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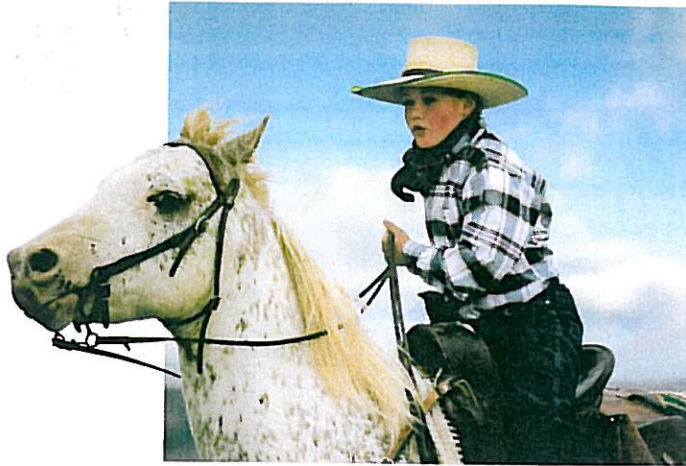
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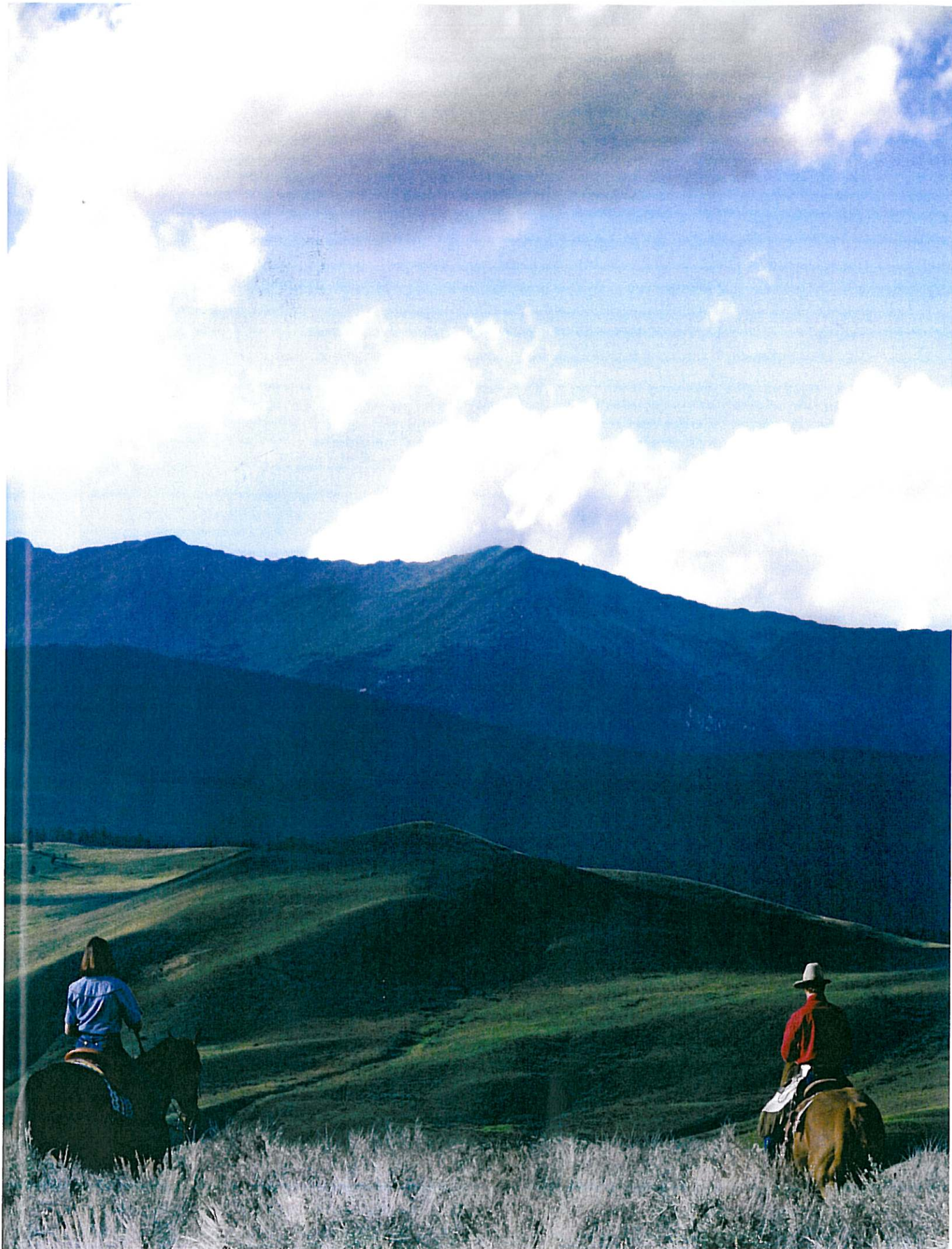
Horses, Of Course

