Zoom! And just like that, the American Connemara Pony Society went light years into the future and held a virtual meeting via the Internet. The screens on laptops, desktops, phones, tablets, IPads, and whatever device would work --- was replete with the images of the Board of Governors. As if by magic, and through the Zoom account of Heather Magnan in New York, who was the “doorkeeper”, the meeting was opened by Cathy Blackmon, president, from her home in North Carolina, at 11 a.m. EST.

Before the attendance was taken, the president explained the structure of the meeting, differing from previous on-site meetings, with the use of a “Consent Agenda” which according to Robert’s Rules of Order, meant the “routine meeting discussion points are grouped into a single agenda item. In so doing, the grouped items can be approved in one action, rather than through the filing of multiple motions.”

A very long document containing the reports of each standing committee of the ACPS had been circulated to the Board members and Region Chairs, and Ad-Hoc Committee members. Each attendee was expected to read, digest, and decide on any actions that needed to be taken. The new process worked “like a charm.”

When the attendance was taken, the following were seen on the monitors: Catherine Blackmon, Kate Denton, Donna Duckworth, Fonda Eigel, Stephanie Fenton-Hickey, Cynthia Holbrook, Becky Jordan, Karen Laden, Jill McNicol, Donna Power, Wayne Quarles, Lisa Rease, Raelin Schenck, Linda Haines, Heather Magnan, Suzanne Phelps, Bonnie Reid, Kay Clements, Sue McLaughlin, Tracy Garland. Also attending were Kathy Sparks, Amy Plavin, Kate DeLaVega, Deb Norman, Liz Platais, Joanie Webster, Marilyn Cheek, and Julie Keahey. Deb Howell had noted that her computer would not support the ZOOM meeting format. Each person in attendance was asked to report how many dogs were in the room with them for the meeting! As the Minutes for the January 2020 meeting of the Board of Governos were approved, Joan Webster, “proofreader extraordinaire” commented that “Finally, the spelling of the word Halfbred had been decided upon and kept uniform throughout the document!”

**The Report of the Membership** by Suzanne Phelps and Cynthia Holbrook centered on the Policies and Procedures followed by the team. One action item on one category of membership to be changed was: FAMILY: spouses and/or parents, children under age 18; reduced fees for registration and transfer; eligible for awards; up to 2 votes per family but must have 2 members age 18 or older

**Suggested change: *up to 2 votes per family but must have 2 members age 18 or older to qualify for 2 votes***

Another change: ●  Send out membership cards in a timely manner and include a Directory of Membership for new members

**Suggested change:**

**Send out membership cards in a timely manner and note availability of online Directory of Membership for new members**

A change in the Directory wording: ●  Publish and send members a yearly membership roster by state in the form of a directory of membership to be posted online or mailed by May 1.

**Suggested change:**

**Publish an online, yearly membership roster by state and by last name in the form of a directory of membership to be posted online. Prepare a paper directory by May 1 with roster by state and last name to be available for member purchase**

The Report of the President – Cathy Blackmon thanked the group for responding so well to the request for written reports submitted before the meeting. In this, her last meeting as president, she thanked everyone for supporting the Connemara, for supporting her, and for moving forward on so many items over the last several years.

**Report of the Treasurer and Finance** – Stephanie Fenton-Hickey noted that the Society was in good shape financially, and the bank balance was $13,752.02. She said she has finally learned the job, and hopes she got re-elected to the Board! Cathy Blackmon added that the ACPS Investments have grown over the year, and it looked healthy. She also provided a Profit and Loss statement that had been sent with the reports. She asked that all Regional Treasurers send the 2019 financials for the annual IRS form 990EZ.

**Registrars’ Reports** – Marynell Eyles and Megan Harris – both had sent their statistical reports on foals, purebred, halfbreds, and Connemara Sporthorse foals. The first 25 purebred foal information has been sent to USEF for lifetime Recording numbers. Four new farm prefixes have been added to the list of registered farm names. A total of 45 Purebred foals have been registered, 6 Halfbred colt foals have gotten TFC’s, and 11 Halfbred fillies of 2020 have been registered. No Halfbred stallions or Purebred stallions have been registered in 2020.

In the Sport Horse Registry, there have been three foals registered with paperwork submitted on three more. There are now 31 mares and geldings registered in the registry.

