



Indian Creek Farm in Columbia City, Indiana sits on a picturesque property. Russell Quilhot had a clear plan of what he wanted his farm to look like and worked diligently to bring his dream to a reality.

A VISION, A PLAN, AND THE TEAM THAT MADE IT WORK

BY KENDRA PEEPLES

The successes of Indian Creek Farm, from its exhibitors and horses to the breeding program itself, have made their mark on the Morgan industry. In recent years, especially, the farm has been publicly lauded with numerous achievements both in and out of the ring while those who make up the sum of all parts have also received individual accolades that speak to the overall quality of team Indian Creek.

Just a couple years ago, Indian Creek was inducted into the AMHA Breeders' Hall of Fame in 2015, in addition to having been chosen as the People's Choice Breeder of the Year in 2015. Megan Buckley, granddaughter of the owners of Indian Creek,

Russell and Jeanette Quilhot, was selected as the People's Choice Junior Exhibitor of the Year for 2015. Trainer Shanna Gish received the AMHA Professional Award in 2015 by a vote of her peers. In 2016, Gish also received the esteemed Cecil Brown Memorial Sportsmanship Award, which recognizes individuals who exemplify sportsmanship in and out of the show ring. For those who already knew Gish, it seemed only fitting that she be recognized with these accolades. For those who had the honor of having her as their trainer, it was a chance for them to share how the attitudes of the Quilhots and Gish helped to make their dreams a reality.

Indian Creek's commitment to excellence in breeding, showing, and client relations has

existed for well over two decades. To understand how Indian Creek got to where it is today, one must go back and look at how the people and ideas came together to form the award-winning team based in Columbia City, Indiana. Trainer Shanna Gish grew up in the state of Oklahoma and caught the horse bug early on in life. Her grandparents, Raymond and Leona Lawler, owned a cattle farm in Kingfisher, Oklahoma.

"I was always fascinated with my Granddad's horses so he would let me sit in front of him as they rounded up cattle, and he eventually allowed me to ride on my own as long as I promised to not point them at a cow," Gish laughed. "Once they knew I was serious, they paid for me to have riding



Russell and Jeanette Quilhot's lengthy commitment to breeding and the betterment of the Morgan horse was recognized during the Super Convention in 2016 as they were inducted into the AMHA Breeders' Hall of Fame.

lessons near my house in Tulsa since it was a four-hour trip between us. I rode all types of horses but mainly stock type, and we focused on the speed events."

Gish's first personal horse was a Pony of Americas. These ponies were popular in her neighborhood and she remembers riding between houses after school with her friends, attending local saddle club shows, and even riding in some parades. Gish's introduction to the Morgan breed was somewhat of a fluke. She was 9 or 10 when her father purchased a three-year-old black Morgan mare from Marlene Peterson named Queens Ransom.

"She took me from that first ride to my first trip to the Grand National in 1981," Gish said. "I really didn't ride her too long before we were fortunate enough to have Jonalyn Evans-Gwinup move to town to train for Kenny and Helen Sterns and their daughter Jane Sterns-Cashel. Jonalyn took me and Random in under her wing and started me on the path to where I am today."

Under Gwinup's expert guidance, Gish learned how to ride all of the seats, as well as drive. "She is an

amazing person, trainer, instructor, and role model with both the horses and in life," Gish praised. She went on to also ride and train with Tom Harkins and Chet Sowle while Gish still lived in Tulsa, so her days became full to the brim with horses. "They kept me organized and out of trouble mostly," Gish said.

During her high school days, Gish was introduced to Stan and Paulette Bodnar at Merriehill Farm. Gish first met this powerhouse training and breeding duo when she attended the North Star Morgan Horse Show. She was then invited to spend some time on the farm in Marengo, Illinois which ultimately turned into 11 years of riding, showing, training, and "learning how to really work." Stan and Paulette shared all of their skills and knowledge with Shanna from grooming to training to instructing and even to office work. While Gish was still riding with Merriehill, she completed her education at the University of Kansas and graduated with a major in Journalism and Business Communications.

"I knew that I wanted to make my career in horses somehow, some



Shanna Gish was awarded for her commitment to Indian Creek and the integrity of the training business in 2016. She is pictured here receiving the AMHA Professional Award at the Super Convention.



way, but never had a thought of training and instructing professionally," Gish explained. She went on to start an advertisement/public relations company that specialized in equine advertising, design, and horse show publicity and promotional materials called Gallop Communications. Gish made Chicago her company's home base so that she could continue to spend time at Merriehill. "I just couldn't get out of the barn, though, she admitted. "Working with the horses was just simply where my heart and head were."

While Gish was working with the Bodnars and running Gallop Communications, Kurt Hufferd was working with the Quilhot family at Indian Creek. Kurt was first introduced to the Quilhot family through his brother, John. Kurt started officially working as the trainer for the Quilhots in the fall of 1990. Kurt clearly recalls his first trip to the farm.

