Today on across the fence it’s home to some of the most prestigious equestrian events in North America and helps generate millions for Vermont’s economy. We are going to learn about the green MTN horse association and its facilities and programs in South Woodstock. Good afternoon and thanks for joining us I'm Judy Simpson. Horses joining cows and other livestock as an important part of Vermont’s animal industry. That industry is a major contributor towards agribusiness is and our bucolic landscape. On across the fence we've learned how Vermont’s equine businesses and horse owners are important to viability of feed hay fencing and equipment dealers and now are going to get a glimpse at another asset of Vermont’s horse industry. The green MTN horse association. To begin I'm joined by a good friend of across the fence Betsy green UVM professor and extension equine specialist. Good to see you again

Betsy.: Great to be back.

Judy.: Fall semester is underway.

Betsy.: Yes the campus is full of students and classes are going full force.

Judy.: And horses.

Betsy.: And horses of course. There are new horses in the barn.

Judy.: Give us an idea why a place like GM HA might be so important of Vermont’s equine industry.

Betsy.: They have a fantastic facility down there in Woodstock and they host over 65 events each year. With those events comes 10,000 visitors many of those out of state visitors two participate help ride or even just watch these great events. They have multiple disciplines from hunter jumpers to dressage horse trials two driving and even fall foliage trail rides. And one other big ones the 100 mile endurance event as well.

Judy.: You have brought along two guests from the association?

Betsy.: Yes Marty hunt is the executive director at GMHA and she's come to tell us a little bit about it.

Judy.: Mighty thanks for making the trip up here to visit with us.
Marty.: Great to be here thanks for having me here

Judy.: Betsy touched on some of the events that you host in the visitors that you bring in but what kind of information or hard evidence to you have about the economic impact of your organization?

Marty.: We've always known that we've had an important impact in the region and recently we decided to document that so that we could be clear about it and we learned through some recent research work that we impact the regional economy by adding about $4.5 million into it. We define regional economy by being about 30 miles of us so we know as a result of that the fact that we are in South Woodstock bringing in the people that we do businesses benefit from that because of the spending and the added value that our visitors bring when they come.

Judy.: Because many of these events span a couple of days.

Marty.: Absolutely our busy times are in the weekends and they tend a start on Wednesday or Thursday and go through Sunday and our average visitors are here two or three days.

Judy.: The association has unique place in the horse industry can you tell us a little bit about that?

Marty.: GMHA is 85 years old and occupies about 65 acres and South Woodstock along route 106. Although I'm a newbie to the association and I've been there three years. It's been so clear to me in my time there how precious this resources to the area. Decades of families and neighbors and friends have come two GM HA over and over again. They've raise their kids and come back and I think the fact that we stand so many different disciplines and reach out to so many different course interests and have done that for so many years we truly are a special place in South Woodstock.

Judy.: I know that the facility was purchased in the fifties is that correct?

Marty.: Yes as I said were 85 years old. We're probably best known for our three day 100 mile ride which Betsy mentioned which we just had to cancel because of bad weather but that event has been going on for 75 years straight and I believe it's the oldest one in the country.

Judy.: You have some specific funds devoted to helping young people as well?

Marty.: We have a couple investment funds that were created through the generosity of investors who are riders and disappearance and friends of GMHA. Because were nonprofit organization in addition to the competition scheduled that we're on which is very heavy we also have a strong educational mission and a lot of that is focused on young people. We have the junior horsemanship clinic and we have our four H'ers and pony club ers and young riders. Were able to support them by not only having a facility for them but through scholarships.

Judy.: As the years have gone on the association's list of activities continues to grow maybe you can take us through some of the years and some of the events?

Marty.: As Betsy mentioned we run 65 events in 26 weeks they start in April and go through October. We're all pretty tired by the end of the time. We do five different disciplines so you can come and be an event are or you can do trail riding or dressage. Hunter jumper and driving we're one of the few places where you can come and actually get some of the driving competitions in. Many of the competition events are sanctioned of their organizations so their qualifying events and their important for many of the amateur riders around here.

Judy.: Can you tell me a bit about how that works and why that's so important?
Marty.: Because we're the only organization like this in New England a lot of folks who are in this area that like to compete enjoy having GMHA in its backyard. The fact that they can calm and not have to travel too far and have the wide breath of experience whether you want a jump of course or a hack a horse to have it nearby is a great asset to the locals.

Judy.: Let's talk a little bit about the grounds and facilities.

Marty.: We have three rings. One is a new all-purpose ring you're seeing a picture of and there it's been done a few years ago that allowed us to expand our ability to allow for both dressage and jumping. We also have several barns cross country courses we have a little cafe and the youth center. An office building that's a picture of a cross country course. Somebody enjoying the beautiful trails. Most of the trails are not on our property we do have a few but primarily you're going to go off on the private land. You can see here young people enjoying one of our beautiful stream settings when in the middle of the summer and the weather's nice we're happy to have that kind of bucolic quiet relaxing setting that forces so much enjoy it when they here and I think that's one of the reasons why they love coming to GMHA.

Judy.: You mention the fact the facility is right in our own backyard and a lot of access to a lot of population but if it weren't for this particular site how far would someone travel if you were in Vermont for an event?

Marty.: They would go to Massachusetts or New York or further south.

Judy.: So these are some really beautiful pictures but of course unfortunately the green MTN horse association did not escape Irene's wrath. What was the impact?

