

League of Agricultural and Equine Centers  
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Profile: Brian Dygert  
General Manager WestWorld of Scottsdale

Brian Dygert has been the General Manager of WestWorld in Scottsdale, Arizona, since 2007, but he has been working toward this position his whole life. He has been around horses since the time he was born and has amassed a great amount of experience in many aspects of the industry. All of this combines to help him maintain West World's status as one of the premiere facilities in the country.

"My father was an equine and small animal veterinarian," Brian explains. "We lived on a small family farm. My grandfather had a dairy farm and Standardbred horses. He held the trotter record in the country in the 1950s as a trainer and driver." Brian himself preferred Quarter Horses and reining, competing at the AQHA Youth World Show and Congress Youth team tournament as a youth. Knowing that horses would always be a part of his life and career, he earned an AAS degree in Agricultural Science from Canton Ag and Tech, a BS degree in Animal Science from North Carolina State University, and an MBA from Colorado Technical University. Prior to coming to Scottsdale, Brian was the Manager of the Senator Bob Martin Eastern Agricultural Center, an equestrian and multi-use facility owned and operated by the State of North Carolina. He opened this facility in 1998.

"After undergraduate school my wife, Linda, and I got involved in horse show management and horse show production," he recalls. "This side of the business activity has led me to the point of my career that I am now deeply involved, because facility management is such a predominate focus in horse shows. Linda and I ran a 14 breed, twelve-day horse show for the Erie County Fair and Expo, which is the second largest county fair in the country. This particular show had over 800 horses, and we flipped--a complete move-in and move-out of all horses--the facility three times during the course of the twelve days. This particular show taught us a lot because we had to get very sophisticated with all the rules for all the breeds and disciplines we presented. This was a key time for building a strong business base for Linda and me in the horse show production business. We spent over ten years managing and producing shows on the East Coast, and we had direct experience dealing with predominately fairground management to rent their facilities for horse show use." . . . we had direct experience negotiating horse show rental agreements with predominantly fairground managements.

And it's not just the know-how of running a show that makes Brian so good at his job. Having lived and worked in every aspect of the horse show industry gives him unique perspective. He has gained a full understanding of the needs of each party involved in a horse show, from the youngest exhibitor to show management to facility management. "My ability to understand the needs of each stakeholder due to first-hand experience is a key skill I possess. I have been a breeder, trainer, exhibitor, and a professional all while making a living in the industry. I am an FEI judge and have been an instructor to judges

on all levels as well. Because of all this, I understand the decision making process of why horse show people on both sides do what they do." Brian holds officiating licenses for the NRHA (National Reining Horse Assoc) AQHA (American Quarter Horse Assoc), USEF (United States Equestrian Federation) and the FEI (Federation Equestrian International). Brian also teaches officials for licensing and relicensing for the NRHA, USEF, and FEI.

Brian's experience has taken him to the highest levels of the sport, including the World Equestrian Games and the Olympics. He was part of the management team that put reining into the 2002 WEG in Jerez, Spain as a demonstration sport.

For Brian, his job allows him to make the most of his skills, education, and experience all in one very fulfilling job. "What I find most enjoyable is having the horses and people arrive at my facility," he muses. "When people and their horses are riding and are happy and productive, doing their thing, and then the show starts, this is the most fulfilling. Add a beautiful day--Scottsdale has a lot of beautiful days--this is when it is as good as it gets for me. The challenge is to take publicly owned facilities and make them function and serve in the industry they are suppose to, such as horse shows and special events, and stay within the regulatory boundaries yet perform in a practical and productive format. There is also a lot of political pressure. We all have political pressure in every aspect of business and life, but real politics of elected leadership and the interaction of this within the event industry pervades the job every day."

### **WestWorld of Scottsdale**

Established in 1982, WestWorld of Scottsdale is a popular event facility among different breeds and disciplines, hosting 90 events per year--of which 70 are. The events represent 387 days of use and over 500,000 attendees each year. WestWorld covers 386 acres and contains 936 permanent stalls in 20 barns, 416 RV sites with water and electric and two RV dump stations, four show offices, six permanent restroom buildings with showers, and parking for over 11,000 vehicles. The nine arenas include two covered/open-air and seven outdoor.

