



Eric Smith, FHANA Board of Directors candidate

Many may already know me, but for those that do not, let me introduce myself. My name is Eric Smith, and I am running for a third term for the FHANA board of directors.

I would like to tell you a little bit about myself and my background. In my day job as a sourcing manager, I have the responsibility for sourcing over 200 million dollars a year in capital equipment and services. My educational experience is a graduate from the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, and I hold a Professional Engineering license as a Mechanical Engineer.

My family has been involved with horses 25 years ago when my daughter wanted a horse. Our first horses included an appaloosa, a paint, a quarter horse, a Haflinger, Morgans, a Saddlebred, and an Arab. We finally focused on the wonderful Friesian breed. My introduction to Friesians started 20 years ago when my wife, Heidi, purchased a young Friesian colt. Since that time the herd has grown, and we currently have seven Friesians and the original appaloosa horse as well as 2 boarded horses.

All of these horses led to many experiences and opportunities. In the early years I was a volunteer 4-H horse leader and horse project trainer. Safety is always first and all the kids learned to enjoy horses without getting hurt. Several students became accomplished riders and drivers earning state and national recognition. Others were graced with the use of a horse in the horseless horse program. Their smiles and connections to the horse have forever changed both their lives and mine.

My experience with the Friesian horse has been diverse and in-depth as well as casual to professional. Enjoying the breed is my passion from trail riding, performing breed demonstrations at multiple horse expos to competing in ADS, IFSHA and USEF carriage driving events. I trained my horses to local, state and national titles including the FHANA high point driving award as well as several regional driving awards. Becoming more and more involved I learned how to handle and show the breed. This led to being a "runner" handler at inspections for over 10 years and handling over 1000 Friesian horses at the inspections. As many have noted, I love the babies, but the stallions are special. My "circuit team" was able to qualify several stallions that eventually received studbook breeding approval. Additionally, I have trained and presented client's horses in-hand and in the inspection driving IBOP tests.

Every contact with owners represents an opportunity for knowledge and education. Handling thousands of Friesians has allowed a personal connection with so many people. This contact afforded educational moments for both small groups and individuals. Each contact moment is an opportunity to talk about training, tack, what the judges see, and potential improvement. This direct connection has also led to building a large network of Friesian owners and enthusiasts. These connections have served to learn about different issues, concerns, and progress made in the Friesian breed and FHANA. It is amazing what one learns when you simply listen to people with an open mind. FHANA offered me opportunities to be a FHANA clinician, and I traveled all over North America giving talks on breeding and inspection preparation. I have also been a webinar clinician for several FHANA webinars.

Breeding is also a deep passion. In studying large amounts of information available to the breed, I began a breeding program. We've had great success with our own horses. This passion to breed led to developing a system of defining goals, balancing genetics and making recommendations. This system has grown to help others as a breeding advisor for the Fenway Foundation for Friesian Horses. Hundreds of mare owners have requested the in-depth breeding consultations. Sharing this knowledge has been a priority. Many members have had open dialogs about their horses. Others have participated in several of my FHANA education webinars. One of my breeding papers was published internationally and as well as my collaboration with expert breeding educators was published in several European articles/papers. A wise person recently asked why I would put myself through another term on the FHANA board? I pondered the question. My response is I care. I care for the horses. I care about the members knowing that everyone has something to offer. I know I can continue to make a difference in bringing a sense of community. Letting everyone know that everyone matters, and they bring something to offer if we listen. I bring representation and treating members with respect. In my travels to most areas and sites I have gotten to know many of you and call you friends.

In the end my approach is to first represent the Friesian horse and do what is best for the breed. Next, the membership deserves not only representation, but participation and a voice in the future direction. Ensuring integrity and trust through transparency will go a long way by representing the horses and members, the Association will prosper. I am honored for the opportunity to represent the FHANA membership for a third term, promoting respect, integrity and transparency.

Finally, I would also like to thank the entire membership for allowing me to serve you for the past 6 years as either a secretary, treasurer, director, and president. I welcome the opportunity to serve you again for the next 3.