"The shell of the barn was there, but the apartment and office were still not finished," Kurt recalled. "There was no fencing on the property. There were no trees. The ponds were still being dug. Everything was under construction. Russ put me in his car and we drove into the farm, and he explained what all he was planning to do. I thought, 'Wow, that all sounds great,' but I didn't honestly think all of it would get done just because the plans were so big. But by gosh, he did everything he said they were going to do."

When it was all said and done, 160 red oaks were planted that line the driveway, a bullpen was added in the back, a barn for equipment and hay was built, and Kurt even added his own input as the fences were installed. "It grew up around me, so it holds a special place in my heart," Kurt explained.

Kurt was utilizing Gallop Communications for Indian Creek's advertising needs, so he and Gish were already fast friends. She came to the property one year when the Quilhots hosted an auction, and Kurt told the Quilhots, "You can't let her leave." In the words of Gish, "It became apparent that we all needed each other in one way or another."

Shanna joined Indian Creek in 1997 and has not stopped working her magic for the past 20 years. When she joined the team, she was able to help teach the Quilhot's grandchildren to ride as well as put her office expertise to work. Thus began a two-decade career of helping to continue the Quilhots' dream of breeding champions, training young horses, and keeping Indian Creek running in tip-top shape.



Cache was purchased for Sarah Quilhot's final junior exhibitor season and has gone on to be a cornerstone broodmare for Indian Creek Farm with a long list of world titled offspring.

Early on, Hufferd and Gish were charged with finding the perfect mount for Sarah Quilhot, one of Russell and Jeanette's grandchildren, for her last year as a junior exhibitor. What they would ultimately choose for her would become a broodmare that formed the foundation of their breeding program. At the time, Cache was only four years

old and the competition in the English pleasure junior exhibitor division was steep. Kurt had previously worked with the mare, so he suggested that the Quilhots consider buying her despite her still being a junior horse.

"The junior exhibitor world championship in 2001 was as stacked as I've ever seen," Kurt reminisced. "Deep, deep class. Sarah made the workout and we considered that a win. I told the Quilhots, 'The best thing about this is that she'll be a good broodmare down the road.' I had no idea that she'd be as good as she is."

Cache has been the dam for such notable Indian Creek foals as Warbird, American Girl, Cachet, Nathan Hale, Cool Brees, Recordbreaker, Mastermind and Tomahawk. Between all of her progeny, they have earned a stunning 15 World Champion, 12 Reserve World Champion, and 13 Grand National Champion titles. Cache is sired by DBA Street Talk and out of the mare Fleeting Heart giving her Serenity Masterpiece on her top and bottom lines.

The golden cross with this mare seems to be connected with HVK Bell Flaire. The Bell Flaire bloodlines extend into their frequent breedings to Mizrahi and the Mizrahi son Graycliff Tony GCH. They have also experimented with Futurity French Command. Warbird was sired by French Command, and they also utilized a French Command son, MEM The Patriot, to produce Nathan Hale. One of Cache's world titled sons born in 2013, Mastermind is sired by Quilhot's homebred



During their first year together, Kurt Hufferd and Indian Creek had a wildly successful Grand National. In 1991, Kurt drove Indian Creek Payday (pictured here) to win the Park Harness Two-Year-Old World Championship as well as driving Indian Creek Jade's Joe to win the Pleasure Driving Two-Year-Old World Championship.



Quilhot grandchildren, David and Megan Buckley posed following Megan's win aboard her grandparents' Indian Creek High Stakes at the 2017 Gold Cup Regional.



Indian Creek Highlander, sired by MEM Sambuca and out of Long Acres Broadway.

Long Acres Broadway has served as the second foundation broodmare of the breeding program. She is sired by Tug Hill Whamunition and out of Mantic Mardi Gras. This grand mare won the World Champion Mare title in 2003, 2004, and 2005. She has borne show ring stars such as Cipriani, Miss Margaret, Broadway Joe CH, Bellagio, Lady Elizabeth, Belle Haven, Highlander, Herald Square, and Triple Play. Her progeny have won 4 World Champion, 11 Reserve World Champion, and 11 Grand National Champion titles to date. Though Long Acres Broadway and Cache are not bred similarly, the Quilhots have seen success by crossing similar breeding lines with both mares. With Broadway, they have bred her to MEM Sambuca, a double Futurity French Command bred stud, several times, as well as to HVK Bell Flaire and Mizrahi.

It has always been a group decision when it came time for the Quilhots to start breeding their mares. Kurt and Shanna would research as much as they could on their own to see what kind of crosses typically worked and what type of horse they tended to produce, then they would present their findings and suggest a

stallion for the Quilhots to breed to.

Kurt remembered, "Every time, it was a group decision. Through trial and error, you will learn how to do it. It was a group effort more than anything else. They gave us free reign to do our job, and they really just love the breeding. As we went more and more, Russ always had the goal to breed one of his own studs to his own mares, and we finally got to that point. They have always had very specific breeding goals that we worked to reach."



