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## Ontario Equestrian Federation – 2014 Annual General Meeting

### Executive Director's Address

#### Staying Relevant

It is a very exciting time at the OEF. There are many changes happening while we focus on expanding and strengthening our programs and improving our member relations. All the while, we need to continue to focus on being innovative, relevant and responsive.

As you know, change is never easy and we know that we have some challenges ahead of us:

Firstly, we need to ask ourselves, can the OEF be an affective provincial sport organization and still create and deliver value for all of its members, whether they are competitors or recreational participants?

Our members now have more complex needs. They are no longer only satisfied with a membership card and insurance benefits. Therefore, we need to constantly try to recognize and adapt to our members' complex needs while continually looking ahead to what the future might have in store for the horse industry and its participants. We want to know what our members need before our members know themselves. Not an easy task.

In order to deliver valuable programs and benefits we need to ask ourselves:

- Who are our members?
- What do our members do with their horses?
- Where is the next generation of members coming from?
- What direction should the OEF be heading in?
- Who does the OEF want to be when it grows up...and will we ever stop growing?



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Ultimately, we want to ensure that the OEF remains relevant and we want to avoid stagnation. Therefore, we have shifted our focus from “how many members can we get” to “what are we doing for our members”. This focus includes energies spent on new business concepts, brand development and positioning along with constant innovation.

The OEF currently has almost 22,000 members, which is an enviable number but it is a number that has not changed over the last few years. We know that there are tens of thousands of more equine enthusiasts in this province that are not members, nor have ever been a member. Why? Either they don't know about us or they don't see value in joining based on the benefits that we have provided up until now. It is exciting for us that there are tremendous opportunities for growth, but first we need to be sure that we are in a position to properly service and provide value to this group and that is exactly what we are positioning the OEF to do.

To begin, we are currently working to complete the following projects:

- A new strategic plan – what we need to do
- An operational Plan – how we are going to do it
- A marketing Plan - how we are going to sell it and get money to pay for it all
- A new Membership/Communications Plan – how are we going to let everyone know about it and participate by becoming a member. Or as I like to call it ...the close.

In the midst of creating value to all of our members, we also need satisfy the needs and expectations of the Ministry of Tourism Culture and Sport. As the provincial sport organization for equestrian in the province of Ontario, the OEF enters into a contractual relationship with the Ministry to deliver programs to improve equestrian sport in Ontario. While there is a funding component to this relationship there is also a strict delivery criteria.

We must uphold our commitment to identify and develop athletes bound for podiums. The ministry has made it very clear that the base funding we receive must be used to improve and grow equestrian sport in Ontario. We were not always clear what defined “sport”. Over the last year, the ministry has worked closely with us to review



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and make suggestions on funding guidelines. We now have a better understanding of what the word “sport” means and we know that all funding that the OEF distributes must be meaningful and have achievable outcomes.

ie) cost = benefit = measureable outcome.

We now have parameters that all programs must follow in order to receive funding. Over the last nine years the OEF has distributed \$428k to various associations, recreational groups and projects. The OEF can and will continue to support associations and recreational projects, but all funded projects will now have to involve one of the following factors: safety, capacity building, talent identification and development, along with officials and/or coaching development.

With our new clearly defined guidelines and criteria we can now assist in funding programs that we can measure. We will also be to determine whether or not these programs are in fact bettering equestrian activity and sport in Ontario. We will no longer be able to distribute funds without clearly defined criteria.

One of the new athlete development projects that we will be working on is the newly acquired Ontario Has Talent program, which we are very excited about. This year the Ontario Has Talent program will focus on developing young Dressage athletes, but the plan is to roll the initiative out to all the disciplines over time.

In addition to sport, recreation has always been and will continue to be a focus for the OEF. The ministry is also committed to recreational riding and the OEF will proudly work with the Liberal government to develop a provincial trail system, which was declared one of Premier Wynne’s mandates in an open letter to her ministers.

The OEF is committed to working with Equine Canada who hired a dedicated staff representative who is responsible for recreation. EC’s manager of recreation is working with all the provincial sport organizations, including the OEF to improve the quality, access and availability of trails in Ontario and across Canada. This past summer, OEF worked with EC to launch a National Trail Guide certification program. A successful pilot was run in Nova Scotia and I am proud to announce that two Ontario participants are now nationally certified trail guides. We are looking forward to



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introducing this program in Ontario, as trail riding is a large part of the equestrian experience here. The OEF also sponsored a Le TREC clinic hosted by Equine Canada. Le TREC is an exciting recreational activity out of Europe that challenges riders at orienteering and tests their riding skills through obstacle courses and trails. It's a great activity that anyone can do on any type of horse in any type of saddle. We are very excited to get more riders interested in Le TREC.

It's ambitious, but we are dedicated to provide equal attention to both sport and recreation programs and participants. We are in a position that asks us to be everything to everyone. Not an easy task, but it is one that we are going to tackle!

We have recognized that we need to give more time and attention to our key educational programs that include:

### **Equestrian Skills Development (ESD) competitions:**

- Currently there are guidelines in place for the Hunter, Jumper and Dressage competitions to run under ESD sanctioning. The committee will be looking at expanding the program to include Eventing in 2015.
- A committee will be established in the coming months to solicit stakeholder suggestions and feedback so as to continually develop and improve this entry level program to ensure that we offer a program that develops grass roots competitors, organizers and officials.

### **National Learn to ride program**

- Looking at how the OEF can encourage and engage more facilities to offer the Learn to Ride program in order to create a consistent learning experience and standards for riders and parents in Ontario.

### **Coaching Certification/ Stable Accreditation**

- We need to do a better job of educating instructors and coaches on the importance of becoming certified and how this will enhance their business model.
- The Horse Facilities program has receive much more attention over the past few years and we need to continue to develop and improve this program to encourage more facilities to join.



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- We also need to do a better job of educating parents and riders on the importance of riding with a certified instructor/coach at an accredited facility.

Along with developing our educational programs we have given a great deal of time and energy to securing new affinity programs and aligning our brand with established organizations, like the OFA, over the past year. The programs that Allan discussed in his address will provide members more tangible benefits that will help strengthen our numbers and create more revenue that can be invested back into the industry.

We have a lot of plans for the coming year, but everything will be for nothing if we don't improve our communication with members. We live in a society where we are inundated with a constant flow of news and information. Again, we are trying to communicate with a large group with diverse interests. We recognize that we need to improve our communication channels and deliver pertinent information to our specific user groups. The success of the OEF and its programs relies on effective communication that is relevant, timely and cohesive.

Our main communication medium with members is WHOA!, our quarterly newsletter. WHOA! has experienced a complete revamp over the last few years. The articles are more focused on OEF news, the articles cover member achievements and our breed/discipline section is stronger than ever with more articles covering more types of activities. We know that our members read and value WHOA! (because they tell us!) and we will proudly continue to publish and deliver the newsletters for members.

To conclude, our members are our customers and as such they are all special. Everything we do at the OEF is for you, our member. You continue to demand the best from us and we plan to do our best by you by providing you with quality programs, relevant benefits and effective communication. We will continue to push the envelope and test new markets on your behalf. We will fail along the way, but that's okay as long as we learn from our mistakes and move forward. We will continue to make change relevant, meaningful and effective for you.

To quote Winston Churchill

“To improve is to change, To be perfect is to change often.”



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Thank you