EQUESTRIAN CENTERS ARE INCREASINGLY POPULAR
AS AMENITIES AT HIGH-END COMMUNITIES

It's a beautiful autumn afternoon at Las Campanas outside Santa Fe, New Mexico. ■ Pam Pierce, a resident of the community, simply can't wait to walk into the 30,504-square-foot Las Campanas Equestrian Center and visit her beloved horse, Dutch. She is welcomed by the staff and delights in the sounds of horses nickering in their stalls. She soon sits astride her steed and heads off for a solitary ride. ■ "The equestrian center was the lure for me to become a resident

STORY BY JOHN TORSIELLO

Rock Creek Cattle Company is a working ranch with 80,000 acres of property in southwest Montana, so there is plenty of room to ride (opposite page). And residents of all ages are able to get in on the riding fun (above).





The opportunity to ride horses is part of the New Mexico lifestyle and is what drew many residents to Las Campanas (above). The barn has 92 stalls, and the facilities include an outdoor show arena, and an equestrian members lounge.

at Las Campanas," says Pierce, who purchased a home in the community in 1992. "It epitomized what I thought life would be like in New Mexico. I credit the leadership of management and the staff with knowing how to create this environment. My favorite part of the equestrian center is the freedom to ride alone and experience the beauty of the land and the scenery of the mountain quietly."

Lawrence and Suzanne Becerra have lived at Las Campanas for three years and keep three horses at the community's equestrian center.

"The center was a large part of why we purchased a home here," says Lawrence Becerra. "We both love to ride, so having the convenience of a world class equestrian center was a definite positive for us."

Of course, Pierce and the Becerras are not alone in their love for horses. Such popularity is driving a growing trend toward the inclusion of equestrian centers at large-scale, high-end golf communities, especially in areas where the enjoyment of horses and riding is keen.

"Our philosophy is to continue to expand our amenities, and the equestrian component will be one important aspect that makes our community unique and appealing," says Bill Dougherty of Golden Ocala Golf & Equestrian Club in Ocala, Florida, located in the heart of the Sunshine State's horse country.

He continues, "First and foremost, our owners [the Roberts family] are big horse people and the sport is near and dear to their hearts. When the property was purchased the rolling hills, ancient oaks, and fencing was perfect for an equestrian component."

Golden Ocala is in the process of building an equestrian facility where horses will be housed, trained, and cared for. There will also be a riding



arena and equestrian services offered to members of the center. Dougherty says the 1,400-acre Golden Ocala footprint is ideal for the establishment of riding trails that will loop around and through the property.

"Our equestrian center will be substantial," he says, "with two to three dozen stables and riding rings. It will allow our residents to stable a horse here and enjoy riding on our trails. Many of our residents tend to be horse people, even if they enjoy other activities like golf and tennis. The equestrian component is a major reason why those types of people move to Golden Ocala."

