

'NORTHERN LIGHTS'
AFFILIATE
COMES TO TOWN FOR THE
NVRHA CHAMPIONSHIP
EVENT.

--Susan Heyvaert



From left: Shirley and Terry Lund; Susan and Doug Heyvaert; Lyla and Rick Demulling represent the Northern Lights NVRHA affiliate

Some people are talkers and some are 'doers'... when I first met Susan Heyvaert it became immediately apparent that she was a doer. Susan's positive energy and enthusiasm in promoting the NVRHA has propelled our organization into yet another region of the country. With lots of support from her husband Doug, Susan has been the driving force behind the inception of the newest NVRHA Affiliate 'Northern Lights' which encompasses the states of Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. This group of folks is planning a big 2010 Season with events in several great locations. Read on to learn more about Susan's journey to the NVRHA...

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It all began innocently enough... a neophyte empty nester, a past showmanship/horsemanship competitor, a 4-year High School rodeo hauler... you get the picture. What to do? Trail riding seemed to be the easy way to go for the time being so off my daughter and I went to Prescott, Arizona, a week prior to the Buckskin Extravaganza Sale. They say never buy a horse for its color, but, hey, there were 80+ buckskins/duns for sale. Surely I could find the perfect one for me, right? Auctions are rarely the recommended way to buy a horse but after riding 16 horses in one day, my daughter and I whittled it down to two. We were just looking for one calm, 4+ year old, well-mannered, smooth gaited, gorgeous horse. Does that wish list sound familiar to any of you? After a nerve racking phone bid the next weekend, we were able to win the bid on Dillon, my daughter's pick. (She's always had an eye for a good horse, so I knew this would all work out!)

Fast forward to the Denver Stock Show, January, 2008. My husband and I were escaping the Minnesota winter and watching the AQHA Ranch Versatility Finals that had been advertised in one of my horse magazines. It sounded like fun and I just wanted to see what it was all about. As luck would have it, Henry and Donna Block were sitting behind us, avid supporters and participants of the newly formed National Versatility Ranch Horse Association. The classes in the NVRHA, as I would discover, were very similar to the AQHA's but with a different slant. NVRHA focuses on education preceding a competition and members compete against others of like abilities. I'd "been there, done that" with the show scene many times, leaving a show not knowing what I had done wrong when not placing, or for that matter, what the judge had liked when I did place!

I left Denver with a new-found enthusiasm and determination to jump head first into the NVRHA! By the time we boarded the plane to head home, I had contacted Jay and Gena Henson, a recommendation from the Blocks, and had my plans to send Dillon to Kansas... that's in the Midwest... it couldn't be too far away, right? (I can hear you all who know where Hugoton is chuckling.)

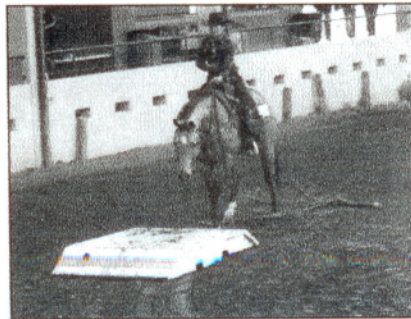
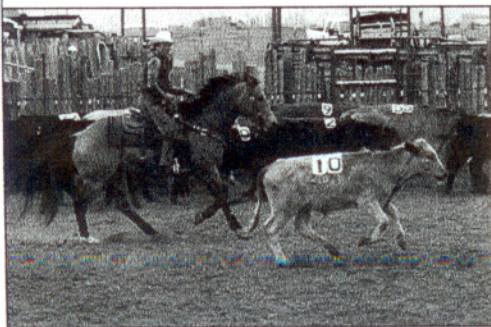
Events: There is conformation, trail, ranch riding, cutting, and working ranch. OK, conformation, trail, and ranch riding sounded pretty familiar, but I had only observed my daughter cut in High School Rodeo. Maybe I had absorbed SOMETHING from all those lessons I watched. Reining... now that was a new one. I'd better figure out how to do spins,

stops, circles, and flying lead changes. UH-OH, you have to ROPE too?! How is a middle age woman going to learn that? Slowly, very slowly...

Luckily, my new buckskin had some cow in him... some Peppy San Badger goes a long way. Over the past two years, with the help of talented NVRHA clinicians, various trainers, and my peers, Dillon and I as a team, have managed to progress along the NVRHA continuum. It's a challenging but rewarding journey for this empty nester. Not so much rewarding in the sense of winning, but rewarding in the satisfaction of learning new skills I never thought possible. The exhilaration of running and turning a cow on the fence brings a huge grin to my face... and shortness of breath! On the rare occasion I rope my cow, I am on CLOUD 9 way past bedtime and into my dreams, where I catch much more often!

As Doug and I are driving the 17 hours home to Minnesota from the National Championships in Colorado Springs, my thoughts are not of the event or how I did, as much as the friendships we have made through NVRHA. Two couples, Terry and Shirley Lund and Rick and Lyla Demulling, came from our area, all the way to Colorado just to watch the Nationals. Rick and Lyla have taken on the responsibility of Wisconsin Advisors and showed their support by bidding on a nice mare at the auction Saturday night. Terry and Shirley are preparing to put on an event in 2010. I suspect they and many others from the North Central Region will all be at Nationals next year with horses.

The memories I bring home are of a group of gracious and fun-loving people who offer their homes and stalls to us, openly give advice, and show patience as they answer my zillionth question. It is the people who set the NVRHA apart from any other horse organization. See you at the next clinic!



Susan Heyvaert and Starlight Dillon