

Meet the Judge

By Sara Heesacker

Nunn, Colorado

LANCE VERNAM

“It’s the people.” There are some individuals we meet in this world who truly and sincerely just love interacting with people. I’ve never personally met Lance, but it hit me from the start of our conversation until the very end. He wholeheartedly loves NAVHDA and the principles this organization were developed on because he loves to foster people.

Growing up as a young boy, Lance’s family owned beagles. He enjoyed pheasant hunting with his dad in Pennsylvania and he always wanted a hunting dog when he grew up. After moving to Michigan, he had a Labrador retriever. Still holding on to the dream of getting a bird dog, his vet proceeded to tell him that he was living in “grouse country” and a setter was the dog to get.

Lance came across an ad for NAVHDA in a magazine coincidentally the very first year that the Northern Michigan Chapter was formed. After meeting that inspiring group of people, Lance, now a Lifetime Member, joined NAVHDA with his English Setter, Belle. Lance and Belle achieved a Natural Ability Prize I and a Utility Prize III. More importantly than her testing success, she is remembered fondly as a really good wild bird dog.

After Belle, Lance made the switch to German Short-haired Pointers, and he has owned a total of six since 1998. His first Shorthair, Jasmine, sticks out the most to him. She had quite the career in NAVHDA, qualifying for the Invitational twice. Jasmine produced 22 pups, two of which were Versatile Champions, many Utility prized dogs and all three of her litters were NAVHDA Natural Ability Breeder Award Recipients.

Lance became a NAVHDA judge in 1999. Typically judging four weekends a year, Lance is looking forward to being able to judge more often in upcoming years as he closes in on full-time retirement. The social aspect of traveling the country to new chapters and meeting the people is one of the things he looks forward to most. Having the opportunity to stay in a chapter member’s house is on



the top of the list as getting to know a family that would open their home to a judge is priceless.

In 2019, Lance became an Aims & Rules Clinic Leader. “More fun than judging,” were the exact words he used to describe this aspect of his willingness to volunteer for the organization. More than providing an opportunity for people to learn more about the judging system and how the standard works, “It’s an incredible weekend where open minds come searching for knowledge.” Once again, teaching and working with people are the reasons for the excitement.

Lance and his wife are snowbirds these days. He spends about seven months of the year in Michigan and the remaining five months in Arizona, where he enjoys being a part of the Grand Canyon NAVHDA Chapter.

Through it all, Lance has found time to enjoy his dogs and has hunted all over the country. From Manitoba and Ontario, through almost every state from the east to the west in the Northern United States, Colorado, Arizona, North Carolina, even flying his dogs to Alaska. Lance shared a story about a hunt that would make any hunter envious. He went to Idaho one time for a week-long trip and produced Chukar, Blue Grouse, Valley and California Quail, Ruffed Grouse, Pheasants and Hungarian Partridge... a trip where the dog work was spectacular.

If you enjoy versatile dogs and are interested in judging, Lance advises to stick with your convictions. “Judging is a lot of work, a lot of fun and if you truly enjoy the hobby of watching dogs work, keep moving forward even after a bad day.” Every chapter, test and handler has left a fond memory with Lance and he likes to remind people to take your time and listen to the chapter members that are helping you work through a problem to avoid repeating their mistakes. Most importantly, he encourages people to be satisfied with the time they put into their dogs. 🐾