Las Campanas boasts of an indoor riding and training arena, a barn with 92 stalls, separate facilities for another 100 horses, an outdoor show arena, a full-size dressage ring, a round pen, turn-outs, an equestrian members

Montana's Stock Farm was originally a place for breeding and training thoroughbreds, so it's natural that the community has an equestrian component. There are two barns with room for 24 horses and an outfitter who leads trail rides on the 2,600-acre property.



Golfers will be attracted to the Rock Creek Cattle Company by a Tom Doak layout. But the "cowboy experience" of horseback riding will also be a big part of the community's lifestyle.

lounge, and a dedicated staff of trainers and handlers. A number of programs and lessons are offered to members of all ages.

"The equestrian center was viewed as a critical aspect of the Santa Fe/Southwestern experience," says Nissa Kaseman, equestrian office manager at Las Campanas.

Residents with a golf equity membership or a social membership are allowed access to the center and can purchase the right to use a stall. Riding lessons are also an additional fee. Other residents can purchase a stall and boarding through the Equestrian Residency program.

"In our experience each member of our community is enthusiastic about one thing in particular," Kaseman continues. "Those who are avid golfers tend not to be avid equestrians and vice versa. That said, there are members who have horses who do enjoy golf or using the spa. Many of our equestrian members are wives of avid golfers."

The rambling 1,800-acre Ford Plantation in Richmond Hill, Georgia, prides itself as being an ideal venue for residents to enjoy "the sporting life." And, of course, that means horseback riding. The property's equestrian center offers full service boarding and training facilities with such niceties as electric fans and rubber mats in every stall. There are climate controlled tack rooms and a lounge as well as shower facilities, blanket and storage rooms, and 24-hour security surveillance. The center has a full-size dressage ménage with custom perma flex footing, a jumping arena with a complete set of jumps, and paddocks for daily turn-out. There is instruction and training for beginners to advanced riders.

The size of Ford Plantation allowed the developers to create a mix of forest trails, open meadow, dirt paths, and waterfront trails that meander pleasantly for a total of more than 12 miles.

"The Ford Plantation Club has always been promoted as a sporting club and not just a golf community," says Lisa Andrews, vice president of sales and marketing. "We wanted the equestrian center to round out the amenity package focusing on history, nature, and outdoor activities."

The club has 386 members, Andrews says, "and probably one-fourth of those individuals were drawn here for the equestrian facility and riding trails."

Resident and avid horse person Brenda Cotter concurs.

COURTESY OF THE ROCK CREEK CATTLE COMPANY



"Our family wouldn't have moved to The Ford Plantation without an equestrian center, trails, and a top-notch golf course. My husband, Kerry, and our son, Heath, enjoy golfing as much as I enjoy riding and the Ford Plantation offered both amenities."

Another classic sporting club, Greenbrier in White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, features one of the top new private golf courses in the country, called "The Snead," as well as three 18-hole championship layouts at the



Greenbrier Resort. But as we know, not everyone who lives in a golf community [the Greenbrier features a number of residential neighborhoods as well as the famous resort hotel] plays golf. Thus the construction of a modern equestrian center at Greenbrier that serves as the center-

piece for 10 miles of riding trails and a variety of riding rings. The club offers programs and lessons in hunt seat riding, jumping, and basic dressage as well as training in natural horsemanship principles.



"The sporting concept at Greenbrier is built around the idea that our members lead the sporting life—one that is active in many areas and in touch with nature and the family," says Brian Courtney, a spokesperson for DPS Sporting Club Development Co., which also manages The Snake River Sporting Club in Jackson, Wyoming, and other such clubs. "Golf and equestrian sports are large in that lifestyle."

The level of activity varies during the course of the year at many equestrian centers, with some owners bringing their horses north in the summer and south in the winter.

