

Monthly Spotlight – State Line Tack.com

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Off to the Races: A 2020 Graduate Reflects on a Career in 4-H



Martina Essert, 18, of the Chesapeake 4-H Horse and PonyClub in Virginia has been on a horse since she was in her mom's belly, today she's getting ready to say goodbye to 4-H and turn her sights towards college. She'll be joining the University of Georgia this Fall majoring in Journalism with a minor in International Relations.

As the youngest of 5 children, Martina recalls waiting anxiously to turn 9 years old so she could join 4-H like her siblings "my mom definitely saw the impact 4-H had on my brother and sister and she wanted me to get into it as well...I've ridden my entire life and so has my mom and grandma, so I definitely knew I wanted to join the 4-H horse program." Now in her 10th year in 4-H, Martina is grateful for all of the experiences, lessons and knowledge that have made her who

she is today. "It's such a community and such an inspiring place to grow up in."

While competing in horse shows was a big focus of Martina's 4-H experience, she also remembers the valuable lessons she learned around finance, record-keeping and horse science, particularly through Hippology and Horse Bowl competitions "that knowledge from early in my 4-H career still serves me to this day; if I'm having issues with my horses in the barn I can still draw on that knowledge that I gained when I was 9 or 10 years old in 4-H."

Throughout her years in 4-H, Martina also took advantage of the many leadership opportunities to help her overcome her shyness. She currently serves as President of her 4-H Club and Ambassador of Virginia's 4-H Cabinet, in previous years she was elected to be a Virginia 4-H Horse Ambassador (and now serves as mentor to the program). She credits her own 4-H mentors, many of them women who have pushed her to apply for leadership opportunities and aim high

"being in 4-H meant being in a very supportive environment, they were really cultivating me and helping me to grow and get more confidence."

In 2018, Martina attended the Legacy Awards, and it was this experience in 4-H that steered her toward a career in Journalism. "I got to meet Jackie Joyner-Kersey and interview her as a green carpet correspondent...I never thought I would be standing there interviewing an Olympian!" The experience also offered her a new perspective on the breadth and impact of 4-H programs "I always knew 4-H was more than horses, but that moment when I got to see all the different pillar winners was so inspiring to me."

While Legacy was a highlight of her 4-H career, Martina also recalls difficult moments in 4-H that helped her grow and become more resilient. In 2017, just days before competing in the Southern Regional Championships, an event that required grueling 5:00 am trainings every day, Martina's horse "Johnny Be Perfect" tore a ligament and was forced out of the competition. "It was so heartbreaking, I couldn't even put into words how upsetting that was." Later that year she attended the State Horse Show without her horse and got to focus on other areas of the show that she had previously overlooked "I got to spend time volunteering in the show office and getting to know all the volunteers that make the show happen, I got to walk around and cheer my friends on and join art and portfolio competitions...it really expanded my perspective of 4-H."

Being in 4-H has also offered very tangible skills that Martina will continue to apply throughout her life and career. The opportunity to get to know her horse and create a bond, for example, has offered a valuable lesson in relationship-building: "I've got this animal who thinks entirely differently from me...whenever you are working with your horse you are trying to take the fear out of them, you are trying to reassure them." Thanks to the horse program, she's also gained valuable organizational and time management skills "being so organized with all of my horse work has really helped me be organized with my academics." Lastly, competition within 4-H has taught her kindness and sportsmanship "instead of getting so wrapped up in my own nerves at shows and competitions, I just go up to someone else who looks like they are nervous and say hey- good luck today- just those tiny comments that take ten seconds out of your day can really make someone else's day."

As she wraps up her last few months in 4-H, Martina has some advice to future 4-H'ers "take advantage of any opportunity that you have access to and don't take any of them for granted because so many kids would give anything to have the opportunities that 4-H'ers have."