

EQUICENTER

DE SANTA FE

GETTING READY TO RIDE!

From 2003 to 2009, the Grand Prix de Santa Fe was a very successful charity horse show created by equestrians Guy McElvain and Brian Gonzalez. Now, after six years without a show, the world-class city of Santa Fe is getting ready to jump into the show ring with the newly acquired Equicenter de Santa Fe and a three week hunter / jumper show scheduled this summer from July 22nd through August 9th, with the finale being the reincarnation of the \$50,000 Santa Fe Grand Prix.

The original partners of the previous horse shows, Guy and Brian, are back along with Double J Management



Guy McElvain, co-founder of the Grand Prix de Santa Fe, is a grand prix rider who competes year-round from Colorado to California. Photo by Sharon McElvain

members Janet and Larry Hischer and Tim and Jodi Johnson, who together purchased the 137-acre Equicenter de Santa Fe, that was also previously known as the Santa Fe Horse Park, a popular place for local polo teams.

The property was shut down and taken over by a bank in 2009, due to financial and legal problems with the owner. Brian Gonzalez approached the bank about buying the property, and the investment group closed on the property mid-January of this year.

Guy McElvain is no stranger to Horse Connection, having served as an on-air event correspondent for HC's media division, as well as competing as a grand prix rider. HC caught up with Guy between classes at HITS Thermal where he and the McElvain family are showing throughout the winter circuit.

HC Congratulations on the purchase of the Equicenter de Santa Fe and the return of horse showing in Santa Fe. Did those early shows that you and Brian Gonzalez put together give you a good indication that the support would be there for a summer horse show series in Santa Fe?

Guy: "Thank you and yes, the town gave us great support for those early shows, from the political side of Santa Fe to the residents, businesses and the tourists, they loved having this type of event in town."

Geographically the town is really well suited for this because we're centrally located to Texas, Colorado, Arizona and California, and when you consider how far people have to travel to horse shows, with the exception of Denver and Parker, Colorado there is really not much out there as far as shows. With the extended horse shows that we are planning, and the planned amenities you find at "A" shows, having hunters and classes for amateurs, it's appealing to the people

because of the destination. Everybody loves Santa Fe."

HC The inaugural horse show kicks off on July 22, 2015 and will run through Aug 9 for three weeks. This follows the Colorado Horse Park's six-week Summer in the Rockies series. Was this your intention, to get horses and riders to show in Santa Fe after Colorado?

Guy: Yeah, that show is a good draw as you know, and the Colorado Horse Park just sold so there is some renewed excitement there that the shows will continue and some relief that it will remain a horse facility, so we're hoping that we can make it easy for people coming to Colorado to then come to Santa Fe and show before going home. I think this gives us the best chance to be successful rather than try to have our shows before the summer circuit in Colorado. We're going to give it our best shot so we'll see how it works."

HC With Colorado Equestrian Partners LLC taking over the Colorado Horse Park and your group opening the Equicenter de Santa Fe, the southwestern US suddenly becomes a big destination for horse showing this summer. Do you know any of the Colorado partners and have you talked with them about your shows?

Guy: "I don't know of them personally but people I know speak very highly of them so I'm looking forward to getting to know them and hopefully between the two of us we can provide another alternative to summer horse showing in the United States."

HC What plans do you have to make the Equicenter's shows enticing to draw in the out-of-staters to show?

Guy: "First off, we want to take advantage of everything that Santa Fe

has to offer, and if we're successful, to be supported by the city and the community so that the show can be a little more affordable for the exhibitor and the prize money can be a little better. We also want the show to have more for the exhibitor to do instead of the usual "cookie cutter" classes. Of course we'll have the grand prix and the hunter derby but we want to focus on making sure that the amateur has fun because it's the amateurs that really help drive the shows. The pros can go wherever the money is, but perhaps the amateur can come show in Santa Fe and combine it with a family vacation. Santa Fe is a great tourist destination known for the opera, fly fishing, art, golfing, spas and recreation, and those activities would be great amenities to anyone showing here. It could be more than just going to a horse show; it could be a family vacation."

HC What build-outs are underway at the Equicenter in order to get it ready for the first shows this summer?

Guy: "Well, the property hasn't been used for a while so we need to make some repairs, build more stabling, we're going to have to put in the arenas and install modern footing, and put together the rings, so we have a lot to do. We're going to do everything we can to make this a world-class facility and that will take steady development, which we are committed to do."

HC Will the Grand Prix ring be grass?

Guy: "Yes, we'll have all-weather footing for showing during the week, and on Sundays, Grand Prix days, we'll run everything on the grass."

HC What other disciplines or shows would you like to see at the Equicenter?

Guy: "We want a facility that can accommodate any and all horse shows.

There really isn't a modern equestrian facility in the state. The dressage show people are really excited about this as well as the local hunter and jumper clubs. We'd like to host everything we can on the equestrian side and we've heard from groups that put on concert events, wine events, etc. that are excited about the possibilities of this facility. We'd love to have any and all the events we can out there."

HC Will polo still be played at the Equicenter?

Guy: "Polo has and is being played there so I certainly hope it will continue – I know that the polo clubs are very excited about our involvement in the property."

HC What is your vision for the future of the Equicenter and horse sport in New Mexico and the region?

Guy: "When you look at where the sport is going, it's going to these really nice venues with world-class accommodations. We want to have world-class Grand Prix but we also want to have something for all of the amateurs. I guess what I really envision is a large summer circuit, where you don't have to travel very far, say between Colorado and New Mexico, where you could be horse showing all summer. That's where I'd really like to see it go. To have a few really big events to draw in the big talent, and then have a full summer circuit of "A" rated shows."

We've shown during the summer in Colorado but when it's over there is nowhere else to go. And I think with Santa Fe's elevation and cooler temperatures, we can draw equestrians from Texas and Arizona to our shows."



Brian Gonzalez, co-founder of the Grand Prix de Santa Fe is the Master of Foxhounds for Santa Fe's Caza Ladron Hunt. Photo by Evalyn Bemis

HC Last question, as a competitive grand prix rider and one of the largest Holsteiner breeders in the US, where do you find the time to launch this new exciting venue?

Guy: (Laughing) "I'm going to do it like I do everything, with really good people. We've got some really good people involved with this. I'd rather be the dreamer and everyone else can do the heavy lifting. I'm sure it won't work out that way, but that's the way I'm hoping it will."