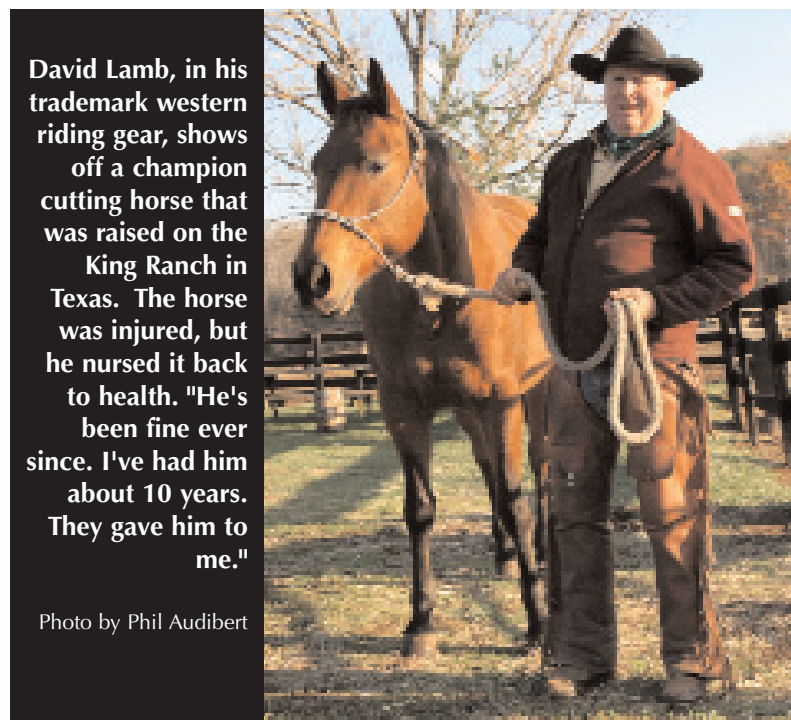
David sweeps his hand over the whole operation. "Today these horses might go out trail riding; I'll take a bunch of tourists from Japan riding. And tomorrow they might go foxhunting. Next week I might take them for the General Assembly ride for the Senators and Delegates. Today they might wear a western saddle. Tomorrow they might wear a hunting saddle. These horses are broke to do a lot of things for a lot of people."

They also run an equine old folks home...elderly horses who, in Sally's words, "have done their job; they've done it well. A lot of people just dump 'em, but we keep 'em."

But don't you dare dump your old crippled horse on them. "I feel everybody should take care of their own animals," says David, adamantly. There are 100,000 race horses in this country. When they break down or become too old, "What's going to happen to them?" he asks. "They



Contributed photo
Approaching the business from different directions, David and Sally Lamb formed a partnership raising and training horses as soon as they were married.



David Lamb, in his trademark western riding gear, shows off a champion cutting horse that was raised on the King Ranch in Texas. The horse was injured, but he nursed it back to health. "He's been fine ever since. I've had him about 10 years. They gave him to me."

Photo by Phil Audibert

Risk vs. Reward

"Risk management," snorts David Lamb as he plops a multi-page document down on the coffee table. "Dumb rules, I call them. And they really are dumb rules. If they came out here and walked in our shoes a little bit they would see that none of what they've written is reasonable to a prudent person."

We're talking about rules that say, for instance, you as a volunteer 4-H leader cannot conduct equine activities at your place if there is farm equipment such as a tractor "in the area," presumably because horses being around farm equipment is inherently dangerous.

"Dumb rules written by a group of lawyers who have no idea about the 4-H program or what we do. It's not about safety," he continues bitterly, "it's about lawyers who have creat-

ed this hysteria in the horse industry because of lawsuits. It's all about money. If it was about safety, you'd see cheerleaders wearing hard hats." He adds these rules do not apply to the Beef Club or the Swine Club...just the Equine Club.

The problem is if the Lambs do not adhere to these rules, then 4-H insurance will not cover them, making the volunteers, liable for law suits. If someone is hurt, they can sue the volunteer. "I'm not willing to do that because I have a business here," says David flatly. "As of this month, our 4-H group has officially disbanded because all the leaders have resigned because they're not willing to change the policy."

He has been trying to change it for two years now. "When a volunteer program I do

starts requiring stuff that's not in step with what the state law requires, then I have a problem with it. And they won't address it."

He cites the issue of protective head gear. New York is the only state in the union that requires that all riders under the age of 16 wear helmets in all equine activities. It is not state law in Virginia.

But one of the new risk management rules coming out of Virginia Tech mandates that all 4-H riders wear helmets.

David Lamb does not tell riders they must wear a helmet. Neither does he tell them not to wear a helmet. He has a waiver that every parent signs that puts this important decision in the hands of the parent where it belongs.

Helmets are not as safe as you might think. "I know of numerous injuries and deaths

because of the hat," says David explaining that low hanging branches can catch a child's helmet strap or brim and take him off the back of the horse. There is even some debate that Christopher Reeve's spinal cord injury may have been caused by the brim of his helmet hitting the ground first, forcing his head back. "It's questionable among the orthopedic people whether the hat was an advantage to him or whether the hat broke his neck," says David.

"The strap on these hats is a crucial problem that needs to be addressed," he continues, adding he would like to see helmet manufacturers design break-away chin straps. But in the meantime, he says, "It all goes back to the parent needs to make the decision, not me. Put all the responsibility on the parent. We as

volunteers shouldn't have to do that."

"If it was about safety, you'd see cheerleaders wearing hard hats."

--David Lamb