



Alexandra Rheinheimer Horse Sports by the Bay, Inc.

My name is Alexandra Rheinheimer and I, along with my husband Dean, own Horse Sports by the Bay, Inc. which is a company that we created in 2004 to oversee the development and production of Horse Shows by the Bay. Horse Shows by the Bay is an annual multi-week equestrian festival that features the nation's best riders and horses competing in various English riding events. In 2004, which was our inaugural year, we hosted 250 horses in Traverse City for three weeks. This upcoming season we plan to host over 1500 horses and will be expanding our series from three weeks to a month plus. Horse Shows by the Bay was first staged in a hay field close to Chum's Corner; it now operates out of Flintfields, which is a multi-million dollar custom outdoor event park built specifically to house Horse Shows by the Bay and other events like it. Horse Shows by the Bay is now considered one of Traverse City's number one tourism drivers. We estimate that to date the local economy has seen an impact of at least 30 million dollars from our series of horse shows.

My story started 30 years ago when, at the age of six, my mom signed me up for my very first horseback riding lesson at some random trail horse barn in upstate New York. Who would have thought that now, in 2009 I would be co-owning a horse show and qualified to judge others in a field where usually it's the ones born with a silver spoon that advance to the next level. Well, here I am and I owe my mom for everything if not more since she made it happen. Horseback riding is not cheap, and as a single parent my mother was always faced with the problem of affording my rather expensive hobby. She used to ask me all the time, "Sure you don't want to take up swimming or tennis?" Of course, I always said, "no"...how could swinging a racket or churning the waves in a pool produce the same elation I would feel while galloping over a hurdle or smelling that lovely sweat smell only horses can produce?

So, summer "camp" was really a clever way for my mom to disguise the fact that I was trading my stall mucking and water bucket scrubbing services for riding. Of course, from the outside looking in that was a job, but to me that was heaven. I ate carrots for lunch and I cantered (not walked) to school. I was horse mad! As my passion increased, so did my exposure behind the scenes. By the age of 16 I was promoted to stable manager and then while attending college, I became a stable hence business owner. Since then I've also become certified as horse show judge, announcer, and event manager. And most importantly, along the way, I found a lifelong partner interested in the very same things

that I am! As I look back, I know that these long hard early days were the very moments that shaped me for whom I am today. I owe my strong work ethic, business success, and personal strength to my awesome Mom Pat who is my constant source of inspiration and motivation. Oh, and can I mention that my sister is also making a living out of the horses? She teaches riding lessons in South Carolina. Mom Pat also helps me with our show – again, who would have thunk it?

Dean and I formed our company for a multitude of reasons, but mostly we felt that in order to be in control of our destiny we needed to establish an event/business that we were ultimately in charge of. Up until 2004 both Dean and I, although considered very successful, were always under the watchful eye and constraints of other event owners. We just knew that if we combined our talents, knowledge, and past experiences we should be able to successfully produce our very own series of shows.

Of course our journey has been a roller coaster, to say the least! Mother Nature, the economy, and just plain old trying to figure out how to pay for it all are factors we've had to endure along the way. We've learned to surround ourselves with other people who share the same vision as we do and to employ the very best industry and business professionals. Since we aren't trained number crunchers it's best to hand that type of stuff over to the people who specialize in the trade!

There have been plenty of other challenges that have popped up too – like finding a balance between work and play. Sometimes I have to remind myself that the cell phone is just not that important, regardless of who's trying to reach me and that if I'm on another job, like judging or announcing another horse show, it's important to remember that that job comes first! Am I success story? Sure! With a rather meager budget I've taken a hobby that's considered only fit for "kings" and turned it into a career and livelihood. Have I made mistakes? Sure! I've shaken hands when I should have enforced a signed contract and I've often let work interfere with my personal time. But in the end I'm so glad that I, together with my husband, took the plunge to own and produce our own event/company that will hopefully take us long into the future. And if it doesn't I still feel comforted in knowing that my experience as a horse show event owner will only lead me down paths that wouldn't have been forged if I had sat back and watched the world go by.