

# Jennifer Dixon Has Made It On Her Own

by Leeann Mione

Like the Mary Tyler Moore show theme song from so many years ago, Jennifer Dixon embraced the challenge of making it on her own and she's done it well.

Dixon, owner of JL Dixon Stable (formerly Dixon Stable), has a great group of customers that have all experienced success in the show ring due to her efforts, as well as a thriving business in Atherton, California.

She's the girl-next-door but with steely resolve, loads of determination and a no-nonsense attitude. Those characteristics come in handy for her because being the barn manager of the Menlo Circus Club, with its three training entities (JL Dixon Stable, Round Meadow Farm and Breakwell Stables, Ltd.), and reporting to a general manager, board of directors and navigating a whole lot of bureaucracy that most trainers never face, poses unique challenges.

The Menlo Circus Club began in the 1920s when a group of children decided to create a circus to entertain their friends and families at the home of one of the families. They brought their horses and pets and put on a show. As word spread, the event grew and in 1922 additional land was purchased. The Menlo Circus Club was incorporated in 1923.

Dixon oversees all aspects of managing the barns and horses at the huge facility. The main barn has 66 stalls and the school horse barn holds another 12. She has a yearly budget and is in charge of ordering all the feed, bedding and supplies and also hires the instructors and caretakers.

The club is made up of members but those that she serves are both members and non-members. The club hosts barn parties, Christmas parties, horse shows, polo games, lessons and various activities with the variety of breeds that live there.

Jennifer, of course, had years to get to know what was entailed in the job of barn manager while married to Bruce Dixon. When he got sick in 2007, the responsibilities fell to her. It was daunting at first to be the person held accountable for so many different departments.

"I hadn't really done the billing for everyone before," said Dixon. "That took time to learn and the first couple of times I had to sit in front of the board of directors and give my financial reports, it was intimidating."

Anyone who knows Jennifer however, knows that while she might have felt somewhat intimidated, she never showed it. Whether reporting at weekly managers meetings or juggling the training and showing duties at JL Dixon Stable, Jennifer handles it all with ease.

"We're at a 40-acre facility in the middle of town," said Dixon. "That poses its own unique set of challenges for the Circus Club."

Her road to Louisville this year, was especially challenging. "The week before Louisville, we had 600 portable stalls set up in the middle of the polo field for the Menlo Charity Horse Show, a hunter/jumper



*Heather Buhr, Ethan Feiber and Jennifer Dixon had a great week at Louisville. Ethan finished as the Reserve World's Champion Of Champions in the Three-Gaited Pleasure Junior Exhibitor 13 and Under with CH A Magic Spell.*

show that benefits Vista Center For The Blind. In order to work horses, we had to ship them back and forth to the horse park at Woodside". Dixon and her staff would send four horses, work them in Woodside then truck them back and load up the next four. In addition, Dixon's assistant broke her shoulder two weeks before Louisville. Fortunately, Jennifer has a 'right-hand-man Antonio Mendoza who's been with her for 12 years.

Other factors were in the back of Jennifer's mind as she made preparations for the horses, owners and riders to go to Louisville.

"I was really worried this year about the heat in Kentucky", said Dixon. "Our horses in California spend the year in very moderate temperatures so when it's really hot and humid in Kentucky, it's hard for them to acclimate and perform to their best. The heat broke however right before Louisville so it ended up not really being a factor".

Yet another challenge for the west coast horses is the fact that class sizes on their circuit are rarely, if ever, as big as they are at Louisville. "It's almost impossible to teach a rider how to navigate through traffic before they get to Louisville".

She went on to say, "It's not that we don't have good horses out here, it's that we don't have the numbers". Many, many world's champions have called California or the west coast home and have earned titles on the green shavings despite the unusual challenges they face.

The trip by plane is expensive and often the starting and ending points are not ideal not to mention the schedule. Horses fly to and from Louisville when the plane is full, so sometimes that means having to leave or return on a different day than originally planned.

The trip by van is very long; 48-52 hours. If it's very hot, they lose a lot of energy and bloom on the trip. "Terry Konkle hauls for us and the horses traveled in box stalls on the van", said Dixon. "Terry drives to Kentucky straight through because if he stopped and unloaded, they'd need 24 hours to really rest. It just makes more sense to keep going than to unload and stay somewhere unfamiliar. The horses actually did just fine on the long trip. They were very comfortable since the heat wasn't so bad.

"I also have to acknowledge and thank farrier Rudi Beneke and veterinarian Dr. Stephanie Flowers. Their help was vital to keeping the horses in good order".

When asked how she deals with the three hour time difference and jet lag, it was obvious she deals with it like anything else. With no problem whatsoever and very matter-of-factly. "I set my clock to the local time and just don't think about what time it is back home".

She made the plan and she loaded the van. Ethan Feiber was headed for his first show in Freedom Hall. Like Jennifer, as it turned out, he also didn't have much problem dealing with the pressures of showing at Louisville in the junior exhibitor three-gaited pleasure and