

Meet the Judge

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THE HARMMEYERS

My favorite part of NAVHDA is getting to know families like mine. Families that came across this organization by happenstance and never looked back. This describes the Harmeyer family and how their love of versatile hunting dogs has influenced every part of their lives, and in turn, how their family has influenced so many lives in the NAVHDA organization.

After having Labs and Lab/Springer mixes for years, Al bought his first shorthair. As so many of us can relate to, in Tracy's words, "He did everything wrong in training that dog." A friend suggested he might want to join a pointing dog group to help teach his pointing dog and here is where NAVHDA entered the scene. That dog was too old to run in Natural Ability but the organization hooked him. Al got his first NAVHDA shorthair from a friend of Bob West which went on to be his first Prize I Utility and Versatile Champion.

In those days, Al was a car repair man at a shop he owned for over 30 years, and Tracy was an office secretary. Steve was, and still is, a full-time engineer. They would train their dogs in the evening after work. It was very typical for friends to join those evening sessions with their dogs as well. They would occasionally field, "Would you take my dog for a month to work on..." questions. They decided to give it a try and quickly found out that they were not only talented but enjoyed training dogs for other people. Krystal Creek Kennels in Cedar Grove, Wisconsin found its start in 1996 and has been the hub of the Wisconsin NAVHDA Chapter for many years. They enjoy being critically involved in the small size of the second oldest chapter in the organization because it allows them to have a personal connection with their members. Watching the lightbulb go on for a dog that gets another hunting team one step closer to their goals has provided Al, Steve and Tracy with so much joy over the years.

The Harmeyers have such a long and rich history with the organization. Al joined NAVHDA in 1991, and entered into the NAVHDA Apprentice Judge Program in 1992. He evaluated his first dog as an official NAVHDA judge in April of 1994. Not to be left watching from the sidelines, Al was quickly joined by his son, Steve, and daughter-in-law, Tracy, who became members in

the early spring of 1993. Tracy and Steve both quickly joined the NAVHDA judging fold and began evaluating dogs in 1996 and 1997. Collectively, they have judged 932 tests over the last 30 years. The Harmeyer trio has influenced the cultivation of 3,901 dogs through their judging involvement in the NAVHDA system! Starting with the 2007 Invitational hosted by the Missouri Uplands Chapter, Al and Tracy have also represented the NAVHDA Judging system at the highest-level; evaluating over 681 dogs at the illustrious Invitational (Al on 35 different Invitational Judging Teams and Tracy on 24). It is amazing to think how many NAVHDA members have shared field or water time with this family because of their dedication to the organization and willingness to serve in these roles.

It's well known that the judges in NAVHDA are required to run dogs in the organization to maintain that status. As impressive as the numbers of dogs judged by this family is, it can be equally said about the number of dogs they have tested in the organization. They have been in the shoes of a handler on test day 332 times!



The work, hunting, family vacation balance is something we all know so well. Al and Tracy get a week each year to enjoy hunting together but the rest of the hunting season they take turns managing the business while the others get to enjoy watching the dogs put birds in front of the gun in multiple states from North Dakota and Montana to Iowa. Strategically, they have found creative ways to enjoy time away while still always balancing the demands of life. After getting married, Steve and Tracy took their first vacation to Tennessee where Steve ran a Natural Ability puppy, they both apprentice judged the other NAVHDA test day and detoured to Nashville to take in the sights before coming home. It was after 25 years of marriage that Steve and Tracy finally took their first "non-NAVHDA" vacation.

The Harmeyers are a truly multigenerational team when it comes to the kennel. Steve and Tracy's two children are heavily involved in NAVHDA, starting with running Natural Ability dogs when they were both roughly 8 years old. One of her favorite days in NAVHDA was when three generations of Harmeyers, Al, Tracy

and Anthony (Steve and Tracy's son), all received Utility Prize I scores on the same testing day. NAVHDA is truly in this family's blood as the youngest generation of Harmeyers both have goals to one day be NAVHDA judges themselves.

The comradery of like-minded dog people hooked this family like it does to so many of us. Getting the opportunity to meet new people all over the country with the same passion and love of hunting has fueled the involvement of this family in our organization for decades. After participating in an Aims & Rules Clinic with Al at the beginning of my judging apprenticeship and being in an Invitational field run with Tracy as one of my judges, I am one of those people that has had my NAVHDA story personally impacted by this family and will be eternally grateful to their contributions to my journey. The ripple effect of time, devotion, encouragement and support by this NAVHDA family has left not only a stamp on the organization as a whole but in the lives of so many NAVHDA judges and handlers like myself and will continue to impact many more to come. 🐾

