



What an amazing ride

What an amazing ride it has been for Richland Park.... beginning in the fall of 2000 when Bob met with Mike Etherington-Smith to discuss building and developing our 400-acre farm into an eventing venue. Over the next several years we built the national levels of novice through Advanced and the international levels of CIC3***, CCI 2**, CIC2** and CIC 1*. In 2009, Ian Stark took over the role of cross-country course designer.

Richland Park is a year-round commitment, and it is impossible to describe and comprehend how much work, energy and effort goes into producing a world class venue. We have been blessed with truly amazing, dedicated and loyal volunteers, all willing to put enormous amounts of time and energy into Richland Park in order to produce a world class event.

Our goal with Richland Park was to offer a venue that would make the little guys feel like the big guys, and would offer them the chance to ride with the ULR's and mingle with them. We are confident that we achieved our goal of a first class event where the little guy is treated as an equal to the ULR's.

We were blessed because through years of hard work at our businesses, we were able to buy a spectacular piece of property, with fantastic footing. Our connections in the horse world brought us the best designers and course builders. Richland is blessed with amazing footing, second to none; a sandy loam with fabulous drainage. From the beginning our number one priority was footing. Our good friends who farm our property, WJ and Lori Stafford, installed irrigation throughout the cross-country course, and we purchased a K-Line watering system and all the necessary equipment to maintain and repair the footing so we could produce perfect tracks at each show. We are proud that in the sixteen years of hosting an event, we never had to cancel in spite of 7 inches of rain the week of the show, or a summer of drought. We had perfect footing every time.

So, what has the past seventeen years brought us? The thrill of watching the top riders in the U.S. and Canada ride cross country on our farm, at our home. We have to say that again, we got to watch the best of the best ride the best horses on our cross country course. Wow! It also brought us the opportunity to meet, work alongside and become lifelong friends with two of the best cross-country designers in the world, Ian Stark and Mike Etherington-Smith. We got the thrill of hearing "Richland Park" announced at the Rolex Kentucky Three Day Event as part of a riders resume of wins. We are

proud and blessed that we have not had a serious injury to horse or rider. We are proud in the quality of the show that we produced with the help of our dear friends and course builders Bert Wood and Jay Hambly who went all out to make our show first rate. We thoroughly enjoyed the comradery and chaos of having 10 or so people, all working on a common goal, living with us for a month all helping to produce a spectacular event.

On the negative side, having to deal with organizations that are not organizer friendly, and are far too political. For us Richland Park has been all about the horses and not about the politics of the game. It should not be so difficult for an organizer to add a division, nor should it take years to do so. We put a lot of money and time into developing a new track only to be turned down for a CCI3***, this was a huge emotional hit for us. Why won't they let us run a level we want to run and are willing to invest time and money into? It doesn't make any sense. We started running intermediate in 2003, but had dropped it when we had both a CCI2** and a CIC2**. We had numerous requests to add the intermediate division back in and we never thought our request would be denied. Not only denied, but told we cannot add Intermediate back into our divisions unless we move our date. Funny, we didn't know eventing had a mileage rule. Previously, we had already moved our date from the end of September to the end of August because USEA wanted to run the AEC's on our date at the end of September. In 2016, the USEA moved the AEC's to the week immediately following our event, forcing the riders to choose which event to support. Unfortunately, we were unaware of the date change and took a huge hit on our entries. For us it was never about the money and almost every year we were in the red, and we expected it and were prepared for it. We Just took it in stride, sucked it up and dealt with it.

A long-time mentor of ours said "when you stop being challenged and stop growing, you are dying." We spent the past year thinking about the future of Richland Park, and after careful consideration made the difficult decision. When our builders arrived in August, we told them that 2017 was going to be our final Richland Park, and that we wanted to produce the best show we could, the best show we ever had. From our perspective, the 2017 RPHT was the best. Saying goodbye to Richland Park is the hardest thing we have ever done as we both loved doing it and took great pride in what we created. We were honored to open our home and our farm to the eventing community once a year and share with them the magnificence of Richland Park. A fellow organizer commented; "Well is it congratulations or I'm Sorry?" The truth is, it is both. Thank you for the amazing ride.

Bob & Kay Willmarth

Richland Park