

WOMEN IN SPORTS

Mary Coldren

Competition Director, Maryland 5 Star at Fair Hill



L. to r.: Jeff Newman, Maryland 5 Star/Fair Hill Organizing Committee; Rachel Temby, Manager, Fair Hill Natural Resources Management Area; Emily Wilson, Maryland Department of Natural Resources; Mary Coldren, Maryland 5 Star at Fair Hill; Sam Ray, Maryland Department of Natural Resources

Eventing is unlike any other competition in the equestrian world. Or any sport, for that matter.

A single horse and rider compete in a grueling, three-day triathlon of dressage, cross-country and show jumping. With its roots in a calvary test, eventing requires a mastery of skills in the arena and across open terrain. And like every equestrian sport, the “team” connection between a rider and a horse is truly unique, but especially critical in eventing where the rider competes with the same horse for each event.

The pinnacle of eventing is a five-star event, bringing the best riders and horses from across the globe. Until now, there was only one five-star event in the U.S. On Oct. 14-18, 2020, Maryland will inaugurate the highly anticipated Maryland 5 Star at Fair Hill, the state’s first five-star eventing competition and the seventh worldwide. Prior to this year, international eventing competitors and fans had to travel to Kentucky to experience the caliber and thrill of a five-star event.

“There’s a buzz in the industry for this event,” explains Mary Coldren, competition director and executive manager for Fair Hill International, a 31-year-old eventing competition in Cecil County. “It will bring more awareness to the sport, and kids can get involved with the 5 Star and see competing in it one day as their ultimate goal.”

She remembers how exciting it was when Kentucky held the first 5 Star event in the U.S., which, at the time was referred to as a 4 Star. Held each April, it’s known as the Land Rover Kentucky Three-Day Event. “It’s equally exciting to have a 5 Star in the fall,” Coldren says. “It benefits the riders and is great for the enthusiasts to now have two eventing competitions at the highest level in the U.S.”

Since 1988, Coldren has worked tirelessly to promote eventing and equestrian sports through Fair Hill International. The Maryland 5 Star at Fair Hill and the newly expanded and enhanced Fair Hill Training

Center, nestled in 350 acres of lush countryside, brings a worldwide spotlight to Maryland. “The new facility gives us an infrastructure that we never had before,” says Coldren. “Before, everything was brought in from water trucks on an empty field to temporary bleachers. Now we have new arenas with all-weather footings, great new jumps and water features on the cross-country course, permanent grandstands with vendor stalls and so much more.”

Coldren is thrilled about the cross-country track designed by industry legend Ian Stark: “People have seen parts of it, but they don’t have a clue about the amount of terrain on the track and the three water jumps, banks and different terrain. It is going to be really exciting.”

The appeal of sport, she says, is in the mix of events and “the mix of amateur competitors that manage to juggle their life around their horses.” Coldren adds with a chuckle that, “Yes, for most it is juggling life around the horses, not juggling the horses around life. For the professional [riders], the horses are their life. Horses are a passion.”

She would know. Coldren, who serves on the board of directors executive committee of the United States Eventing Association, the sport’s governing body, began competing as an amateur when she was 13. While Coldren no longer rides, she loves sharing her passion for eventing and the Maryland 5 Star. She expects the event to draw up to 40 competitors, male and female and across a wide age span, and thousands of spectators. “In eventing, it’s a fair playing field,” adds Coldren. “Men compete against women and juniors compete against seniors. Not many sports are like that.” ●



For more information, go to pages 10-13 for details on the Maryland 5 Star at Fair Hill or visit maryland5star.us