

# Capital Challenge Horse Show

*Celebrates 30 Years of Memories*

Story and Photos By  
Sabrina Brashers/  
Jump Media

Three decades ago, Oliver Kennedy and Billy Glass created the Capital Challenge Horse Show at the Prince George's Equestrian Center in Upper Marlboro, MD. The event went on to become one of the country's most esteemed horse shows and the first stop on the elite fall indoor circuit. On September 28-October 8, 2023, the Capital Challenge Horse Show will celebrate its 30th anniversary by once again hosting the country's best hunter, jumper, and equitation competition.

In honor of this special occasion, we spoke with several prominent riders and trainers who have long histories of attending the Capital Challenge Horse Show to find out what makes the competition most memorable for them.



Archie Cox with student Emily Williams who earned the Grand Junior Hunter Championship in 2019 aboard Beach Boy. Photo by Jump Media

## Prestige and Atmosphere

Accomplished hunter rider and trainer Amanda Steege, who won the \$50,000 World Championship Hunter Rider (WCHR) Professional Challenge at the Capital Challenge Horse Show in 2018, is a longtime supporter of the horse show because of the high level of competition it provides across the hunter divisions.

"Capital Challenge is so special because it is one of the few horse shows of the year where hunter people from all over the country come to compete," shared Steege. "Capital Challenge is also the home of the World Champion Hunter Rider (WCHR) Finals and Challenges as well as the North American League finals, the Taylor Harris Insurance Services (THIS) Children's Medal Finals, and the Atrial National Adult Medal Finals. It is the culmination of the year for a lot of people and brings with it a lot of great energy.

"I enjoy the atmosphere and the excitement of the WCHR program and all of the finals," continued Steege. "The WCHR Professional Final is always a fun class whether I'm lucky enough to be in the top six and compete or if I'm in the stands cheering on my friends. I also love Capital Challenge-style presentations and the amazing awards and trophies that are given out every year. It's so special getting to show over beautiful courses and jumps designed by the best in the business. The hunter divisions tend to be very large and are some of the most competitive classes we see all year."

Augusta Iwasaki had a successful junior career showing at the Capital Challenge Horse Show in the equitation as

well as pony and junior hunter divisions. The up-and-coming amateur rider received Grand Junior Hunter Champion honors in both 2017 and 2021. She also won the THIS National Children's Medal Final in 2017 along with numerous top placings throughout her junior years.

"Capital Challenge is such a special horse show because of its atmosphere and prestige," described Iwasaki. "Everyone competing has worked year-round to be there, and it shows in the level of competition. I really enjoy showing at Capital Challenge for many reasons, but the WCHR competition really stands out for me."

Andre Dignelli, owner and head trainer at Heritage Farm in Katonah, NY, has produced national hunter, jumper, and equitation champions for nearly three decades. Dignelli has had many students in the winner's circle at the Capital Challenge Horse Show in all divisions and levels of competition.

"Capital Challenge is the biggest indoor show for hunters in the country," commented Dignelli. "I think the head-to-head competition for those top hunters is what makes it unique. The show also does such a good job with awards and prize-giving ceremonies. They make a real effort in having the presentations be special. At Capital Challenge, you get to see everybody come together with their best horses, trying to put in their best rounds. It's exciting to have such high-level competition."

Throughout his career, Archie Cox, owner and trainer at Brookway Stables in Lake View Terrace, CA, has taught many of the nation's top hunter horses and riders and captured championships at every major competition, including the Capital Challenge Horse Show.

"Capital Challenge is truly amazing," said Cox. "Many of the best horses and riders come together to compete against each other. Hunters take center stage for an entire week, which is very special."

*“ Everyone competing has worked year-round to be there, and it shows in the level of competition. ”*



Amanda Steege and Laffie Du Muze claimed the WCHR Professional Challenge and the Grand Green Hunter Championship in 2018. Photo by Shawn McMillen Photography

*Early memories and favorite moments...*



**Amy Miller**  
(8 Dutch)  
New Jersey Real Estate Expert  
WETTERER REALTY  
Cell: 908-607-6996  
Office: 908-742-7442  
Email: amy@amyml.com  
Website: amyml.com  
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**JUNE 17-19** Blue Goose Stables | Cochranville, PA  
**JUNE 22-25** ALBA QH 3.0 | Siena, Italy  
**JULY 22-25** Gladdagh Farm | New Richmond, WI  
**AUG 26-29** Four Star Qtr. Horses | Oatland, OR  
**SEPT 2-4** KSM Bear Creek Farms | Burlington, TX

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### Early Memories

"My first memories are from back in the early 2000s," explained Steege. "I was a young professional and mostly had Future or Pre-Green hunters to show. I was always so happy to just win a ribbon. The first time I won a blue ribbon and the coveted Capital Challenge medal in The Show Place Arena with Balou, owned by Lisa Arena Davis, in 2012 will always be a highlight for me."

Iwasaki began her showing career at Capital Challenge in the pony hunter divisions.

"My first memory of showing at Capital Challenge was competing in the Small Pony Hunter division," shared Iwasaki. "I remember being so nervous to show there. I was so excited when I earned seventh place in the last over-fences round of the division."

Early memories for Dignelli include helping fellow Heritage Farm trainers in the professional hunter divisions.

"In 2007 and 2008, Heritage Farm had some pretty fancy hunters," commented Dignelli. "Patricia Griffith was showing Vida Blue and Kirsten Coe was showing Heartfelt in the professional divisions. They were two high-level riders with two high-level horses. They won the WCHR Professional Challenge in consecutive years, with Kirsten winning in 2007 and Patricia winning in 2008."

### Favorite Moments

"I have so many favorite memories," said Steege. "The top three favorite ones are my first time competing in the WCHR Professional Finals, winning with Balou in 2012, and my most favorite memory is from 2018 when Cheryl Olsten's Lafitte De Muze was undefeated over fences in the Green Hunter 3'6" division and we won the WCHR Professional Challenge. It was his first year competing in the United States, and many people had never seen him show in person before. It was a huge thrill. I'm looking forward to making more memories in 2023!"

"One of my favorite memories at Capital Challenge was my first time winning the WCHR Junior Hunter 3'6" Challenge with Small Affair," described Iwasaki. "It was in 2017, and we were also Grand Junior Hunter Champion that year."

"One memory that sticks out is when I flew in the night before the North American Junior Equitation Championships to help Lillie Keenan in 2012, and she won," shared Dignelli. "That memory always stood out, because most of the time on that weekend, I would be training at home for the USEF Show Jumping Talent Search Finals – East; other members of my staff would go to Capital Challenge, and we'd split up. On that occasion, I got to enjoy being at the show and having Lillie win."

Cox has been a longtime supporter of the Capital Challenge Horse Show and after so many memorable years, it is difficult to pick just one moment.



Andre Dignelli (second from left) with Lillie Keenan in the winning presentation for the 2012 North American Junior Equitation Championships. Photo by Jump Media



Augusta Iwasaki and Small Affair were crowned with the Grand Junior Hunter Championship and won the WCHR Junior Hunter 3'6" Challenge in 2017. Photo by Jump Media

"It makes me smile thinking of the 30 years I've competed at Capital Challenge," said Cox. "A lifetime of memories has been created there with everyone coming together to share their mutual love of horses and the sport. Those memories last forever."

To learn more about the Capital Challenge Horse Show, please visit

[www.CapitalChallenge.org](http://www.CapitalChallenge.org)