



Arcola Farm

The Realization of a Dream

Arcola Farm, situated on 50 beautiful acres in Stillwater, Minnesota is the realization of a lifetime dream for Kirsten Johnson who fell in love with horses as a young girl. With the unqualified support of her husband Ron, the enthusiastic participation of her four children – Hanna, Inga, Ada and Lars and the expertise of their trainer, Tom Bombolis and their coach, Nancy Becker, her dreams came to fruition in spectacular fashion at the Morgan Grand National in 2014. From small beginnings the family has worked incredibly hard to make this private venture a success. Kirsten has created an outstanding breeding program which can now boast world championship offspring. Each family member has a story to tell of show ring triumphs and favorite memories created in an atmosphere of mutual respect and appreciation for all that life at Arcola Farm has to offer. Read on to discover how the Johnson family and the Arcola Farm team have created something unique and special.

The story begins with Kirsten, who grew up in Owatonna, Minnesota with a mother who was 100% Norwegian and a father who was of Swiss/Scottish descent. She was, in fact, named after a Norwegian opera singer. Although Kirsten always loved horses, she did not learn to ride until she was 13 years old. Her dad agreed to buy a Saddlebred named Ginger for \$500 from a local lumberman, provided that Kirsten worked to pay for her keep. The mare fortunately came with a sulky, harness, a flat saddle, bridle and halter (all included in the purchase price), because Kirsten confessed she would have had no

idea what to buy. In order to pay for Ginger's care, she became a janitor at a small metal shop in her home town, working three or four times a week after school until she was 17. Learning to work for the privilege of horse ownership, she has instilled the same work ethic in her own family.

Having very little experience with horses, Kirsten was not aware of any limits to what she and Ginger could do. Ginger loved to drive so she took her through downtown and around the local parks as well as riding her on the trails. Soon wanting the challenge of showing, she bought a used saddle suit and began riding at open shows. It was here that she gained her first exposure to the Morgan breed. "I loved them with their thick, wavy manes and beautiful faces. They did everything!" she remembered. It was to be some time, however, before Kirsten owned her first Morgan.

Kirsten's family lived close to a big Arabian farm in the days when it was acceptable to show one horse in multiple disciplines. Ready for a new challenge, she began to show a beautiful, bay Arabian named Tary in western, park, in hand and showmanship. When it came time for college, however, she had to set the horses aside. It was to be twenty years before she returned to her early passion. Earning a degree in psychology, she then pursued another interest, attending the Minneapolis Technical Institute to perfect her skills as a chef. It was there she met her husband Ron, also a Minnesotan of Scandinavian descent, who was pursuing a career in the culinary arts.

After graduation, they were both recruited by the Ocean



The Johnson family is a close-knit group united by a common love of the Morgan horse. L-R Lars, Hanna, Ada, Ron, Kirsten and Inga.



Ada Johnson scored an impressive win at the American Royal last year, topping a talented field of riders in Saddle Seat Equitation 16-17 Years.

Arcola Farm, named for an historical village nearby, is situated on 50 beautiful acres in Stillwater, Minnesota.



Riding her equitation mount, King Lehr's Friar Tuck, Ada Johnson added to the family's outstanding Grand National record last year, winning the Saddle Seat Equitation Senior World Championship and the UPHA Senior Challenge Cup finals.

Reef Club in Key Largo, a high end resort with six restaurants. Assigned to the fine dining establishment, Kirsten was a broiler chef and Ron worked the sauté station. After Key Largo, the couple worked at several different resort locations, the last being in Aspen, Colorado, where Kirsten managed a bakery and Ron worked at the Snowmass Club.

Even though they enjoyed the lifestyle, the pull of home brought the couple back to Minnesota where Kirsten ran a bed and breakfast for three years before having their first child, Hanna, in 1992. While Ron was not a 'horse guy', he supported Kirsten's goal to own horses one day. First moving to a small farm in the country, they later purchased a lovely, fifty acre property in Stillwater, Minnesota, now home of Arcola Farm. Two years after Hanna was born, Inga came along, followed by Ada and Lars.

