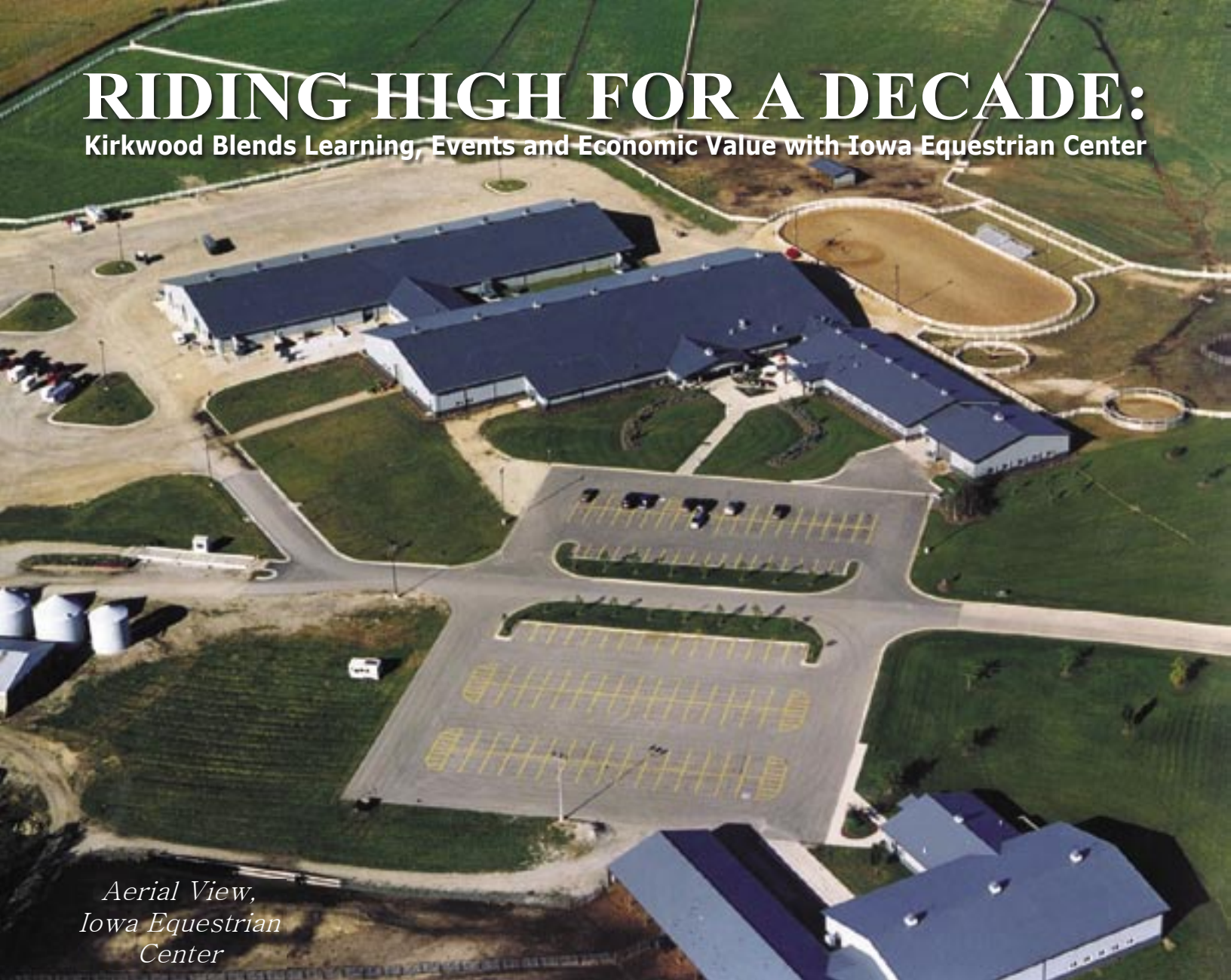


RIDING HIGH FOR A DECADE:

Kirkwood Blends Learning, Events and Economic Value with Iowa Equestrian Center



*Aerial View,
Iowa Equestrian
Center*

[Cedar Rapids, Iowa] Patrick Klatt loves to sing the praises of the Iowa Equestrian Center. There's only one thing better—when someone else does the praising for him.

"That's the best, when people who know what we do and the care we put into it tell others. You can't beat it," he says.

Klatt has no shortage of examples. A favorite is from early 2009, while he was attending a symposium for horse events venue managers in Oklahoma. His eyes twinkle as he sets the scene.