Action item – “For 2021, all Halfbred and CSH foals out of or by a HWSD carrier, must be tested as part of the registration process.” That statement was put in the form of a motion after discussion, to be **“All foals of 2021 will be tested for the Hoof Wall Separation Disease unless both dam and sire are tested and proven N/N.”**

Additionally, it was decided to make the new USEF Passport available for $25 to breeders as an option on the registration form. The information is available on the USEF Website.

ICCPS – Linda Haines reported that the group had not met since the Clifden (IRE) show was cancelled for 2020. Sheila Ramsey had asked the CPBS and the ICCPS to share their databases/pedigrees with her for a website on HWSD. The CPBS declined, and as “Mother” society for the ICCPS, the other nations followed suit.

ACPS-F – The Susan McConnell Memorial Foundation – Deb Norman and Stephanie Keen are co-chairs of the Foundation, and it was noted that some of the forms for items like scholarship payments or forms for fund distribution were missing from the website. Deb Norman will work on the missing items. At this topic, Kate DeLa Vega, who has been working on the update to the ACPS website, reminded all that she needs all the correct forms, and that they also need to go to Julie Keahey for the document control.

Arbitration – Fonda Eigel – no disputes to report.

Awards – Marilyn Cheek, Sally Oxnard, Donna Miller – needed clarification on how to engrave the bronze plates on the Hall of Fame trophies for 2020 since they will not be awarded. The decision was the to use the words, “Not Awarded.”

Marilyn Cheek

This year was the strangest in my 13-year experience as Awards Committee Chair and one might think that little could have happened with the Covid-19 pandemic forcing the country into full sequestration. But one would be wrong.

Our members exploits in 2019 garnered 30 USDF All Breeds Awards, which the Awards Committee finances. USEA recognized 12 purebred and halfbred Connemaras for high point honors in the seven divisions. We also send those awards out. The USEF awarded 47 Horse of the Year (HOTY) ribbons, plus the Clifden, McKenna and Seldom Seen trophies which were presented in January 2020. And thanks to the hard work of our Achievement Awards wizard, Karen Laden, assisted by Tracy Garland, and Sue Antilla, we gave out 54 awards ranging from certificates to Awards of Excellence this spring.

Although the rated shows were suspended for a large part of the year, we still have ACPS ponies in the lineup for some HOTY Awards. The cancellation for the first time of the nation’s two oldest shows, the Warrenton (VA) Pony Show and the Upperville (VA) Colt and Horse Show (which both feature Connemara Divisions) resulted in no Breeding or Connemara Hunter winners. However, there are 13 contenders in the Purebred Dressage Division, 8 in Halfbred Connemara Dressage, 13 in Purebred Eventing, 8 in Halfbred Eventing, 2 in the open Halfbred Connemara Jumpers and 2 in the Open Halfbred Connemara Hunters.

When shows started opening back up, Katie Donaruma supplied a number of High Point Connemara at an Open Show ribbons to various events. Please remember we offer these, but the shows must list the award in their prize lists and the requirement that show secretaries must verify that the ponies are registered with ACPS.

There also were administrative duties to while away the hours, and Sally Oxnard used them wisely to revise and update all our awards policies and forms. Working with Robyn Fillman, she also cleaned up the Adult Scholarship policies and the Deb Busta Eventing Scholarship. After the board reviews these, they will go to Julie Keahey to be put in current ACPS format and put online so they can be found more easily than they are now. We also want to get the excellent “how to” of awards articles Megan Harris wrote up into an interactive format for the website as well as a concise form of the USEF and ACPS Performance Awards Clarification Table that Donna Miller put together.

It was a hard decision to suspend awarding any of the Hall of Fame and Connemara of the Year Awards in 2020. The consensus was that a significant part of the honor is receiving the award in person in front of colleagues. We need to decide what we should engrave on the trophies to recognize the aberration this year is. Some have suggested simply stating “Not Awarded” but others prefer to explain by adding “Due to Coronavirus Pandemic.” We welcome the Board’s input.

Regions 1 and 9 are continuing the Fun With Your Pony program trial and there have been a few inquiries about when we will have a separate award program for the Connemara Sport Horse registry. At present they are able to compete for Achievement Awards along with halfbreds. We are also hearing more suggestions for expanding our Western and trail awards. If we do that, we would need to assign another person to those as there are as many Western disciplines as there are English ones. The same is true for a separate Sport Horse program.

Something we’d like to do now is put more money into our scholarships. The cost of clinics and specialized training has increased steadily since we established those programs and it seems to us that it might be better to offer one large one than smaller first, second, etc. place awards.