While the children were very young, Kirsten began to shop for horses. Attending the Minnesota Horse Expo, she acquired a list of Morgan farms and began to set up appointments, one of them at Bonnie Lee Farm. Given a warm welcome by the late Mona Bonham, she rode and drove several horses before Mona fed her lunch and spent the rest of the day telling her all about the Morgan horse. It was a wonderful introduction to the breed that has made Arcola Farm a well-respected private breeding and training facility.

Lyle and Colleen Wick of Hardwood Creek Farm in Hugo, Minnesota, were the biggest early influencers of the Johnson family. Kirsten originally met Lyle at a show, subsequently taking her first Morgan, North Pine Sequence, to Hardwood Creek for training. "He (Sequence) was a little bit rowdy -- round and chunky. Lyle didn't think he would be a show horse," Kirsten remembered. Sequence went home to be a trail horse and Kirsten acquired Hylee's La Fenicé (Frannie), a big, pretty, dark bay mare she showed in the hunter pleasure division under Lyle and Colleen's direction. "They are very family oriented," observed Lyle Wick. "They do everything together. Even when Lars was pretty small we would start at 2 pm on the weekend and all six of them would have a half hour lesson."

When the Johnson children needed a show horse, Lyle, who

once taught horsemanship at the University of Minnesota Crookston (where he met Colleen), remembered UMC Pomp and Circumstance, a world-class Morgan who had been part of the program. Knowing he would be the perfect horse for this family, he found him at a Saddlebred farm. "He felt like an old soul," said Kirsten. "Nothing bothered him and he was never offended by anything we did." After Pomp joined the show string, Ron surprised everyone by wanting to learn how to ride. Shortly afterwards, he also expressed a desire to show, beginning his career with Pomp in the western pleasure division. Now 22 years old, this wonderful horse has a lifetime home at Arcola Farm, named for an historic village close by.

Over the years Kirsten has shown many outstanding horses including Monnington's Titian, GLB Perfect Harmony with whom she won a Grand National Championship in Eng-



2014 was a stellar year for the home-bred Arcola Farm offspring. With Tom Bombolis leading, Arcola's French Press won the Futurity in Hand Yearling Colt World Championship. L-R Rachel Rogers, Kirsten Johnson, Tom Bombolis and Hanna Johnson.



Arcola's Perfect Gentleman (above) won a first world championship victory pass in a performance class for an Arcola bred horse last year as the Three-Year Old Hunter Pleasure Reserve World Champion.

lish Pleasure Ladies Amateur Mare, Rowenda French Twist, Orrwood's Special Edition, Arcola's Perfect Timing, French Kristoph and most recently, By the Bay. Every member of the Johnson family has shown at least one of these horses over the past few years.

Ron, who was still working as a chef when Hanna was a toddler, was never home before Hanna went to bed. Deciding a change of career was in order, he became a food stylist then later embarked on a new venture as an architectural draftsman. The changes allowed him more time with the family which included trips to Hardwood Creek to watch lessons. He also enjoyed more time around the family farm, maintaining equipment and taking care of the property.

"I didn't expect to become so involved with showing," Ron admitted, although he has always enjoyed the camaraderie and friendliness of the Morgan community. Beginning in 2003, primarily in the western division which he loves, he went from strength to strength, eventually paired with the outstanding Graycliff Rimfire, with whom he won, among other top awards the Grand National Western Pleasure Amateur Gentlemen's Finals in 2014, adding yet one more title to the impressive Arcola Farm total.

Ron has wonderful memories of show ring triumphs with his family, but he also treasures special moments of life on the farm. A Boy Scout leader, his troop visited the farm one day to work on their Animal Science merit badge. It was serendipity that halfway through their visit Tom and Hanna came to tell Ron a foal was being born. "These things usually happen at 2 or 3 in the morning," Ron observed. "I saw it as an intervention. I was just thrilled. We took them down five or six at a time to see the new baby and they stuck around all evening." In honor of the occasion, the new foal was named Arcola's Merit Badge. Now a yearling, he recently won the Grand Champion Gelding title at the North Star Americana show, presented by Ricardo Salinas.