"We had this dinner event with people from all across the country. At our table were promoters and managers from Kentucky, Texas, California, North Carolina, Colorado and Louisiana," Klatt recalls. "This was a veteran crew, lots of background there. They heard I was a first-timer at the event, so they asked me about our center at Kirkwood. I told them some facts and what we do in a year. Then Dale Barnett jumped in, the horse complex manager for the North

Carolina State Fair. He had been to the center as a judge, and he spent the next several minutes singing our praises. So there I was in Oklahoma listening to a guy from North Carolina boast about our facility in Iowa, to people from all over. That was rewarding!"

The Iowa Equestrian Center is a relatively rare project for both communities and colleges in the U.S. It weaves college course work, community involvement and high-level events into one busy, welcoming facility. The center is a prominent addition to the campus of Kirkwood Community College, commanding a ridgetop on the south side of the Cedar Rapids campus. Hundreds of students in the school's Ag Science programs use the center for class work each week, learning riding, horse husbandry and the business behind the equestrian life.

Each Thursday afternoon the center undergoes a regular transformation from

classroom and lab into a fully equipped events facility. This weekly metamorphosis is in keeping with the plans and support of the center since its 2001 opening. The idea was born from discussions with many eastern Iowa horse owners, breeders and others. Encouragement from the equine community led Kirkwood officials to do research on the idea of a larger, shared facility that would meet both educational and industry/recreational goals.

Dan Wiese is a long-time eastern Iowa marketer and researcher who conducted the market survey and research in 1998 that led to the center initiative. He calls the Iowa Equestrian Center a "great success that grew out of genuine support" in the region.

"In my business it's rare to do the upfront research, predict the outcome and have it come to pass. Our study said it would be full from day one and stay that way for the foreseeable future. The results and public awareness show that has been

the case. The [equestrian center] was really a fascinating project. Also, it was pleasant to deal with the horse people, both those inside Kirkwood and outside folks as well," Wiese recalled.

After an encouraging round of fund-raising from the equine industry and many area ranchers and breeders, the center was constructed in less than two years and opened in the first days of 2001. A key private challenge grant of \$1 million was quickly matched, with another \$250,000 Vision Iowa tourism grant taking things to the construction stage.

True to those research projections, the center was 'in the black' ahead of schedule, with a calendar chock full of shows, clinics, workshops and other events almost from the start. The size and quality of the facility is a key draw for attendees, with a 100 x 200 foot indoor arena with seating for 300 spectators. Adjacent stall barns can accommodate more than 200 animals, with other nearby buildings providing spill-over space for the biggest shows.

The balance of educational and recreational goals is evident at the Iowa Equestrian Center, beginning with its weekly rhythm of activities. Classes in Kirkwood's Horse Science programs take precedence Monday through Thursday. Student riding, grooming and other skills-based activities are the rule in the center most of the day. Veteran Horse Science Technician Nellie Wilson says the center has plenty of practical additions to teaching.

"Having the classrooms right next to our stalls and stables is really practical. When we are in class discussing anatomy or other topics, all we have to do is walk out



Reining - A popular spectator sport at the IEC



A Hunt Seat Class portion of an Arabian Show in the climate-controlled indoor arena of the IEC

and show them the real thing. Also, having our facilities all under one roof makes it practical all year long, much better than the spread-out facility we had before. It's also helpful to have lots of well-known clinicians coming through that our students can meet and learn from," Wilson said.

Equine Program Coordinator Megan Green has embraced the depth of knowledge visiting the center over the years. "There have been some great guest lecturers from breed organizations all over the country who have shared in our classes. Plus, the wide range of events gives our students a lot of exposure to breeds and types of careers they would not have the chance to know otherwise. It all comes to us. Everything from 4-H and FFA events to the National Buckskin Congress has been right here to learn from," Green said.

The Iowa Equestrian Center turned 10 in the first days of January, 2010. For Klatt, Liz Lindner, Center Assistant, and Zach Schaller, Operations Coordinator, a moment's pause is about all they have for much of any typical year. Since opening in January, 2001, the center has seen a crowd of visitors and participants Klatt estimates at 'conservatively, a quarter million' people, coming from all directions. He recalls seeing license plates on trucks and trailers from as far away as Virginia, Texas and New Mexico at various recent events. Klatt also points to show visitors across the border in Ontario, Canada as evidence of the center's wide interest reach.

Also key to eastern Iowa supporters of the center is its economic impact. Klatt says the research projections of \$2 to \$2.5 million are "conservative" when he considers cash flows in 2009. "When I think of the lodging, meals, feed store and veterinary business, the fuel and revenues to Kirkwood, we can look at \$3 million easily," he said.

And, true to those early predictions, Patrick Klatt smiles as he pulls up a listing for the center's 2010 plans. There is barely a weekend open until near the end of the year.



Tie Stalls; one of the options available to riders and/or competitors at the Iowa Equestrian Center