

Signature Oak

STABLES

From The Smallest Acorn

by Colleen Scott

When Rob and Elizabeth Haar started Signature Oak Stables, Dexter, Michigan, in 2014, little did they know in just seven short years their boutique, semi-private farm would be producing highly sought-after progeny and their horses would be winning prestigious national and Scottsdale titles. But as they like to say, "From the smallest acorn, a mighty oak grows....."



Editorial Design Danielle Crawford Productions

Liz, who rode and showed as a child, had stepped away from riding for 25 years. When the Samantha, expressed an interest in riding, they leased and owned various mounts for her and eventually, Liz was bit by the bug once again. "I decided I wanted to show again and wanted to try something different from western riding which I did as a kid," she shares. "So, that's how I started showing English."

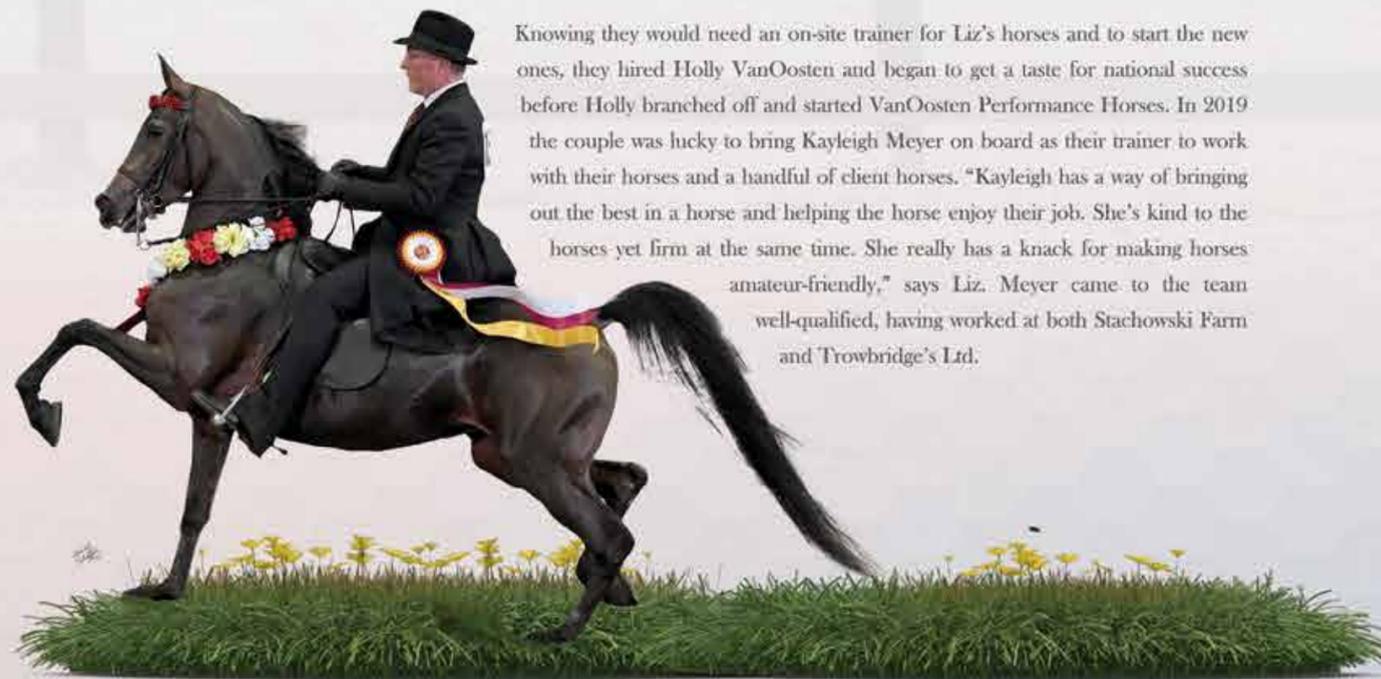
Their horses have met with much success in the Open division, especially Hello Kitty CCF (VJ Royal Heir x Miz Kitty), a U.S. National Champion and two-time Reserve Champion; Kalaramas Serotonin (SF Aftershoe x Kalarama Co-Ed), a U.S. Reserve National Champion Junior Horse and Top Ten in Half-Arabian English Pleasure; and with Sippin On Fire VH (Baske Afire x Undulata's Chick Chat), a unanimous Scottsdale winner in Half-Arabian Country English Pleasure. Liz has also had success with these horses, as well as her other Amateur horses, such as CP Charming Notions (H Mobility H x Afire Charmm) and Half-Arabian Afires Starlin (Afire Bey V x The Recipe).