The Johnson family loved being at Hardwood Creek but with more foals on the ground, all of the children as well as Kirsten and Ron riding and nine horses in training, they had evolved to the point where it made sense to do everything on their own property. They are very grateful to Lyle and Colleen Wick for their direction and support. "They were responsible for getting us started, for setting up our kids, our first world

championships. I loved their patience and demeanor, their sense of fun and their optimism. It's always a little scary to leave," Kirsten stated. "I really appreciated the foundation Lyle and Colleen gave us," added Ron.

While at Hardwood Creek, Ron and Kirsten made lifelong friends, including Kathy and Greg Smith who have since moved to Arizona. Getting together, cheering each other on and enjoying good food together, they still have great fun. One year at the AMHA convention, Kathy admits she and Kirsten got carried away when they bid on a trip to Monnington in support of the American Morgan Horse Institute. The two couples subsequently enjoyed a great trip to England where they became good friends with Angela Conner-Bulmer, with whom they have stayed in touch ever since. When asked if there were any other special celebrations they have enjoyed together over the years Kathy responded, "We celebrate everything!"

Also a friend since before Lars was born, Nan Wille-Cecchetti used to do all of the horse show buns for the Johnson girls when they were young. "With Ada it was like trying to put a bun on a bumble bee!" she laughed, remembering how much the little girl used to wiggle. "But she developed the intensity and discipline to succeed the way she did last year. They are a wonderfully caring and giving family," she added. "There has never been a time when we visited the farm that Kirsten did not have chocolate chip cookies for us." Nan, who has owned many world champions over the years, just leased Kiss and Tell to Arcola Farm. This lovely mare with three world titles is now in foal to Graycliff Tony.

Not only did the Johnson family acquire a great foundation at Hardwood Creek, there were many show ring triumphs during the time they were in training with Lyle and Colleen Wick. These included the Western Pleasure 13 and Under Reserve World Championship in 2006 for Inga with UMC Pomp and Circumstance; the 2007 Western Pleasure 13 and Under World Championship with Park Place Dominion, also ridden by Inga, and a top ten world championship win for Kirsten and Monnington's Titian in ladies English pleasure the first year she showed him. In 2008, Ada won the Walk Trot Classic Pleasure Saddle World Championship with Rowenda French Twist (Toby).

In addition to growing the Arcola Farm show string, Kirsten had committed many years to breeding, crossing Frannie with



Lars Johnson (14), the youngest of the Johnson children, enjoys showing with his family and making a little extra money cleaning shoes and boots.



As a teenager, Kirsten gained her early show experience with a beautiful Arabian named Tary. She would purchase her first Morgan many years later.

Whammunion in 1992 (Arcola Farm was officially established in 1994). In 1993 she acquired Purest Adrenalin, a Trophy/Eclipse bred mare with a long neck and a big trot. Breeding to High-Y Black Tie, Kirsten was very excited to see what she would produce. Sadly, the mare colicked and died. Another heart-wrenching tragedy occurred with Kirsten's favorite horse of all time, GLB Perfect Harmony. This beautiful mare passed on the first day of the Grand National show in Oklahoma City, right before Kirsten had planned to retire her from the show ring and continue her life as a broodmare. Fortunately, they had pulled embryos while the mare was still showing so they were able to raise some of her babies, one of them being Arcola's Perfect Gentleman, one of their young super stars.

While the loss of these two outstanding mares was devastating, the breeding program continued to thrive and produce successful offspring. Through the study of bloodlines and careful selection, the Arcola program has evolved into what we saw in 2014 – three home bred world champions (Arcola's French Press, Arcola's All Spice and Arcola's Perfect Gentleman), who earned their place in Morgan history.

In general, the objective was always to breed horses that were structurally sound, beautiful and personable. "I don't care what they do as long as they do it well," Kirsten emphasized. "It breaks my heart if horses are in the wrong division. It can lead to health problems. I want to get good homes for all the horses we raise. I want them to be trained and go on to lead wonderful lives, even if they never show. I want to spread the word about the Morgan breed everywhere, including 4H and open shows. I love them because they can be a high-end show horse or the best trail horse ever. Anyone can enjoy them."

