



John R THE THIRD ACT

by MARY KIRKMAN



Several months ago, John Rannenberg did something a lot of people would like to do. He assessed his accomplishments in a long and highly decorated training career, and gave serious thought to how he would like to spend the rest of his life. The Third Act, some call it—that time when, if you are able to, you decide what is most important to you, redefine your goals, and go for it.

And then, shortly after he'd decided to make a few changes, he woke up one morning with a voice in his head saying, "Not now, John! Not now!" "I'm sure it was my mother," he chuckles, referring to the late Barbara Buchanan, a beloved figure in the Arabian industry. "And she was right." Almost the next day, the country closed down in response to the pandemic.

So, he let his decision rest in his mind and take root, and as the months passed, the stars aligned. Before the year was out, he was leaving a job of more than 35 years at Rohara and going into business for himself, based at Christy Higman Clements' new Ocala training center. His longtime friend was embracing change as well, transferring her operation north from the Miami area.

"We're not in business together," he clarifies of the arrangement, "but we're on each other's team. That's for sure." The good vibes of their endeavor fairly radiate out the big double doors of the barn.

How did all of this develop? It was a step by step process, he says. First, he considered his goals at this stage of his career. "Do I still want to compete against Jim Stachowski, Joel Kiesner, Jessica Clinton, and others on great horses? Damn straight I do!"

At the same time, he wanted to have more time for other priorities, such as judging, giving clinics, helping to put on horse shows, working with amateurs—in short, take more time to "give back" to the industry that has supported him

since he was a teenager. It also, he says, will set him up better for how he wants to contribute later, when he transitions out of a daily barn routine (that's a vague notion that, given the vibrant nature of his fitness, is only barely on the horizon).

"I want to be relevant and I'm not ready to retire," he says simply. "When people ask me, 'when are you going to retire?' I say, 'and do what?'" But time passes quickly, he points out, and that's part of what this is about. "I'm looking at what I can do now to continue in an industry that has been my life and my passion, and that has been so good to me. It's becoming less about me and more about what I can do for somebody else."

There also were the practical facts: he wanted to stay in the Ocala, Florida, area, and live the lifestyle he'd grown to love. Done! His partner, a well-known real estate broker, showed him an array of houses and one in particular felt right. After the more rural Rohara—admittedly one of the most gorgeous farms in the area—he now exults, "At 61, I own my first home!"



Ocala offers other benefits as well, he notes, including a burgeoning business community and the addition of the new World Equestrian Center (WEC). One of the most highly anticipated developments in the industry in years, the WEC is expected to host about every type of equine activity there is, as well as introduce a diverse new crowd to horses through other events.

And so, John P. Rannenberg Show Horses LLC is coming together (the “P” is a callout to his mother, whose maiden name was Penn). His clients have followed, filling his stalls and settling in comfortably, and he and Christy are moving forward slowly, further developing a bond already decades old. “I’ve known her since she was 12,” he smiles. “I watched her develop her craft and saw how she handled her clients and her success—she’s someone I’ve respected for years.”

Most importantly, their foundation is that their philosophies, their methods of training, and their concepts of integrity match.

“I think we can complement each other,” he reflects. “The choices I’ve made have felt very natural. It’s been an easy transition.” ■



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