While the English division has provided something new and challenging to learn, Elizabeth says she is also trying to "relearn" the western division, with the help of Zac Powell at Powell Training Center and their new Half-Arabian Western Pleasure horse, Midnight Blue J (Khadraj NA x Blue Moon J). "It's changed a lot since I was a kid," she says.

"When I was young, I was grateful to have any horse to show," Liz says. "I never imagined I would be able to continue to ride and show as an adult, and especially never imagined I would be able to own and ride so many great horses. It's been a lot of fun."

Late in 2013, just as Elizabeth was getting reintroduced to the Arabian horse community, their trainer Tim Goggins retired. Rob's interest in breeding, with encouragement from Tim, led to the proposal of another idea. "Why don't we start our own farm?" And Signature Oak Stables was born.



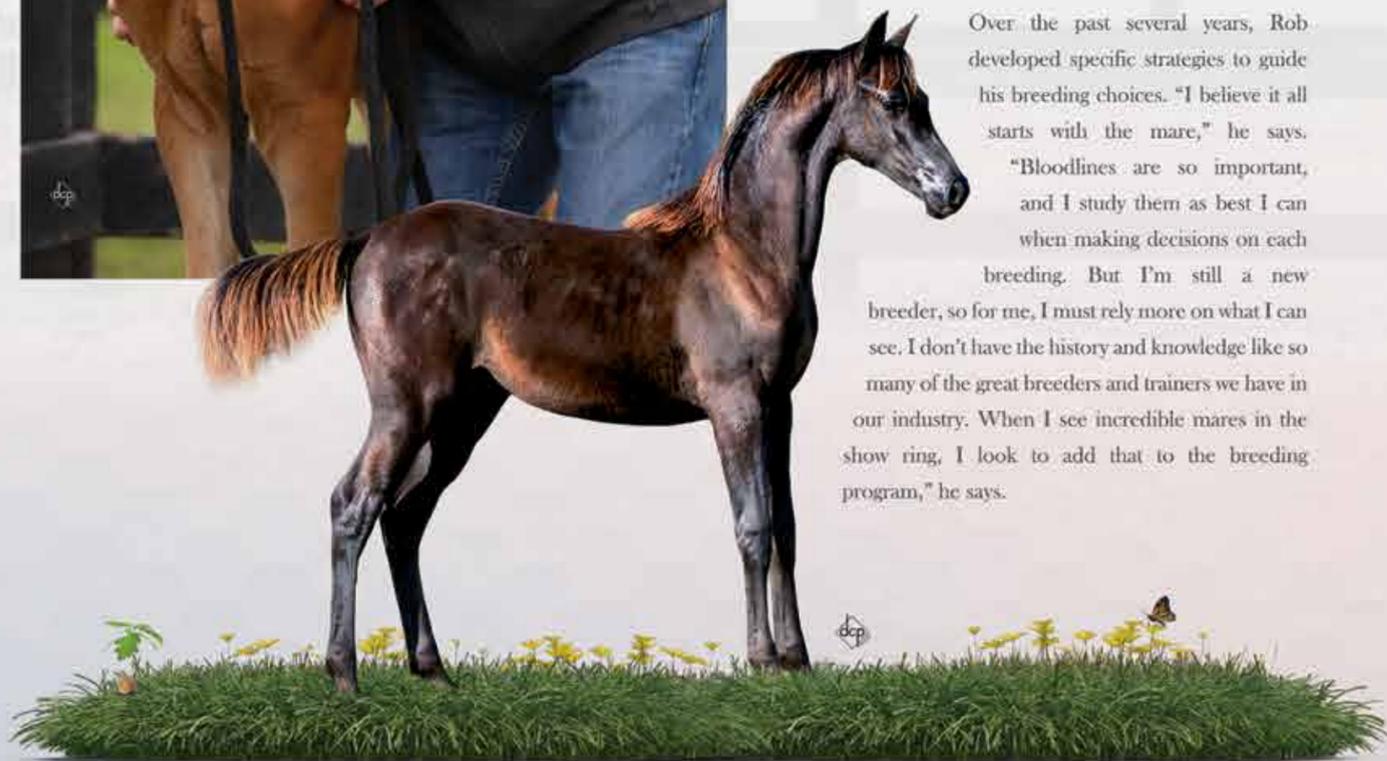
Knowing they would need an on-site trainer for Liz's horses and to start the new ones, they hired Holly VanOosten and began to get a taste for national success before Holly branched off and started VanOosten Performance Horses. In 2019 the couple was lucky to bring Kayleigh Meyer on board as their trainer to work with their horses and a handful of client horses. "Kayleigh has a way of bringing out the best in a horse and helping the horse enjoy their job. She's kind to the horses yet firm at the same time. She really has a knack for making horses amateur-friendly," says Liz. Meyer came to the team well-qualified, having worked at both Stachowski Farm and Trowbridge's Ltd.