When the horses moved home from Hardwood Creek, Chris Nelson came on board for a year as Arcola's trainer, continuing the Johnson family's winning record. With Rowenda French Twist, Ron won the Classic Pleasure Driving Reserve World Championship and Ada won the Reserve Grand National Classic Pleasure Saddle Championship 11 and Under. At the same time Hanna, who

was 'all about saddle seat equitation' was training in California with Gerry Rushton and Stacy Hennessy in California and Kirsten sent a mare to Mike Carpenter in Massachusetts. For two years, the Johnson family was commuting between the East and West coasts. Kirsten and Ron began to question the time spent on travel, even though they were enjoying great show ring success. It was time to find a new trainer for Arcola Farm after Chris Nelson moved back to North Carolina. In 2010, they met the ideal candidate in Tom Bombolis, a well-respected trainer from the Saddlebred world.

Tom grew up in a Greek family firmly established in the Chicago restaurant business. His parents had no interest in horses but Tom was drawn to them as a very young boy. He worked at a local stable in the suburbs until he was old enough to drive, then was fortunate enough to work for some great Saddlebred trainers, including Chet Nichols, Bill and Nancy Becker and Glenn Werry, for whom he worked at Glenmore Farm in Illinois for over 20 years. While Tom had never worked with Morgans, he loved working for private family businesses so when his friend Jay Wood asked him if he would be interested in interviewing with Arcola Farm, he welcomed the opportunity, wisely observing, "a nice horse is a nice horse."

Kirsten knew she had found the right person to take Arcola Farm to the next level. "He had a lot of questions. When I asked about working with western horses and hunters he said 'I can't wait!' We worked very well together from the beginning. He got it right away and he adores By the Bay and Rimfire." Kirsten is thrilled with how well she and Tom 'click'. They have the same goals and philosophy regarding manners and respect towards both people and horses. "We have rarely differed on things," she observed.

Kirsten describes Tom as being very methodical by nature, yet patient and flexible with a horse. "He doesn't want to rush the curb bridle. He introduces it slowly. They will have the best mouths. At the end of the day he wants to have the happiest horses. There are no short cuts. He's also open to new things and willing to talk to other trainers."



Kirsten Johnson, with whom the Arcola Farm story began, won the New England Regional Ladies English Pleasure Saddle Championship with GLB Perfect Harmony who Kirsten describes as 'the most beautiful mare I have ever seen'.

Tom was responsible for bringing Nancy Becker to Arcola Farm as an equitation coach for the Johnson family, knowing she would make them the best they could be. A renowned saddle seat equitation instructor, she brought them to the pinnacle of success. "I truly can't say enough great things about Tom," Nancy stated. "He has been a wonderful family friend for more than 35 years. He is the complete horseman as well as an excellent instructor; and that is what I believe has made him the perfect fit for Arcola Farm. He has great compassion and understanding of a horse. As a



Arcola's breeding objective is to produce horses that are structurally sound, beautiful and personable. Two excellent examples are Arcola's Marked Man and Arcola's Perfect Gentleman.

true horseman should, he listens to a horse. He has the ability to treat each horse as an individual which is something I truly believe he learned from my husband, Bill, many years ago when he worked as assistant trainer at our farm in Matthews, North Carolina. Tom and the Johnson family are the perfect match, both on a personal and professional level."

Katie Mair, who trained King Lehr's Friar Tuck at Sterling Training Center for Annie Thurber before he was purchased for Ada Johnson stated, "Tuck had to go to a special home or he wasn't going anywhere!" Tom was the first person she called. Originally meeting at the Grand National show in Oklahoma, they were both stabled in Barn 6 where Tom would bring the Arcola horses past the Sterling aisle to work in the outdoor arena. They became friends right away, learning they have a similar approach to training, especially with respect to the care and maintenance of older horses. "I have a lot of respect for Tom and he's a genuinely kind person and a really decent guy," Katie told us. "Tom really listened to what I had to say so I knew he would take care of Tuck the way I did." Katie also knew Ada was the right rider for Tuck and was thrilled beyond belief to see them win a world championship title.

John Hufferd, the former trainer of Orrwood's Special Edition, had a similar experience with Tom when the Johnsons bought this lovely performer for Arcola Farm. "He's a great guy and I give him a lot of credit – especially for the way he works a western horse. He's doing an amazing job. I have the ultimate respect for him as a horseman."