Management is currently conducting a \$42.8 million expansion of the Tony Nelssen Equestrian Center. The project will expand, enclose and climate control the Equidome at WestWorld in order to accommodate events year-round with 300,000 square feet of climate-controlled horse show space. The 44,000 square foot South Hall can be used for stalls or vendors, and the 130,000 square foot North Hall can be used for stalls, arenas, vendors, or a combination of the three. There are 26 rentable assets in all, and the size and flexible nature of these assets allow for a large range of activities as well as running more than one event simultaneously.

WestWorld operates under an agreement between the City of Scottsdale and the Bureau of Reclamation and serves as a community asset.

### **League Footing Academy and Symposium**

Our trip to Memphis for the League Footing Academy and Symposium (Jan 18-23) is just around the corner. We have had great response this year. Space is still available and there is still time to register for the League Footing Academy and/or the Symposium. Just a few of the Center and Allied members signed up so far include:

Agricenter Show Place Arena  
Brackenridge Main Event Center  
Ellsworth Equine Center  
Expo Square  
Georgia International Horse Park  
Hardy Murphy Coliseum  
Horseshoe Park & Equestrian Center  
Jefferson County Fairgrounds  
Los Angeles Equestrian Center  
Oklahoma State Fair Park  
Synbiont Ag Wash  
Tennessee Miller Coliseum  
Tunica Arena & Exposition Center

We also want to thank our sponsors and vendors who will be at this year's Symposium:

Populous  
WW Manufacturing  
Tarter Gate Co.  
Big Ass Fans  
Polylast Systems  
Priefert  
B & T Shavings, Inc./greentree  
ThorWorks Ag

If you have not signed up to attend or sponsor this event but would like to, please contact the League Office at [crhorses@insightbb.com](mailto:crhorses@insightbb.com) or 859-887-0033.

See you in Memphis!

### **Considerations for Making Your Facility More Useable in Winter**

By Brian Dygert with LEG Up News

The winter months are the least active in the horse show world, leaving many facility managers in a situation where they need to either budget for this down time during the rest of the year or find a way to make the facility more useable during these months-- either by making it more attractive for horse lovers or offering it up to non-equestrian activities. We talked about marketing your facility for non-equestrian events in our [September](#) issue, and this month we will discuss some of the considerations you need to make if you want extend your facility's use into the colder months.

## **Facility Improvements**

Naturally, you must have the facilities that can support winter activity, but just adding a cover to an arena may not be enough. There will need to be more covered warm-up and grooming areas, places for vendors, and in some cases a place for cattle if this kind of activity is a large part of your business or local market.

If you can make showing at your facility as pleasant as possible in bad weather, your events will have a much better chance at success. People want to stay dry and warm in order to enjoy activity in an arena, so building the facility in such a way as to keep the wind and weather out is a must. A cover might keep the footing dry, but this will do little good if wind blows cold and rain in from the side and people can't enjoy the arena. Depending on where you are and how long you expect people to be in the facility for a typical event, heating may also be necessary. There should also be convenient parking with safe, navigable paths to get inside. For horse activities, a covered arena needs to be close to the barns or trailer parking.

## **Types of Activities**

The types of activities you market the facility for in winter is a large part of ensuring your success. Focusing on events that are relatively local is a key strategy, because winter weather makes it too risky to count on a significant amount of travel in most areas. Of course, if you are in a warmer region, your facility may be an attractive destination for those in colder climates, as long as they can get out and get back during winter storms. If participants would have to cross mountain ranges in order to get to your facility and the passes are not navigable in bad weather, that will have an impact on the ability those people have to attend.

You will need to do some market research to determine whether you can reasonably expect to attract enough business to justify the expense of putting on winter events. Get in touch with the winter show producers in your area and discuss what activity your area can support. What does your local community want to do in the winter? Clinics are great in the off months, because many people are working on moving up to new levels and events while they are on break between show seasons. This may also be a good time for play days, obstacle or cow practice, or schooling shows. Depending on the market, there may even be a desire for full-fledged rated horse shows. If there are no other events happening during the winter, find out why--it might just be because no other facilities in the area are able to put them on, but it could also be that there is no support for it in the market.

Finding a way to make your facility more useful and attractive in the off months is an excellent way to improve your bottom line, but this is not an investment to rush into. Do your research and plan carefully to ensure you make the right decisions.