

Shedding light on equine endeavors

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BY WENDY PAULY FOR THE TELEGRAPH HERALD

Photo by: Wendy Pauly for the TH



Christine Woodford, DVM, gives the audience tips for good horse performance last week. Woodford was the keynote speaker at a horse seminar held in Dubuque.

Horse enthusiasts gathered recently to break bread and learn more about their four-legged friends. Three Rivers Town & Country Store, in Epworth, Iowa, sponsored a dinner and seminar last Tuesday at the Best Western Midway Hotel in Dubuque. About 45 attendees listened to talks on feeding horses and equine conformation (how the animal is built). Katie Kotz, equine and lifestyle specialist for Three Rivers, organized the event. She started the night with a discussion on feeding for weight gain.

While many humans struggle to avoid packing on extra pounds, some horses need to gain weight. Horses might need to improve their condition to look better in the show ring, improve fertility, increase growth or performance, in preparation for sale, or to recover from neglect. Kotz discussed how to assess a horse's condition using real-world examples. She updated the group on the progress of Lola, a horse the Kotz family is fostering after she was rescued by the Dubuque Regional Humane Society.

Lola was very thin but has been gaining weight. She also had her teeth worked on and is learning better behavior. Kotz was joined by Fran Minnaert, with Land O'Lakes Purina. Minnaert discussed some characteristics of Purina products. After some audience participation on judging horse conditioning and running

some feed calculations, Kotz turned the floor over to Christine Woodford, DVM.

Woodford, of Mt. Vernon, Iowa, is certified in animal chiropractic care and acupuncture. These services can relieve stress and pain in horses, similar to the relief they can provide humans.

Woodford spoke to the group about equine conformation and gait analysis. The body structure of a horse is important to consider before studying his gait.

“Balanced conformation is important so the horse can perform well,” Woodford said.

She gave the audience tips on how to examine their horses. The veterinarian also explained how some imperfections could be worked around to make horses comfortable and to perform better.

Woodford also noted that sometimes, a horse just might not be built right for certain activities. But horses are resilient and even a short, stocky pony might be good at going over jumps.

After discussing how horses are put together, Woodford tied conformation to how horses move. A well-balanced horse is likely to move with good rhythm. This should yield a healthy horse, free of pain that might be associated with activities. When something is out of balance, the horse can feel pain. Risk factors for soreness include unbalanced feet, an unbalanced rider, poorly fitting equipment or poor conditioning. Fortunately, steps can be taken to correct many issues. Woodford noted, “Proper foot care is important for horses all year.”

Horse hooves grow year-round but faster in warmer months. Keeping the hooves trimmed and level can help the animal move with balance. Woodford also explained how to examine a horse for lameness (soreness) in their legs. She noted that owners should be sure their horses are trained to be led at the walk and trot pace when they are healthy. If an injury is suspected, a horse will need to be led at these gaits to help the vet determine the problem.

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