Asked about the difference between training Saddlebreds and Morgans, Tom responded, "I approach all horses the same and they all learn the same, up to a point. Once a Morgan knows its job, it generally learns it for life. Sometimes all you need to do is keep them healthy and happy." The biggest difference he has found is with the hunters. "Some naturally carry their heads higher or lower. You just have



Arcola's Perfect Timing, now five years old, is a lovely example of the quality offspring found at Arcola Farm. "This is one of the big reasons I love being a breeder", said Kirsten. "the beautiful Morgan foals!"

to find the sweet spot for each individual. I had to adjust my way of thinking for a different look. It's a work in progress. And we have just started scratching the surface with the Arcola bred horses. They are committed to raising the nicest horses they can possibly have."

Completely invested in Arcola Farm and the Johnson family, Tom celebrates their success and admits to getting emotional when they do exceptionally well. "You show every step of the way with them," he stated. There have been many special moments for Tom during his time at Arcola Farm, described below by the family mem-

bers who have done so well under his direction.

All of the Johnson family has learned a great deal about horsemanship from Tom. Hanna, who has chosen to make horses her career said, "I credit Tom for making me the horsewoman I am today. I am extremely fortunate to have someone who, for the past five years, took the time to teach me and stood by me even if I didn't get it right the first time or the hundredth. I've learned so much from Tom and it goes beyond horses or lessons. He's honestly made me a better person and I can't thank him enough. But as serious and passionate as he is about his job, he can be very funny and silly at times. My favorite stories of him are about teaching me and Ada boxing moves we can use on each other. Sometimes he makes everyone in the barn memorize the latest movie lines he's obsessed with. This can range from Fargo to his personal favorite – Paul Blart Mall Cop!"

Ada is very appreciative of both Tom and her equitation coach, Nancy Becker. "Tom and Nancy are very special to me. I think Tom is an amazing horse trainer. He can turn a hard horse into a rideable horse – I have really seen him work miracles."

She explained that Tom can get a horse to respond without looking as if he is doing anything.

Each family member has their own story to tell and favorite moments to share but as a group, they came together to succeed in spectacular fashion during the 2014 show season and they are well on their way to achieving a similar record in 2015. Kirsten saw the results of her breeding program come to fruition last year, when the Futurity in Hand Yearling Colt World Championship was awarded to Arcola's French Press and the Futurity in Hand Weanling Reserve World Championship went to Arcola's All Spice. With Hanna on board, Arcola's Perfect Gentleman took the victory pass as the Hunter Pleasure Three-Year Old Reserve World



Ron Johnson, who surprised the whole family by wanting to ride and show, won the Grand National Amateur Masters Western Pleasure Section B in 2014 riding Graycliff Rimfire.



2014 was a banner year for Arcola Farm with multiple Grand National and World Championship titles. Coming together for a celebration photo after Ada Johnson's Saddle Seat Equitation Senior World Championship ride were L-R Ron Johnson, Kirsten Johnson, Hanna Johnson, Pat Bombolis, Tom Bombolis, Ada Johnson, Rachel Rogers, Erin Gunderson, Inga Johnson, Nancy Becker and Bill Becker.



The Arcola team gathered for an impromptu photo last year after Ada's win in Saddle Seat Equitation 16-17 Years with King Lehr's Friar Tuck at the American Royal last year. L-R Hanna Johnson, Ada Johnson, Nancy Becker and Tom Bombolis.

Champion, also winning \$10,000 in additional prize money as a result of the AMHA World Morgan Futurity Auction. This was a first world championship victory pass for an Arcola bred horse and it marked a significant beginning in Hanna's adult career. "It was huge because not only was it my first victory pass at Nationals, but it was a horse that I broke and trained with Tom's help," Hanna told us with pride.

In the equitation ring last year, it was Ada Johnson's turn to shine in the spotlight, adding to Arcola Farm's amazing record. Riding her superb equitation horse, King Lehr's Friar Tuck, she was one of an elite few to win the Saddle Seat Senior Equitation World Champion's title as well as the UPHA Senior Challenge Cup World Championship Finals.

