

A Leap of Faith:

The Chapel at
World Equestrian
Center – Ocala

By Tori Bilas

Photos by Maven Photo + Film



Among World Equestrian Center's many unique aspects, and a significant draw for many families who attend horse shows, is the World Equestrian Center Chapel. Faith is very

important to the Roberts family, and to stay true to their mission of making the venue feel like an extension of home for all visitors, it made sense to include a chapel as an amenity at World Equestrian Center – Ocala, as they had done at the World Equestrian Center – Ohio location.





For property designer Ric Owens, the Chapel is undoubtedly his most beloved part of the property. "On a spiritual level, the Chapel is my favorite thing I have designed at World Equestrian Center – Ocala," he said. The stained-glass windows were hand-selected by Owens along with Mary Roberts, and the interior is complete with stunning chandeliers and custom-made pews from Vietnam. The exterior is classic and unassuming, with soft gray stonework and white trim; the simple structure allows for the experience inside to be the true takeaway.

At the center of the Chapel's design is the 100-year-old antique bell, embellished with lush gardens and capturing the essence of the spiritual escape. "The Chapel is beautiful on multiple levels. It holds a quiet calm and offers an escape from the hustle and bustle of the event venue," said Owens. "It has a non-denominational feel and provides a place where everyone can be at peace and share what

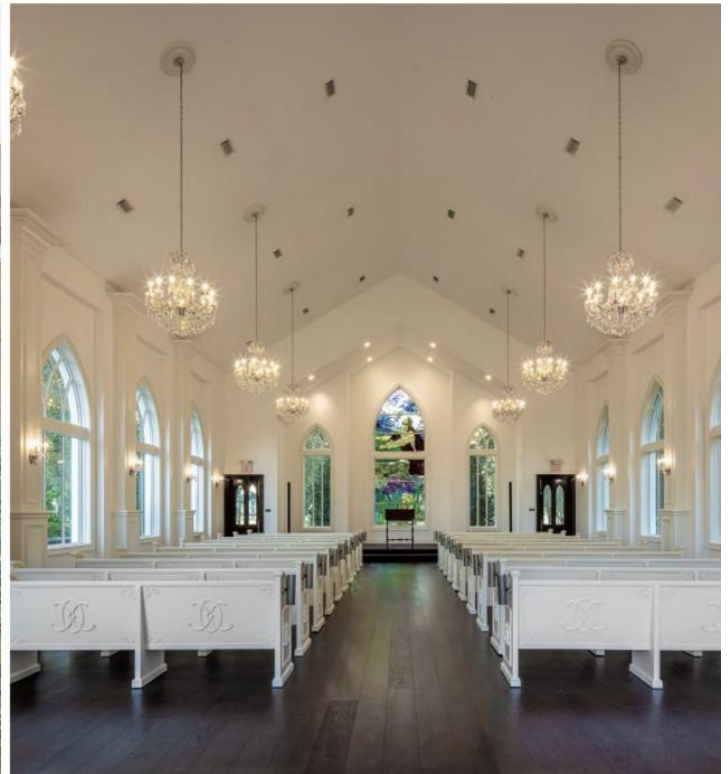
“ It holds a quiet calm and offers an escape from the hustle and bustle of the event venue”

they believe. I think the Chapel is a really special and unique spot.”

“We don't force it on anyone, but it's there if they want it,” said Roby Roberts of the faith component of World Equestrian Center at both Florida and Ohio locations. For many avid equestrians,

weekends mean trips to horse shows and foregoing weekend church services.

Faith extends beyond the chapel doors, though. Across each property, there are baskets filled with small wooden crosses carved from olive wood from Jerusalem available to all visitors at both facilities.



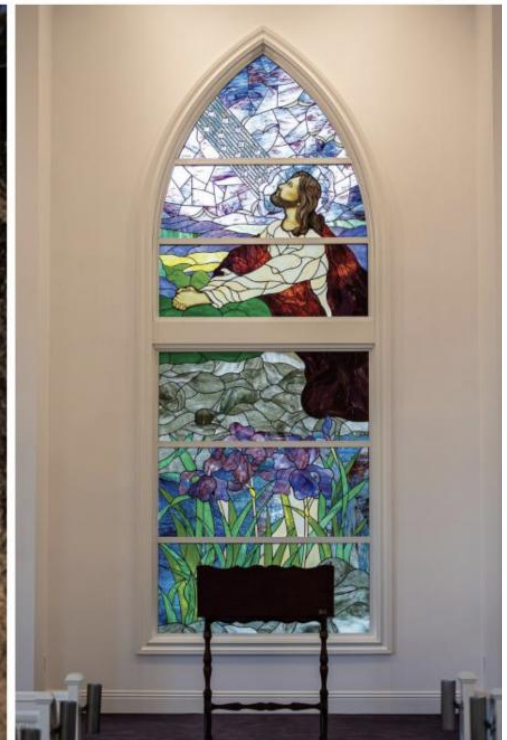


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Just another purposeful detail, these symbols of faith, safety and courage remind exhibitors to feel empowered while competing and anywhere they may go after. Last year, the Ohio facility gave away 20,000 crosses and more than 100,000 of the keepsakes were ordered ahead of the opening of World Equestrian Center – Ocala.

Leading the church services on Sunday and working as a full-time minister for World Equestrian Center in Ohio, Chaplain Larry Speelman has become a very familiar face to many across both World Equestrian Center properties. A native of Wilmington, Ohio, Speelman grew up on a farm with cattle and horses, though World Equestrian Center was his first exposure with show horses and the hunter/jumper world. "I try to tie the scriptures we study together with some aspect of horse show life," he said. "I believe that's a gift that God has given me in this situation as I try to connect the Bible with applicable situations in the horse world."

“Spreading
the Good
Word with
Chaplain
Larry”





Larry Speelman had known of the Roberts family since his youth in Wilmington, where he pastored for more than a decade before joining World Equestrian Center. He met the Roberts family through a prayer circle for a little girl in the equestrian world who had been diagnosed with brain cancer. Following the prayer circle, Roby

Roberts invited Pastor Larry to provide church services, which he did for several years on a voluntary basis. In 2018, Roberts asked Speelman to become Chaplain for his family business, R+L Carriers. With the Wilmington venue being closed for the winter of 2021, Chaplain Larry relocated to Ocala to provide services through the winter season.

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“If you were to ask me years ago what I want to do in life and in ministry, I never would've come up with anything like this,” Chaplain Larry said of his life at World Equestrian Center. “But I get to share my faith, I get to encourage people, I get to be around horses and see so many great things, so this is the perfect environment for me. I really enjoy what I do.”

Visit the Chapel at World Equestrian Center – Ocala anytime. ☺

