

Horses or houses?

Shelbyville copes with growing pains

Kentucky's love for horses is well-documented, and while the Thoroughbred farms of Lexington's Bluegrass region and the Kentucky Derby held at Churchill Downs are in the national spotlight, so, too, is another kind of horse in a much smaller city.

Shelbyville, located in Shelby County near Louisville, is the official "Saddlebred Capital of the World," so designated by a resolution passed by both houses of Kentucky's General Assembly—and its annual Saddlebred horse show is regarded as one of the nation's best.

The city claims that the world's first Saddlebred was born in Shelby County, near Todds Point. Today there are more than 20 saddlebred establishments in the county housing about 50 percent of the top stallions in the breed.

The saddle horse has been a part of the area's history since the 1760s, when **Daniel Boone** and his brother **Squire** traveled to Kentucky on "American Horses," the forerunners of the modern Saddlebred. As the American Saddlebred breed grew, some of the most historic farms were located around Shelbyville. One of the most famous was *Undulata*, where Civil War veteran **Harry Weissinger** and his sons bred the great stallion American Born. Later owned by **Jane Meyer**, *Undulata* was the home of *Beau Gallant*. Now the home of saddle horse breeder and trainer **Edward Bennett**, it is again returning to prominence.

The area's saddlebred status is enhanced by the annual Shelbyville Horse Show, which has won numerous awards, including being named three times the best horse show in the U.S.



SHELBYVILLE TOURISM

by the United Professional Horsemen's Association, and being named the best horse show in Kentucky 12 out of the last 15 years. To kick off the 15th annual show in August, an 80-by-160-foot tent housed 100 stalls for part of the contingent of 450 champion Saddlebreds and hackney ponies that participated. The show is known on the Saddlebred circuit as the last step before the World's Championship Horse Show at the Kentucky State Fair. The show attracts about 20,000 visitors to Shelbyville every year.

The community spirit exhibited by Shelbyville residents plays a big part in making the horse show so special. It is seen in the number of volunteers, in the picture-perfect decoration of the arena, and in the vast array of culinary offerings in the hospitality tent.

To enhance this all-out community effort, the Shelby Development Corporation, an economic program that focuses on maintaining a vibrant

downtown, has for the past 10 years produced the Shelbyville Horse Show Jubilee, a weeklong festival that ushers in the show.

While the show and the Saddlebred farms have given the area a personality and national presence, some horse farm operators in Shelby County—particularly saddlebred owners—are concerned that development is squeezing out their farmland and changing the quality of the county.

In the past few months, many of the seldom-heard-from horse owners challenged two local zoning changes for developments in the heart of the Saddlebred farm area.

One development attorney, **Mark Dean**, contended that farms on U.S. 60 in the western part of the county are prime for residential development because of Jefferson County growth pushing east. He said horse farms can fetch high prices as development land, not farmland.

Shelbyville at a Glance

Mayor: Thomas L. Hardesty

Population: 10,390

Location: Shelbyville, the county seat of Shelby County, is located in the northwestern part of central Kentucky, in the outer Bluegrass region and adjacent to Louisville.

Shelby County has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the nation, and 450 jobs have been created in the past three years.

History:

Shelbyville was founded when **William Shannon** donated an acre of land for public use in 1792. He laid out an additional 50 acres in town lots, and the settlement began to grow. Over the next several years Shelbyville grew in importance as a market, transportation and governmental center. Several Civil War battles were fought in Shelby County from September 1862 to

January 1865—one of the most significant coming on Aug. 26, 1864, when a band of Confederate guerrillas commanded by Capt. **David Martin**

attacked Shelbyville.

Shelbyville has a wide variety of interesting 19th century buildings that help the town retain an atmosphere of yesteryear. Like the county, Shelbyville is named for **Isaac Shelby** (see *Kentucky Monthly*, July 2006, page 57), Kentucky's first governor.