Late this fall Hanna will become the new assistant trainer at Arcola Farm. It is the beginning of a lifelong dream. "Ever since I was very young I never understood why anyone would want to do anything but train horses all day!" Hanna explained. "I considered going into the fashion and even the film industry, but it was all focused on whether I could make enough money to still ride and show horses. Riding and showing have always been my passion so it was a 'no brainer' to make it my career."

There have been other talented people who influenced Hanna before Tom joined the farm. When the Johnson family was in training with Lyle and Colleen Wick at Hardwood Creek, she was inspired by watching their daughter, Alyssa, in the show ring. "I remember her showing in walk and trot and I told my mom I wanted to start showing because of her. Ever since then Alyssa was the older sister I never had and she's been a huge influence on me. She's a great friend and competitor!" Hanna declared.

Beginning her career in the walk-trot division with Pomp, she showed primarily in the English pleasure and classic divisions, riding a wide variety of horses including Monnington's Titian, Rowenda French Twist and Bad Company but Sequence was still her favorite horse. Later, when she was in training with Gerry Rushton and Stacy Hennessy in California, she would practice her equitation patterns with him. "I adored him even though he refused to set his head," she remembered. Now her favorite horse is Arcola's Perfect Gentleman, their home bred hunter, who gave her that all-important victory pass in Oklahoma last year as well as a big win at the Gold Cup regional show as the UPHA Hunter Pleasure Classic Champion. "He's so fun because he lights up in the show ring and it's not uncommon for him to start 'flagging' himself and snorting the first time we work him at a show. I think he has as much fun as I do showing which makes it pretty special."

When looking back to the times she has enjoyed most at

Arcola Farm she said "Arcola Farm is on a hill, and before it was a training facility, I always loved when my sister Inga and I would get on our favorite backyard horses and we'd go on a trail ride and go to the bottom of the hill. We would then gallop the horses as fast as we could back to the barn. The funniest thing was when we got old enough to know better, whenever we were at the bottom of the hill and we turned around, our horses wanted to run back to the barn. Whoops!"

Inga Johnson, the second Johnson daughter, studying nursing at Winona State University, wishes she had more time to show, especially missing the structure of equitation. She enjoyed an outstanding junior exhibitor show ring career, especially in the western disciplines, winning the Western Pleasure 13 and Under World Championship in 2007 with Park Place Dominion, the first time she showed him in Oklahoma City. "I couldn't believe it!" she remembered. "I was so young and it wasn't expected. We were so 'in sync' and I wasn't nervous. My horse was always my best friend."

Inga also won the coveted Western Seat Junior Equitation World Championship in 2009; then in 2013, her final year as a junior exhibitor, she won the Junior Exhibitor Western Pleasure 16-17 Grand National Championship with Graycliff Rimfire and bested a big field with Orrwood's Special Edition as the Western Pleasure Youth World Champion. The world championship win was a great achievement but also a bittersweet memory because Special Edition was already sold. "When I won, it was very emotional," Inga admitted. "I missed him so much."

Inga cherishes her time at Arcola Farm and the partnerships she has forged with her horses. Some of her favorite memories have not come from the show ring but of warming up in Arcola's beautiful outdoor arena. "I would warm up at the extended lope and close my eyes, trusting the horse. With the wind blowing in my hair it was the best thing ever!" As much as Inga loves western, she would still like to show a high-stepping performance horse sometime in the future.

Ada, the youngest of the Johnson daughters, has just begun her studies at Drake University in Des Moines. Looking back to achieving the pinnacle of success as the Senior Saddle Seat Equitation World Champion and winner of the UPHA Senior Challenge Cup finals riding King Lehr's Friar Tuck she reflected, "When I was called as the world champion last year I went into shock. I knew I had a great class and a great pattern but still one can never be so sure of how the judges are going to place a class. It was still a surprise to hear my number called first and I can confidently say it was one of the best moments of my life. I celebrated with my family, friends and trainers. They were the ones who made it possible for me to even compete at a high

level.”

Other major career highlights have been winning with Tuck at the American Royal against a talented group of Saddlebred riders, ‘nailing’ her patterns in the AMHA saddle seat medal finals with Bonnie Lee Future Flaire (Kolby) last year, and winning the equitation championship at the Gold Cup Regional show this year. When not riding horses, Ada enjoys spending time with the Arcola foals. “I love the babies when they’re really young and will snuggle with you and I also love watching them grow and ‘morph’ into a show horse. It’s really cool to see the transformation of some of our promising young horses. Also training and riding the three-year olds always keeps you on your toes and is a really good way to become a better rider.”