Speaking of money, the silver lining to the Covid crisis is that we will have only minimal charges in 2021 for updating the Hall of Fame Ribbons we have and for Achievement Award Medals. We are well supplied with the latter because of the quantities we have to buy at one time, plus our former National Chair, Mary Delton, found more in the course of her move this year and sent those along, The cost of the Hall of Fame keepers and Awards of Excellence frames are likely to increase and there may be more Golden Shamrocks to buy as a number of ponies are collecting gold in several disciplines.

Finally, Sally and I request that the new president assign some of the new Board members to our committee. Sally has been doing this job since she was in preschool and I’ve been at it for more than a decade. The job gets bigger every year and while we would be very glad to help successors learn the ropes, we would like to step back from primary roles.

By Laws – Scott McGuffin – no action needed

Inspections – Kathy Sparks submitted lengthy reports on the Policies and Procedures documents that she and her committee have been updating. The work is nearing completion, and the Board applauded her diligence. There will be Inspections in 2021, at the sites planned for 2020. There could be additional sites added.

Internet – Amy Plavin – said the updates are being made, and the revamped website is anticipated to be a great improvement. The Domain name, American Connemara was available and she asked if the Society should own it. The decision was swift, and the answer was “yes.”

Nominating – Deb Norman was chair and reported her committee was very pleased that the nominees for the Proxy were excellent. She thanked those who had served, and noted that Jill McNicol was revolving off the Board as she had served the term limit. She will be welcome to serve another term after a year.

Promotions – Heather Magnan, Kate DeLaVega, Donna Power - Heather Magnan, Promotions Chair 2020 was an interesting year to say the least for ACPS Promotions. Early in the year the promotions committee said goodbye to our longtime co-chair, Melanie Trimper. With Melanie’s absence the committee looked to add new members at the USEF Annual Meeting in January 2020. Donna Power, Kate Delvega and Raelin Schenck joined the committee. Many shows, including all the ACPS Regional shows were cancelled for 2020. But, the promotions committee had plenty of projects to keep them busy. 2020 Accomplishments

• ACPS/USEF promotional flyer: Kate worked primarily on this project with input from the rest of the committee as well as the executive committee. ACPS facts and info were compiled and the USEF promotional team put the finished project together.

• Breyerfest video: Since Breyerfest 2020 was cancelled, the ACPS was asked to put together a short video highlighting the breed and the new Breyer model, WH Topgun. Kate and her stepfather David tackled this project and the resulting video was a great montage of member submitted clips of ponies in all disciplines.

 • Website Updates: A new website platform will be launched with updates and a streamlined appearance. All committees have given feedback as to changes need and an interactive breeder map will be added to the new site

• Social Media: Facebook continues to be a huge source of engagement for members. Our page has been quite successful and continues to be a source of information for members and the general public alike. Heather continues to be the admin of this page, with help from Jill McNichol (as well as Megan Harris). The ACPS and ACPS Juniors Instagram accounts also continue to have engagement with a younger demographic of riders.

 • Regional Outreach: Donna, will the help of Sally Oxnard has reached out to all the region chairs. Their needs for promotional support and support in general were addresses and Donna is working on a plan to move forward. Goals for 2021:

 • Policies and Procedures: Heather will lead this task, working with the committee and Cathy Blackmon to complete all necessary updates for USEF Meeting in January 2021.

• Launch the new website. Kate will work with the webmaster as well as various committee chairs to complete all updates prior to launching. Deb Norman will work to ensure all breeders are included on the Breeder’s Map.

 • Regional Outreach: Donna will continue to work with region chairs to address regional needs.

• Youth Outreach: Donna will continue to develop and implement a youth outreach program to engage our young members.

 • ACPS Brochures: Heather will update/create new ACPS brochures in the winter of 2021. She will work with Marynell for any needed text/photos/resources.

Region Chair Liaison – Sally Oxnard and Donna Power reported

Youth Program – A new chair is being sought for this committee. The Goldfarb family of TN have been the outreach connections and Nora Goldfarb established Facebook and Instagram pages for the ACPS young riders. While she is still maintaining those connections, and the family is still providing high point ribbons to competitions for youth such as Pony Club and other junior arenas, it would be a benefit to have a group leader who is not busy with college classes. If any junior reading this is interested, contact the ACPS at americanconnemara@gmail.com

USEF Connemara Committee – Chris Knox, chair – reported that the committee is being re-populated and that it is now possible to get a USEF passport for foals of 2021.

