

# California Woman Brings Skills and Experience to KER

Vinnie has pulled his muzzle off again, and he's eluding everyone who tries to catch him to put it back on; a broken fence board has to be replaced immediately; and someone needs to set up an IV for Sam, who just came off the treadmill and looks as though he's tying up. So, who you gonna call? These varied tasks are all in a day's work for Johanna Nicole. As the new assistant barn manager at Kentucky Equine Research, Johanna draws on years of equine experience as she schedules daily care of the research horses, oversees intern responsibilities, and coordinates farm maintenance.

Born and raised in California, Johanna grew up reading Walter Farley's "Black Stallion" books and dreaming of horses like Man O' War and Seattle Slew. She spent several years showing hunters before taking on a green-broke Appendix Quarter Horse. "He taught me a lot, mainly how to sit a bucking horse," she laughed. Her next horse, an Appaloosa/Thoroughbred mare, was an ideal trail-riding partner. Eventually, however, horses had to take a back seat to college, where Johanna earned a degree in journalism from California State College-Long Beach.

For several years after graduation, Johanna explored newspaper work, investigative reporting, and public relations tasks such as newsletters, press releases, and event coordination. While the work was interesting, Johanna missed her horses. Ready for a career change, she had no problem deciding which direction to take.

"I knew Kentucky was the horse capital of the U.S.," she said. "No place else offers so many opportunities to work one-on-one with horses." Moving to the Bluegrass State in 2000, Johanna set about broadening her experience in the many facets of the Thoroughbred industry. She quickly verified what she had suspected. "A college degree is not what impresses a farm manager," she commented. "You have to prove yourself by putting your time in, no matter who you are."

Working at several large and small farms, Johanna spent several years accumulating knowledge and building credibility. Sales preparation of weanlings and yearlings, a complex and exacting job, was a chance to build on her experience while adding new skills. "You can read about how to do things, but it's when you actually face those situations that you learn the most," she concluded.


After several years of winter broodmare management, assisting in a foaling barn, and starting yearlings in the early stages of their round-pen and under-tack training, Johanna rounded out her skills during a year at Rood and Riddle Equine Hospital. There she worked side-by-side with veterinarians and interns as they treated equine patients



*Responsible for all facets of horse care, assistant barn manager Johanna Nicole adjusts an anti-grazing muzzle.*

for a variety of ailments and conditions. Administering medications and fluids, monitoring and charting vital signs, refluxing colic victims, and tending to horses in the intensive care unit were valuable experiences that could be learned best in a clinical setting.

When she heard about the opening at KER's research barn, Johanna immediately put in an application and was hired in February 2006. "As yet another aspect of the horse industry, research fascinates me," she said. "It's very interesting to participate in the actual studies and see the results."

Providing daily care for seventeen research horses is a demanding physical task, and Johanna and KER's three research interns are responsible for all aspects of the job. That part of her position is exhausting, she admits, but she enjoys working at a place where the horses get good care and are able to spend hours turned out rather than standing in stalls all day. "I like the fact that KER is carrying out research in a way that's good for the horses," she says. As she competently handles a frisky young horse being turned out on a breezy spring morning, it's obvious that Johanna is also good for the horses, and an excellent fit for her position at Kentucky Equine Research. 



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