A three-time World Champion Mare, Long Acres Broadway is also a foundation of the Indian Creek Farm breeding program and dam of several notable champions.

That first cross with Indian Creek breeding prefixes on both sides came when they decided to cross Indian Creek Highlander with Indian Creek Belle Vista, leading to the birth of a filly named Indian Creek Brite Light foaled in 2016.

The Quilhot's focus on teamwork and clearly defining goals is something that is shared throughout the barn. Patricia West and Bill Shean have been sending their homebred horses to Indian Creek for nearly a decade, and it was their first interaction with Kurt and Shanna that solidified that partnership.

As Pat explained, "We were searching for a trainer that specialized in English pleasure horses for our first homebred, very promising two-year-old Harlequin colt, Stoney Point Harlequin Romance. A good friend who had been in the breed for many years, Allyson Hughes, suggested Indian Creek and Kurt and Shanna."

Pat specifically remembers being impressed after just one phone call with Shanna. She had asked Pat about her specific goals and expectations as owners and exhibitors in addition to asking more about "Harley" himself. "I remember getting off the phone and thinking, 'These are trainers who are looking for relationships with their clients and are concerned about a fit, not



just for the horse, but also for the client,” Pat explained.

The same story seems to be told time and time again when you speak with the clients of Indian Creek. Chelsee Dalcourt first met Shanna and Kurt in 2012 at the Grand Nationals. Dalcourt’s family was one of Morgan enthusiasts throughout and she had decided to look for a horse to buy. Her grandmother Rita Lawler and cousin Keeley Guenther thumbed through some of the sales pamphlets around the fairgrounds, and Dalcourt could not believe her eyes when she saw that SpringMill Ring Of Fire was offered for sale. She had long been a fan of “Cash,” and after mustering the courage to inquire about him, she met pleasantly with Kurt and Shanna between classes and would go back later to speak more and try him out. Ultimately, it was a match made in heaven that Dalcourt describes as “pure magic.” This pair would end up earning the Reserve Champion title in the Youth Park Saddle Finals and then the Reserve World Champion title in the Amateur Park Saddle in 2013.

There is another breeding program that makes its home at Indian Creek. Patti and John Huse of the SpringMill Morgans were also introduced to Gish via Gallop Communications. They met again when the Quilhots hosted that very auction where the Quilhots first met Gish. The Huses were asked to bring their great stallion Nostradamus for a special presentation. By

1998, the Huses had moved all of their horses to Indian Creek for training. The SpringMill breeding program was also inducted into the AMHA Breeders’ Hall of Fame in 2014. Like the Quilhots, the Huses had a clear set of goals with their breeding program: to breed world champions, to own world champions, and to personally shown and win a world championship. Patti beamed and said, “And we have accomplished all of that with this team.”

Though Kurt left Indian Creek following the 2015 show season to move to Oklahoma and start his life with Kelly Kraegel, there is not an ounce of bad blood between him or anyone still at Indian Creek. Shanna and Kurt have remained close friends and often bounce ideas about horses off of each other via a phone call. Gish said that she was incredibly nervous with Kurt leaving the farm. She credits her dedicated staff as being her “saving grace” during the transition over the winter of 2015-2016.

“Those are not boots that are easily filled and will certainly never be replaced,” Gish said concerning Kurt Hufferd. “His move was about as smooth and friendly as you could go through, and we just tried our best to carry on like he was here. I have to give our clients a lot of credit for sticking with us through that transition and believing in me enough to stay with Indian Creek when there are so many other wonderful and talented trainers out there, too.”

It is that kind, understanding nature

that Gish’s clients and friends throughout the industry admire about her. She is the type of trainer whose good nature is well known. The clients of Indian Creek gush about her commitment to everything and anything that the barn needs. Sometimes that need is of a local child who dreams of showing but is not positioned to do so financially. Gish will come up with a lesson horse that they can show in academy. When Pat West came to visit the farm for a practice ride, she was surprised when the Huses presented her with a cake from a baker in Indianapolis followed by a dinner with the Quilhots and Gish in her favorite restaurant in Fort Wayne.

When West let Gish know that her dream was to win an equitation class in Oklahoma City, Gish set to work to get Pat prepared. Then in 2015, Pat and WRR Ace In The Hole were crowned the reserve national champions in the Grand National Western Seat Adult Equitation 36 & Over Finals.

When it was time for Megan Buckley to move back in to Pepperdine University for her sophomore year, it was Gish who flew all the way to California to help her move in. It is this type of action that best demonstrates Indian Creek and Gish’s devotion to clients and friends.

Perhaps the words of Chelsee Dalcourt exemplify it best. She said, “Shanna hasn’t just made Indian Creek a fabulous Morgan horse training facility; she’s created a destination that people want to be a part of and a team mentality that makes this place so great.”



Team Shanna was on full display at the 2015 New England Regional Morgan Horse Show where Shanna Gish earned the reserve champion title in the Trainers Equitation Challenge.