Kayleigh continues training their horses, improving on their results in the show ring and helping Liz and their handful of customers hone their English riding skills. Rob focuses exclusively on the breeding program.

"I got into breeding because I fell in love with the horses," Rob says. "I never took up riding like Liz and Samantha but being around all of the beautiful horses made me want to be involved in some way. I started out small, just breeding one mare. And after going through the process of foaling her out and raising her filly on the farm, I decided it was for me."

Over the past several years, Rob developed specific strategies to guide his breeding choices. "I believe it all starts with the mare," he says. "Bloodlines are so important, and I study them as best I can when making decisions on each breeding. But I'm still a new breeder, so for me, I must rely more on what I can see. I don't have the history and knowledge like so many of the great breeders and trainers we have in our industry. When I see incredible mares in the show ring, I look to add that to the breeding program," he says.



"My focus is on breeding high quality mares and finding the stallion that can fill in the blanks," he shares. "We identify the strengths and weaknesses of the mares by watching them in the show ring. Some may be big trotters but not as easy to train. Others may bring the desirable physical qualities you look for but need a bit of 'spark.' I look to match the stallion that can create a good-thinking, trainable horse, knowing we also want to produce high quality performing show horses."

While the Signature Oak breeding program has a dozen or so mares, it features some cornerstone producers, including: Hello Kitty CCF, HNL Royal Hope (VJ Royal Heir x Heirs Noble Love) and CP Charming Notions, each of which make unique contributions to their offspring according to Rob.

"All three have given us fantastic offspring," he says. "So far, Hello Kitty CCF has produced really upright and 'troty' foals. We've managed to add some size and beauty by crossing her to great stallions including HA Toscan Sun, Barcelona BF and Saddlebreds, Nutcracker's Nirvana and Noble Braveheart. And HNL Royal Hope is young and just had her first group of foals—each one of them beautiful with great markings."

"When I bought her, my goal was to bring Heirs Noble Love into the breeding program. To me, she is the absolute perfect mare. And all three of HNL Royal Hope's foals have the presence of their grandmother. I couldn't ask for more! CP Charming Notions is a beautiful mare with plenty of motion and she is passing on those features to her offspring. We've crossed her with Afires Heir and couldn't be happier with the result."

Besides breeding their own mares, Rob supplements the Signature Oak program by purchasing embryos from a select group of mares.

Identifying the right mare/stallion combination is just the beginning for Rob. "I love the whole process—selecting the mare and stallion, staying up on foal alert, seeing them stand and nurse. But my favorite part is seeing them turned out for the first time. I love watching them unfold and gain confidence each day."





Besides having a trainer on site, Madison Azelton heads up a team of caregivers. "Madison is physically and emotionally invested in each horse bred on this farm," says Rob. "She has been with us since the first foal and has really taken on a huge role in our breeding program."

While they haven't had any of their own foals hit the show ring yet, it is set to happen this year with the 2017 Half-Arabian May Fire REH (VCP Magnifire x Modern Girl) who was purchased by the Goldman family.

"We're really excited to see one of our homebred horses hit the show ring," says Liz. "And we are really hoping that Kayleigh and I are able to show a homebred horse in the near future."

With the farm's increasingly larger foal crops, this should become a reality before too long. In 2020, they had their largest foal crop yet with nine. In 2021, they have 10 coming and next year will have at least 16. In 2021, Rob also had his first two Saddlebreds born and has several Saddlebreds coming next year. The couple recently closed on a farm in Versailles, KY and Rob will be managing a full-fledged Saddlebred breeding program from there.

So, what's next for Signature Oak Stables and Rob and Liz? Cheering on the products of their breeding program in the ring and continuing to welcome new foals on the farm.

"Every day we learn more about what makes incredible show horses," says Rob. "It's been an exciting ride so far and we can't wait to see what the future brings."