"We are very busy during the spring and summer months," says Nancy Johnson, stable manager at the Greenbrier Sporting Club. "We have many members who spend a month or two at their houses here during the summer and at that time they use the facility on a regular basis. We average about three to four lessons and trail rides per day during the summer, mostly catering to the children or grandchildren of our members. Winter, as you can imagine, is slow."

Courtney says homeowners at Greenbrier and Snake River take advantage of the myriad of recreational options available to them.

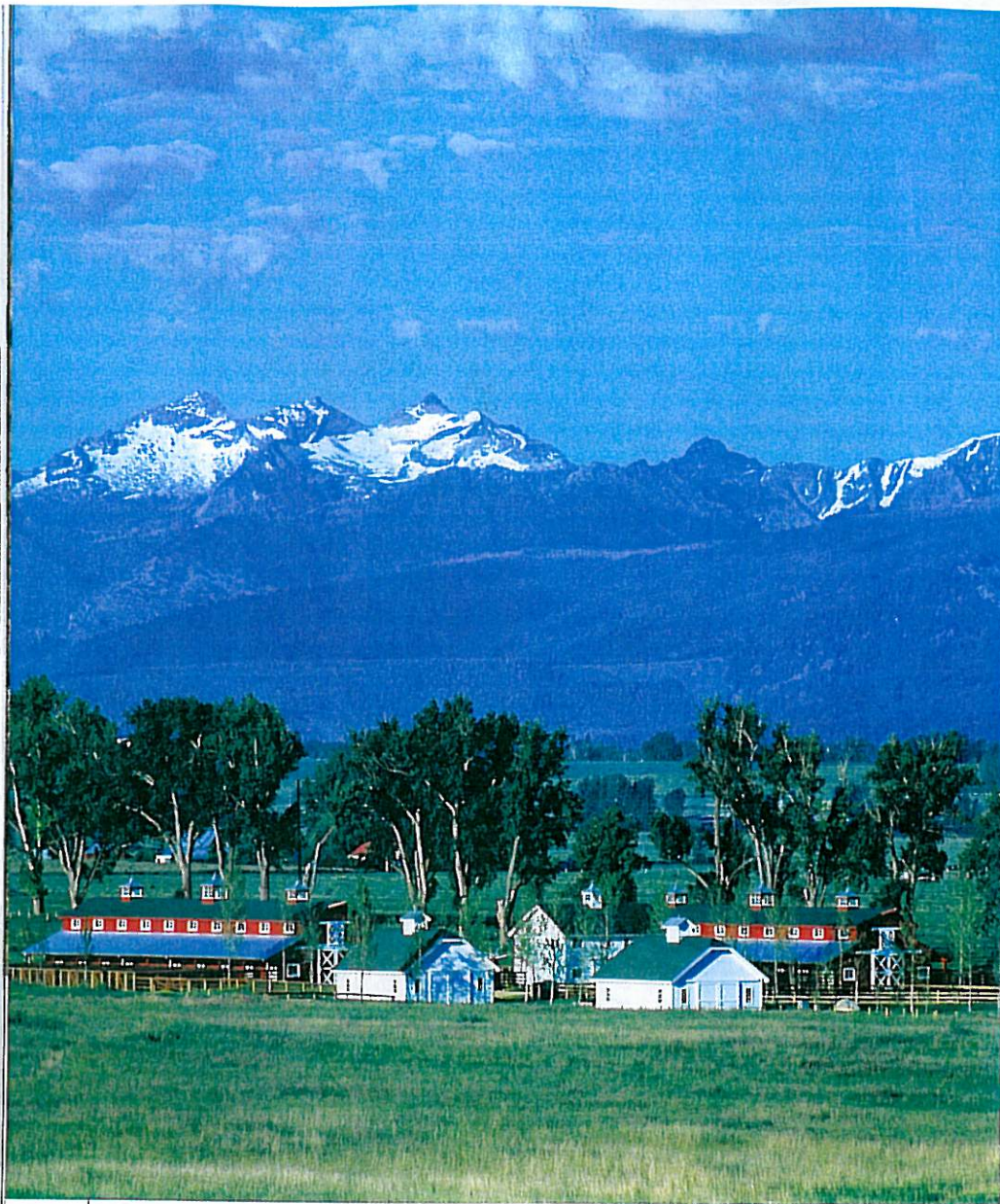
"The Snake River and Greenbrier sporting clubs have high levels of participation across all the activities we offer. While not every member necessarily rides horses, many use the equestrian facilities for their children and grandchildren on a regular basis."