Marty.: It was pretty shocking on that Monday when I showed up to work. You're looking at a picture of See barn on the left side you can see how nice it looks with the footing and the ability to get in and out of the stalls. Then on the other side you can see the rain just washed away underneath the barn for two barns actually which is going to require a lot of material to be brought in and mats to be cleaned out. That's what did it who are told is rivaled the storm of 73 and the flooding that happened there. You can see the water washing through our main parking lot and a barn and b barn. That's how it is our junk field where you can see the foot rail fence is almost a merged and our storage area under water. Here's an example of a trail that unfortunately will probably never recapture. C this is an area and have that was on the 100 mile trail. Here's another example of a washout on a private property which going in to fix these now is going to require a lot of work and a lot of money. That's over by our dust bowl area and again you can see our pedestrian bridges were totally washed away all five of them. We now have a big cleanup project ahead of us.

Judy.: Have you had any time yet to develop any kind of recovery plan?

Marty.: We've had to do that as a result of walking and Monday morning. Something that was a new experience for me. We had people on the grounds board members and others that morning saying what you going to do when you going to do? I quickly gathered the great staff they have together and we sat down and listed what we have to do in terms of construction rebuilding how we're going to communicate with our constituency and our competitors and what we're going to do with the rest of the season how are going to manage volunteers so we've gone to bat immediately using our website to communicate with folks in our e news and we're also have bulldozers and backhoes right there right now we'll be working 24/7 pretty much run the clock with people coming in around the weekends. We are going to rebuild and when we open this spring will be back better than ever.

Judy.: We should mention that there was not an event happening today the storm hit. You a very careful to make sure the grounds were empty.
Marty.: Thank goodness for good reporting. We had notice of the storm coming we knew it would hit we had a driving show that weekend. Were able to move the Cones course to Friday afternoon and after our competitor dinner on Saturday night we bid everybody farewell put the wheelbarrows away and hope for the best.

Judy.: Betsy how do you even addressed starting to help horse owners in the state??

Betsy.: Extension has been working very closely with the Vermont agency of AG first of all identifying folks that need help how we can get the information or equipment or tools or feed or such too them. Also even just to figure out how to get the information as far as how to deal with flooded pastures. What safe what's not? And how we handle a hayfield. Is a usable is it not? What's acceptable from the regulations two the reality for example people to have nowhere to turn out now what are they going to do their already feeding hay that they had planned on banking for the winter and what are we going to do? Really dealing with that and also being there to listen to what the needs are and go through the process.

Judy.: For people who don't understand when you're talking about pastures a lot of the pastures were under water which deposited a lot of silt on top which means there’s no access to the grass.

Betsy.: There's no access and you have to figure out what went through that pasture. Everything from houses to propane gasoline to potentially sewage to even just things from the soil that came up from clostridium all issues. Anything like that what's a for the horse and it's not always an easy black and white answer.

Judy.: So you transition from that to thinking now OK now what am I going to do to feed my horses? I know I've talked to Cow farmers as well and they're the same boat as far as trying to find feed.

Betsy.: Yes and it's not an easy issue because you have Texas burning up so there's hay needs all over the country. There's people in Nebraska shipping hay down south what's that going to leave one where trying to find hay. One of the things we're talking about is planning ahead working with the people bankers if needed and letting them know these are going to be issues so that you're prepared and you're not coming into February saying now what do I do? Even if it's getting support whether it's financial or otherwise to try and find the best way to make sure that we keep these horses and all of our livestock in good health and under the management..

Judy.: So what's the first step but someone should take do you think? Compiling a list of what's gone or what they think they're going to need going forward and start working tortes that?

Betsy.: There's actually some great forms that the ad agency and extension has available to document the damages for one thing so that if there's any potential for help from FEMA or other low interest loans you have to get that documentation first. People are too busy trying to figure out what to do but that's one of the processes that might help them down the road so that's probably the first step is actually putting in a damage report with the state and contacting the ad agency or UVM extension so folks can get people started with that.

Judy.: I'm going to switch gears a little bit Marty and talk about something you mentioned and your organization does which is working with younger people kids and their horses and pony clubs and so forth. How important is that to have the youngsters have that experience so when they grow up hopefully still involved with horses and keep the industry going?

Marty.: It's critical because as you said it's sort of the future and because GMHA has been around so long that generations have continued to come back and obviously you need to it entice and interest the young people. Now it is there so many choices of disciplines to ride bonds emphasize a certain
type of riding so we notice we don't have so many young people in our trail groups anymore but we have many more in the dressage and jumping world.

Judy.: How can Vermonters support you and how can they learn more about the association?

Marty.: You can go to our website which I concede is posted here GMHAINC.org website we do have information on how to volunteer. The biggest thing people can do if they'd like to make a contribution you can go on the website and learn how you can donate or support us in other ways. But the biggest thing we need right now our funds to help us build back.

Judy.: Because as you mentioned winters going to be here soon and you have to have things in place before winter hits because you start with projects and events as soon as the snow melts.

Marty.: Right.

Judy.: Thank you so much for being with us today.

Marty.: Thank you so much for having me.

Judy.: And of course Betsy thanks always to you.

Betsy.: Absolutely.

Judy.: That's our program for today I'm Judy Simpson will see you again next time on across the fence.

Across the fence is brought to you as a public service by the University of Vermont extension and WCAX TV

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. University of Vermont Extension, Burlington, Vermont. University of Vermont Extension, and U.S. Department of Agriculture, cooperating, offer education and employment to everyone without regard to race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or familial status.