Ad Hoc Committees

Melanoma Report – Maureen Loughman Abel sent her report -

Update from Dr. Carrie Finno:

-          We have secured additional funding ($21,000) through the UC Davis Center for Equine Health to continue investigating the early-onset melanoma “risk” region on chromosome 1. Due to COVID-19 research shutdowns, this funding has been extended through June 2021.

-          We have demonstrated that the gene of interest on chromosome 1 is expressed in skin normally. As this gene is a tumor-suppressor gene, we strongly suspect that these risk variants (i.e. single nucleotide polymorphisms or SNPs) within this gene are associated with early-onset melanoma in greying ponies.

-          While the campus shutdown due to COVID-19 has slowed down research overall, we still aim to perform many of the required studies in the next 12-18 months to confirm these genetic markers.

The research is funded through June 2021, there is a particular gene they are focused on, and the research has been slowed due to the Covid 19 virus but it continues.

Drs. Theon and Finno are still looking for :

1. grey Connemaras who developed melanoma before 6 years
2. grey Connemaras who are melanoma free and over 15 years.

Contact me and I will register your pony and guide you through the process of donating a blood sample.

As we near the development of a melanoma DNA test, our society needs to discuss how this testing is going to affect the breed and how we can keep this test from becoming a marketing nightmare for the owners of grey ponies. We should rightly receive much credit for facilitating the research that developed a DNA test for melanoma. On the other hand, a melanoma DNA test as a pre-sale condition can result in many beautiful, talented Connemaras being left behind.

I think you will all agree that this is something we need to stay ahead of!

**Strategic Planning** – Liz Platais reported During the past year, the SPC met via conference call on the 4th Monday of each month 8 times. The focus of each meeting was to review the ongoing work of the ACPS committees, encourage tracking, closure deadlines and identify areas of need. Awards, Media/Promotions/Website, Membership, Breeders Support, Volunteers, Inclusivity, Inspections, Breeders Support and the Annual meeting were all reviewed.

Each area point person was invited to join the eight core SPC members to review their policy and procedures and their mission statements in their presentation. The excitement of the committee in the area of promotions through Kate Delavega and Heather Magnum has led to the development of a newly updated website which should be up and running before the new year. Additionally the committee has been discussing an interactive map of breeders their locations and their breeding stock.

Donna Power and Sally Oxnard are now coordinating regular supportive conference calls with the eleven Region Chairmen. After several years of inactivity the Inspections policy and procedure has been totally reviewed and revised by Kathy Sparks and the inspections committee. It was noted that the majority of the ACPS policies and procedures had not been updated since 2008. President Cathy Blackmon will ask all committee chairmen to update their P&P and submit it to the BOG for approval.

Deb Norman and Kate Delavega presented the Breeders Support Group to encourage the small and large breeder. This will be discussed at the BOG meeting with the question as to whether this should be a standing committee or remain an Ad Hoc.

Many thanks to the members of this committee Kate Denton, Tracy Garland, Kathy Sparks, Donna Miller, Donna Power, Linda Haines, Marynell Eyles and Cathy Blackmon as well as the many contributing members such as Deb Norman, Kate Delavega, Sally Oxnard and Heather Magnum.

The list of Action Items was discussed and reviewed, and the items were approved as per the Consent Agenda, with unanimous approval.

In New Business a new Ad Hoc committee has been formed – the Breeders Committee, based on the idea that while the pony, and the rider, and the owner get accolades in competition and announcements, it’s often the breeder who does not get recognition at all. The committee will present a report in January. The Chair is Kate Denton with committee members Kate DeLaVega, Fonda Eigel, Kathy Sparks, Deb Norman, and Chris Knox.

There being no further business, the Board meeting was adjourned at 1:35 p.m., to be followed by the first meeting of the newly elected Board for 2020/2021. Cathy Blackmon opened the meeting and Deb Norman, chair of the Nominating Committee listed the newly elected members of the Board. They are Catherine Blackmon, Stephanie Fenton-Hickey, Cynthia Holbrook, Deborah Howell, Lisa Rease, and Kay Clements. Jill McNIcol was thanked for her years of service.

The election for the officers of the Board was conducted by Deb Norman, as she offered a slate of officers for the coming year, with an invitation for nominations from the floor. Hearing none, the slate of officers as presented were elected. They are Linda Haines, president, Fonda Eigel, vice-president, Stephanie Fenton-Hickey, treasurer, Marynell Eyles, secretary (not a Board member).

The attendees were thanked and a 15 minute chat session was enjoyed by all, and eventually, the meeting was closed at 1 p.m.