Please describe your credentials which would help you to be an effective FHANA board member.

I have been on the FHANA board for the past 6 years serving as secretary, treasurer, and president. Servant leadership has allowed others to grow, contribute and lead in their rights. I have also been involved with committees since at least 2009. These committees include sports, IT marketing, inspection, finance, education, stallion, and rules & regulations. Each one of these committees has provided key insights into all parts of the Association. I could go on about all the importance each one committee brings, but the one common thread is the members are the key and building relationships drives cooperation. I also learned that everyone has ideas and there may be more than one way to solve problems. We just need to listen to each other's ideas and treat each other with respect. These lessons are most important for a board member. We need to set an example and hold ourselves to a higher standard.

Describe three initiatives you would like to see FHANA accomplish during your term?

1. Renew virtual inspections. They were available in 2021. Renewing virtual inspections provides opportunities for remote members and includes all registered KFPS horses, so they all have a chance to receive linear scores, breeding feedback and more importantly promotion to their respective studbook. Now all we have to do is convince the KFPS which has already started through the president's periodic meetings. We have made our case and now we need to seal the deal.

2. Incentivize lower kinship by making it part of the inspection scoring and posting kinship calculations for all stallions in the KFPS database. We need to do more than tell breeders to make choices to lower kinship. There needs to be a reward for taking the step, and if a very low kinship can move a horse up one premium at the inspection, the registry will see results. Knowledge is the power to make informed and wise breeding choices. That is why posting kinship for all stallions will dispel assumptions and speculation.

3. Build a stronger member foundation continuing to improve member interpersonal relationships. Feuding and attacks are not healthy. The current board is resolved to work together with respect and listening to differing perspectives. We do not have to agree, but listening gives understanding why there is a differing view. This momentum is carrying on to the membership. But mending these relationships does not happen by themselves. They need help. This past year I have helped renew several relations by taking the time to talk and listen. Amazing things happen when we listen to each other.

What could be improved to make FHANA more attractive to past members, existing members, or new members?

Participation and inclusion is the key to keeping members engaged. We need to have fun things to do like expos, parades, shows, educational experiences, and community. There needs to be more than just registrations and inspections for breeders. The awards program has opportunities for almost any Friesian owner or trainer. Making events fun and rewarding builds the Friesian community. But most importantly we need to treat everyone as a friend whether they are part of FHANA or any other organization. The horse does not know or care about our affiliations, why do we?

In your opinion, what are the most important issues facing FHANA going forward, and how would you address these issues as a Board member?

Health and breeding to include long-term health is most important. This is our strategic plan that includes a research program. The board started a yearly research grant in 2022 which needs continued support not just in practice but also financially. Donations are also needed to help support the program. Donor buttons are now available with membership renewals, social media posts are promoting giving, and a new online auction is being developed. There is also risky breeding occurring due to the lack of genetic and kinship data for all adult horses. Good mating choices cannot be made if the information is not available. FHANA is the largest KFPS affiliate. We need to use the position as leverage to bring about change.

Inflation and the health of the balance sheet is another issue facing FHANA on all sides. We have worked hard to be efficient and trim costs wherever possible. Some fees have not increased since 2002 while the KFPS fees rose 2% year-over-year and this year some KFPS fees rose 12%. This is a tall hurdle to pass. We will be posed with either increasing fees or cutting back on key programs. There is every effort to hold the line on increasing fees by looking deep into every expenditure without adversely affecting income. Reflecting back 6 years ago the FHANA balance sheet was on a downward trend for financial stability. Since then, our balance sheet once again is healthy. Our balance sheet will help FHANA weather this inflationary storm.

Finally, the North American stallion testing needs find opportunities for new candidates. It has been too long since the last approved stallion went through the FHANA sponsored testing program. New stallions bring excitement for all enthusiasts and breeders. More of the stallions need to be based in Canada as stallion availability and pricing is challenging. The KFPS is looking at this problem, but they need direction and guidance to make a difference while preserving the quality and policies of the program.