

Mary Burke Strikes Gold

Area VII Eventers Shine at American Eventing Championships



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Finding shelter in an abandoned vendor tent Mary Burke, Amy Tryon, Tucker, Mary's sister Linda Pflug, & husband Richard Burke were able to watch the competition.

Competing in the Wellpride American Eventing Championships (AEC) has been one of Mary Burke's goals for the past three years. This year, she not only competed but came home the winner of the Open Preliminary Championships, with her horse Esprit-De-Corps, affectionately known as Tucker.

Mary had qualified for the event the past two years, but this year the stars aligned in her favor. The trip to Wayne, Illinois, where the championships are held, is a long 39-hour trek with a truck and trailer. And, with the cost of gas, lodging, stabling, and competition, it's an expensive journey as well.

Earlier this year, Mary and Tucker took second at the CCI long-format Event at Rebecca Farm, held in Montana, earning enough prize money to take the bite out of the cost of competing nationally. The pot was sweetened when Area VII Adult Riders awarded her \$1,000 in grant money specifically designated for the Eventing Championships. "The rider grant clinched it for me," Mary said. "It made the difference in me being able to go. I really want to thank Area VII for that."

Mary further cut costs by connecting with JoAnn Green, an eventer out of Lynwood, Washington. The pair were able to ride-share to help lower travel expenses.

"Things really fell into place when Amy Tryon (Mary's coach/trainer along with Lexi Lind) returned from the Olympics and decided to compete at the AEC as well," Mary said. Northwesterners Lauren Ferguson and Karen Laidley also competed at AEC, giving the Northwest a real presence. For the first time in the five-year history of the AEC, Area VII

was well represented.

"I think it's *very* important that Pacific Northwest riders compete on the East Coast," Mary said. "We have competitive riders and athletic horses. The pay-off is two-fold: First, organizers need to know we're here, to encourage them to hold national events on the West Coast, as well as the East Coast. They need to know there are enough West Coast riders to support national events."

"Second, we need more national and international level people to come to the Northwest to coach our more competitive riders. Amy Tryon, for example, has to haul to the East Coast," Mary said. "Clinicians and coaches need to realize there are other Olympic-type riders here."

"The more we go and show at a national level—the more we have presence," Mary emphasized "the more the event organizers will recognize the talent of Northwest riders and horses."

At the event, Mary maintained a focus on her own riding goals, which helped her from being distracted by the thought of riding with talents such as Darren Chiacchia and Leslie Law. "It helped you to raise the bar and ride to a higher level," she said. "But I am very strict about ignoring the competition. I don't watch them. I ask myself 'What is my goal? What is my plan?'"

Fortunately, Tucker competes well in bad weather, since the AEC was caught by the tail end of a hurricane, which dropped 12 inches of rain mid-way through the show. "On dressage day, the rain just wasn't stopping," Mary said. "From a competitor standpoint, I'd decided I wouldn't compete on cross-country if show management decided to hold it. By the second day, they had to close it. It's unfortunate, but it was the right decision to keep horses and riders safe."

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Lauren Davis Baker

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Mary and Tucker competed under adverse, and very Northwest-like conditions.

Mary and Tucker came in second after dressage, just nine-tenths of a point behind the leader. On stadium day, they warmed up in the rain. "There must have been two inches of water in my boots," Mary said. "I couldn't feel the saddle." Still, the pair put in a double clear round.

"There was an abandoned vendor tent by the competition ring that we wanted decided to duck into, to stay out of the rain and watch the rest of the competition," Mary said. "Someone said, 'You'll never get Tucker under the tent but he was so happy to be out of the rain, he didn't want to leave to collect his ribbons!'" In the same division, Lauren Ferguson and Mainway's Dry Ice took seventh place, keeping Area VII riders in the limelight.

JoAnn Green of Lynwood, Washington rode in the Novice Amateur Championship Division with her Holsteiner mare, Olievia. The pair stood in 9th place after dressage but had uncharacteristic stops on cross-country. "It was my first national level competition," JoAnn said. "Things fell into place a week before the closing date. I qualified to ride, received a grant from Area VII Adult Riders, and got time off of work."

Besides feeling tremendously grateful to Area VII for the grant, JoAnn notes, "My boss said it was a work requirement that I go. He said it was a once in a lifetime opportunity I shouldn't miss."

"The competition was a tremendous learning opportunity," JoAnn said. "Preparing, making the trip, showing within 24 hours of arriving there. It was a huge effort but people were really supportive—especially my trainers, Laura Rising and Linda Grandia from Hilltop Stables."

Karen Laidley of Redmond, Oregon competed in the Novice Horse Championships on her horse Snow Globe Effect. The pair put in a good effort against stiff competition, finishing in 24th position.

Amy Tryon took 2nd in Advanced with Leyland and 5th with Coal Creek in the same division. She rode That's Smart to 9th place in the Open Intermediate Division. Amy and Lauren Ferguson went on to compete in additional East Coast shows.

Mary admits, "It wasn't until we headed for home that I realized how big of an accomplishment it was, to compete at the AEC. Then it sunk in. I'm so glad we went!"

When all is said and done, Mary has nothing but praise for show management. "They came through under really adverse conditions—exhibitor and vendor rigs were sinking in the mud and having to be towed. They did a great job."

In addition to her horse, she credits her husband, Rich for unfailing support. "I can't thank the Area VII Adult Riders enough for making this possible," she says. She also credits Lexi Lind and Amy Tryon for their team approach to training. "That's one of the things that makes eventing special," Mary said. "That kind of flexibility and support."

About Mary Burke

Mary Burke and her husband, Rich, own Burkeridge Farm in Ellensburg, Washington, where Mary is available for lessons and clinics.

Mary rode hunters as a junior, before moving up to jumpers. She was the first Junior rider from the Northwest to win the Yakima Futurity with her Thoroughbred. "The professionals usually win that," Mary noted.

"I began riding dressage when I was 17 to 19, to improve my hunters and jumpers. It became my new passion." She rode with Linda Zang on the East Coast for two years, where she bought a Third Level dressage horse. The pair competed to Prix St. Georges, earning their FEI Bronze Medal.

When she returned to Washington state she met her husband, Richard Burke, at Cedar Downs Equestrian Center. (The Burke family owned the facility.) Mary then took 18 years off of riding to raise their son and earn a degree in Physical Therapy.

Six years ago she returned to riding and bought Esprit-De-Corps (Tucker). "It's a small world," Mary said. "When I taught dressage, Amy Tryon was one of my Pony Club students." When Mary became interested in eventing, Amy was the one to help her "figure out cross-country."

"When Amy is traveling, Lexi Lind steps in. Both help me with stadium and cross-country. Their support is awesome."

Indeed, Mary thanks all of her supporters along the way. Eventing is a tremendously difficult and expensive sport—the support of fans and enthusiasts is essential to help keep Area VII riders in the limelight.

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