Shelby County is dubbed "The Saddlebred Capital of the

World" because it is home to more than 40 Saddlebred breeding and training facilities. The presence of the saddle horse in the area was known as early as the 1760s, when **Daniel Boone** and his brother **Squire** ventured into Kentucky on what were then called



SHELBYVILLE TOURISM

Mary Gaylord McClean, owner of the 500-acre Golden Creek Saddlebred farm on U.S. 60, countered that high-priced farmland makes it that much easier to sell without dividing the property, as she has done with a farm in Woodford County. Horse owners are now attempting to form a group that will promote better zoning rules in Shelby County and protect the investments of horse farmers.

Like some other public officials, State Sen. **Gary Tapp** thinks development and horse industries can live happily together. He said subdivisions will provide more customers for the riding stables.

Some farmers, many of whom sell goods to horse farm operators, fear horsemen will leave the county, looking for greener pastures in counties with zoning laws such as Fayette or Woodford. After the 1,221-home Saddle Ridge subdivision was approved last month, reports spread that organizers of the Shelbyville Horse Show—which last year pumped \$1.8 million into the local economy—would move elsewhere.

As the growing pains of community development continue, the principles of the NewCities Institute will also continually need to be applied. Seeking to include youth, diversity and inclusiveness is one way Shelbyville can address this constantly changing situation. Other NewCities principles such as striving to play to your uniqueness and building beautifully while stewarding the environment could also prove to be essential elements in moving the city forward — retaining its heritage while planning for smart growth.

—NEWCITIES INSTITUTE STAFF

12 principles for NewCities

1. Connect to the World
2. Encourage Youth, Diversity and Inclusiveness
3. Feed the Mind, Nurture the Soul
4. Embrace Healthy Living
5. Remain True to the City's Uniqueness
6. Don't Merely Grow, Plan and Develop Over Time
7. Build Beautifully and Steward the Environment
8. Cultivate Leadership and Citizen Involvement
9. Recruit, Retain and Generate Wealth
10. Mimic Bigness, but Think Small
11. Rethink Boundaries
12. Buy Locally, Sell Globally

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Directions from Louisville Or Lexington
 I-64 to Shelbyville exit #35. Travel north on Hwy. 53 (which turns into Hwy. #55) approximately 3.5 miles.
 Take a right at the stoplight (Hwy. #43). Follow Hwy. #43 until road splits into Hwy. #12. Follow Hwy. #12 approximately 1 mile.
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Among the most famous Saddlebred farms is Undulata, established by Civil War veteran Harry Weissinger and his sons. Undulata produced one of history's greatest stallions, American Born, and the farm was also home to Beau Gallant when Jane Meyer owned it. Today, the farm is the home of breeder and trainer Edward Bennett.

Shelbyville, whose motto is “Good Land, Good Living, Good People,” also has a number of small, quaint shops featuring Kentucky crafts, antiques, fine jewelry and gifts. Downtown has a public fountain and a number of quiet shaded corners and green squares.

Special events and attractions: The annual Shelbyville Horse Show held in early August attracts participants and tourists from across the nation. The show received the National Honor Show award, the highest recognition given by the international United Professional Horsemen's Association. The show also has been named the best in Kentucky on numerous occasions ... The Whitney M. Young Institute is named for the former executive director of the National Urban League ... The Claudia Sanders Dinner House is the former home of Harland Sanders and his wife, Claudia. It served as the Sanders' residence and base of operations before additional construction created the dinner house, which specializes in Southern cooking and, of course, chicken.

The world-renowned Wakefield-Scarce Galleries in the historic Science Hill buildings once housed Science Hill Preparatory School for Young Ladies, which was a college preparatory school for girls from 1824-1939 ... The Stanley-Casey House includes the portion of the house built in 1815 and add-ons that were constructed in 1826. Augustus Owsley Stanley, Kentucky's governor from 1915-1919, was born here. The house was later used as a school for boys ...

Native sons and daughters: Whitney M. Young Jr. was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor, in 1969 ... Martha Layne Collins, Kentucky's first and only female governor, served from 1983-87 ... Augustus Owsley Stanley, Kentucky governor from 1915-1919, was born in Shelbyville ... Julia Ann Tevis, who opened the Science Hill Female Academy in 1825 ...

Web sites for additional information:

www.shelbyvillekentucky.com
www.shelbyvilleky.com
www.sentinelnews.com