Nancy Becker has been a key factor in Ada’s success. “She’s very good at describing things to me in a way that I can easily comprehend and then do,” Ada explained. “She is also not afraid to try something new. She has come to the farm many times and totally changed a saddle around or moved the bridle. She really wants what’s best for me and she’s willing to be creative to make it happen. She also knows the little things that can separate the top from the middle. Without either of them (Tom and Nancy), I would not be the rider I am today.”

Making this journey with the Johnson family has also been a rewarding experience for Nancy. “Being a part of the Arcola team has been a great privilege for me. It has been a joy to coach the entire Johnson family and to watch their progress in so many areas. Ron and Kirsten are two of the most kind and generous people I have ever met. They are wonderful supporters of the entire Morgan industry as well as great competitors. Hanna, Inga and Ada have all become accomplished horse-

women in their own right and Lars has matured into quite the good, young horseman. Of course, we all know saddle seat equitation is so near and dear to my heart and I would be remiss if I did not mention the wonderful journey Ada has taken us on over the past few years; now holding the title of the reigning Saddle Seat Equitation Senior World Champion. I am so very proud of each and every one of them and their accomplishments both in and out of the show ring.”

Lars, the youngest of the Johnson offspring, has a unique show ring style. With every pass he seems to be totally relaxed and having fun. Beginning with Pomp in Walk-Jog Western Pleasure he progressed to English Pleasure and Classic Pleasure Driving with Bad Company and French Kristoph (Kris), his favorite horse who will fire up in the ring but is laid back and fun to be with at home.

Lars, who plays football, enjoys photography and belongs to Ron’s Boy Scout troop, admits he does not spend the same amount of time with the horses as do his sisters. Nevertheless,

he enjoys being around the farm, helping his dad with maintenance chores, knowing there is always something to be done. “It’s an experience not every kid gets. We do it as a family – it’s our thing,” he stated, fully expecting to be involved as an adult. “It’s a beautiful place for taking photos,” he added.

A fact that became more than evident as we wrote this piece was the high regard in which the Johnson children hold their parents. They are extraordinarily appreciative of all that they have in life. “I’ve learned a lot about where passion can take you,” said Hannah, who believes she would be a completely different person without horses in her life. When we independently asked Inga the same question, her answer was almost identical – also believing she would not be the same person without the experiences Ron and Kirsten have provided. Hanna added “I’m so blessed to have parents that have encouraged us so much. I also admire my mom’s passion for breeding and how much she loves watching the babies grow up and start showing. It took a while for us to get to this point but her perseverance is something I will always appreciate.”

Inga appreciates her parents most for the opportunities and the support they have always given her. “Without them there would be no Arcola Farm. Having horses in my life has shaped me into the person I am today and that is all thanks to my parents. They have also supported my education and taught me that I can be whatever or whomever I want when I grow up; and to always reach for success, even if it doesn’t come the first time around.”

Lars,

who has a love for the farm but a more laid-back approach to showing, appreciates his parents for their support in whatever he does. “Mom and dad are always there for you and they are always very straightforward with me.”

Ada added, “My parents have been my biggest supporters, from the very beginning. They have taught me so many things but I think the most important was to go after something I want. They never really pushed me to ride horses but the option was open.” When Ada began riding they would ask her what she wanted to do and for a long time she rode in multiple divisions, never really focusing on one discipline. “When I finally came around to wanting to do saddle seat equitation they made me work hard for the first real horse of my own (Kolby). I then worked super hard for the next years with their support. Every day after school and long Saturdays at the barn made me the person I wanted to be and gave me great drive to become the best I can be. I really wanted to be successful and they taught me that if I have a dream, to go after it and never look back.”



Tom and Kirsten shared a special moment in the ring last year when Hanna and Arcola’s Perfect Gentleman won the Three-Year Old Hunter Pleasure Reserve World Championship.