Johnson says the main challenge for operators of golf community or sporting club equestrian facilities is "developing fresh ideas and activities for our members." She adds, "Many of the people who ride at the center do not ride any



Florida's Golden Ocala (clubhouse, top) is building a substantial equestrian center and will establish riding trails around and through the property. The Greenbrier is known for its hotel (above), but it also has a residential community with a strong equestrian component.

There is still cattle ranching going on at the enormous Rock Creek Cattle Company. So members on horseback (opposite page, top) might see real cowboys moving cattle when they are out riding. The equestrian center has not been built yet, but there are facilities for horses.



Stock Farm in Montana features horseback riding in addition to golf, fly-fishing, and other amenities. It's especially popular with families. Also popular for members and their guests is to take a ride to a picnic area, where the staff serves them a gourmet meal.

other time during the year. Learning to ride a horse can be frustrating and lots of kids want to gallop off into the sunset the very first time they sit on a horse. We tailor our programs so that our returning members can continue to have fun and try new things on our horses while remaining safe."

Horses are one of the first things a person encounters when entering Montana's Stock Farm. But what else would you expect to see in cowboy country?

"Especially in the summer and early fall you'll see youngsters and moms on horseback at Stock Farm," says Wes Spiker, a member and spokesperson for the

property that offers a number of activities for homeowners beyond world-class golf. "Horseback riding is part of Stock Farm because it's a part of our Montana heritage and the history of the ranch. When Marcus Daly founded this ranch it was to breed, raise, and train thoroughbreds, the best in the world. Horses are very much in our DNA."

Stock Farm, in addition to golf, fly-fishing, and other amenities, has two barns with room for 24 horses. The community has an outfitter who leads trail rides and there's also a small riding arena where members and guests start and end their rides before or after meandering around the 2,600-acres property. There are also hundreds of thousands of acres available for horseback rid-



ing in the nearby Bitterroot National Forest and the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness.

Spiker says that when members bring guests or extended family they often head out on a horseback ride to a picnic area where the staff “grills steaks and serves a gourmet meal.”

Also in Montana, Rock Creek Cattle Company, a massive new 80,000-acre private community and working ranch near the town of Deer Lodge, will feature a Tom Doak-designed golf course with an equestrian component as part of the overall plan.

“We have not built the equestrian center yet, but we do have six horses available to ride that we purchased for that purpose,” says Eugene Bonfilio, manager of Rock Creek Company. “It is very important that we provide horse riding to our members because most people do not have the opportunity at home to do it. Riding through the ranch and going

West Virginia’s Greenbrier Sporting Club has an equestrian center along with 10 miles of riding trails and a variety of rings. Programs and lessons are offered in hunt seat riding, jumping, and basic dressage.

places a car cannot take you is fun. Seeing wildlife and feeling like a cowboy is exciting, and there is no shortage of room to ride here.”

Indeed, open spaces are important if a community is to have an equestrian component.

“You are talking about needing a lot of land to be able to have a large equestrian facility and ample riding trails,” says Dougherty, “and land is not cheap. You probably won’t see horses in developments that have a high home density per acre. You don’t want trails too close to the golf course. Having stables, paddocks, and staff is expensive and it takes a substantial commitment from the owners to make it happen.”

But when all of that is in place, it’s a much appreciated amenity. ■

John Torsiello is Senior Editor of Fairway Living.