The Johnson children are not the only people who appreciate Kirsten and Ron's qualities. "They are very honest and hard-working," Tom observed. "When you need something you get it. They are very trusting. We have a solid working and personal relationship. They are just a good, Christian family. Ron will do anything to accommodate people and they are very caring and attentive to the farm help." Tom has also been the benefactor of their culinary skills. "Kirsten is a wonderful pastry chef. She knows I love cheesecake so on my birthday she came down to the barn with a cheesecake she had baked topped with fresh strawberries." Ron and Kirsten carry over their enjoyment of good food to the horse shows, always on the lookout for new and interesting places to eat.

Their giving nature also extends to the local community. They raise funds for the We Can Ride therapeutic program as well as hosting a weekend ride and a fundraiser for the Minnesota Special Olympics equestrian team who give a presentation at the farm to guests at the open house. "We also act as an 'open farm' for all of the youth in the area," Kirsten told us. At any time there may be a young person studying for the Youth of the Year program, a Boy Scout troop visiting or a young animal lover who wants to observe, learn and just be around horses.

A long-time supporter, board member and formerly the President of the North Central Morgan Horse Association, Kirsten is now the Secretary, responsible for the newsletter. Lyle Wick, now Vice-President observed, "She's one the few breeders left in this area. She loves Morgans and is the 'big drive' behind keeping things going in Minnesota." Arcola Farm and Hardwood Creek both host annual clinics for the NCMA and have opened their barns to the farm tours arranged for the AMHA conventions held in Minnesota.

Ron and Kirsten know they cannot be successful without a great team. Rachel Rogers takes care of the horses, packs for the shows and generally acts as a right hand for Tom. Ricardo Salinas does a great job handling the babies and Rebecca Pierpont takes care of the farm while they are gone. They are also fortunate to have an outstanding veterinarian, Brian Dahms, who has been with Arcola from the beginning. A key person in Tom's world, he is highly skilled in both the technology of breeding and the care and maintenance of show horses, especially the 'veterans'. He is a good friend who is there for the team in both good times and bad.

Their farrier, also essential to their continued success, is Jeff Couch, who worked with Tom before he came to Arcola.

Traveling from Wisconsin to shoe their horses, he is able to look at x-rays and determine what needs to be done. "We have the Trifecta with our vet, trainer and farrier," said Kirsten appreciatively. "They all get along and respect each other. When they are all in the barn at the same time I can hear them having way too much fun!"

Finally, an unsung hero and an unofficial part of the team is Tom's wife, Pat. Always at the shows to encourage and support, she is willing to lend a hand wherever needed, including set up and tear down. "She cheers us on and gets just as excited as we do," said Kirsten. As well as being constant companions at the shows, Tom and Pat enjoying traveling to see Pat's children Anna, Jennifer and John and their seven grandchildren. "I'm just content to be a homebody," said Tom. He loves to be at a barn which he describes as "as lovely a place I could think of to finish out my career. I'm fulfilled at the end of the day."

When not working around the farm or helping to run the Wenger Corporation, a company that makes products for both the performing arts and athletics, Kirsten loves to put her expertise as a cook to good use and enjoys gardening. Ron enjoys his architectural drafting business (Arcola Design) and the camaraderie and hospitality he finds among the Morgan community, who, it should be noted, made Tom feel very welcome when he came to Arcola Farm. He takes great pride and pleasure in driving the rig across country and managing the logistics of getting to the shows. Of the family's total immersion into the horse world he reflected, "It adds richness to life. I have no regrets."

In finding out more about the unique characteristics that have made Arcola Farm successful, we find a wonderfully close-knit family, all gifted horsemen and women united by a common passion. Supported by a first class team, they have built on their success over the years to produce an enviable product. From small beginnings many years ago, Arcola Farm has evolved into one of the most highly respected private training and breeding facilities in the country. We applaud the Johnson family and the extended Arcola Farm team for their outstanding achievements and wish them very good luck for the bright future they so richly deserve!



Tom Bombolis shared a quiet moment with Arcola's Cyd Charisse.



Inga Johnson, now studying nursing at Winona State University, enjoyed a stellar junior exhibitor career. Her wins included the Western Seat Junior Equitation World Championship in 2009 and the Western Pleasure Youth World Championship with Orrwood's Special Edition in 2013 (above).