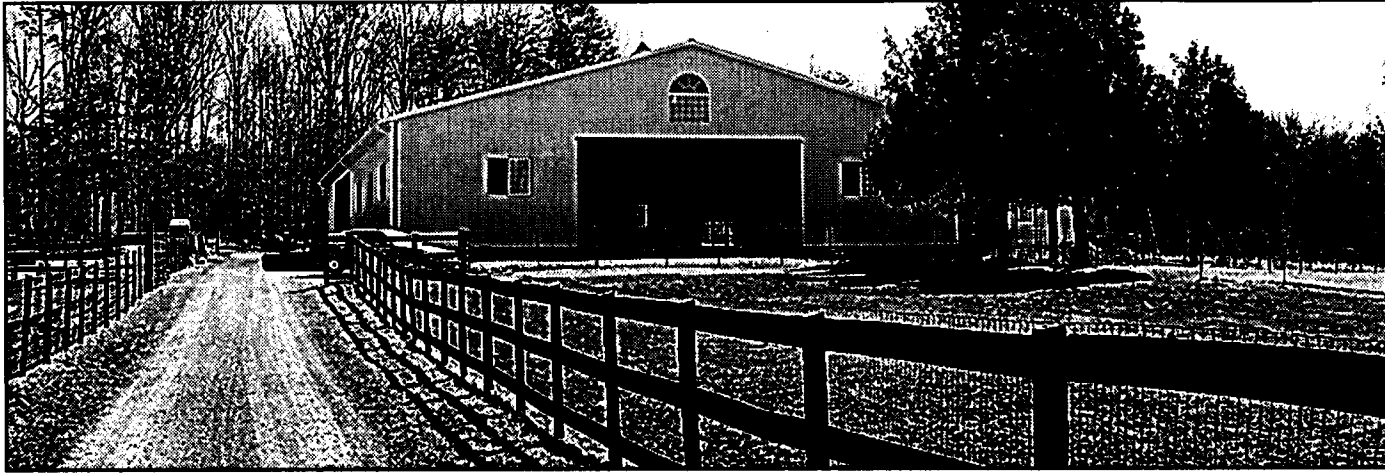


# Green Springs' Anna Valley Farm Gallops into the World of Training Cutting Horses



*Anna Valley Farm will soon offer an indoor arena for riding lessons.*

**PAT WILSON ■** City slickers looking to don boots and a cowboy hat now have the ideal location to learn the skills of western riding. More adept horsemen can use the working cow horses and small herd of longhorn cattle at Anna Valley Farm to hone their cutting and team penning techniques under the watchful eye of a trainer with decades of experience in the sports.

On his 186 acres nestled in the rolling piedmont of the Green Springs district of Louisa County, Paul Vesely is in the process of completing an indoor arena, clearing additional pasture and selling paint and Quarter horses. Already a barn of well-trained equines and an outdoor riding ring, plus miles of trails, welcome clients.

Pat Brunson, formerly of Orange County, handles the training and lessons. With a previous career as a professional rodeo calf roper, he combines his expertise to work with experienced horsemen with the patience to instruct novice riders.

*"We have a simple partnership. I own the*

*assets and he does the horses,"* said Vesely. "We do lessons, sales, events and clinics, along with training the cutting and reined cow horses. Once the indoor and its stalls are complete, we will do selective boarding."

Barn manager, Amanda Jacobs, assists with all aspects of the business.

Vesely, himself, is an example of Brunson's success. He had never been on a horse until 18 months ago. Now, he enjoys working cattle, executing a reining pattern or just loping across the acreage on a sunny afternoon.

For Brunson, time not spent coaching is devoted to selecting young quality Quarter horse prospects for clients or for resale after he perfects the equines' innate abilities. Using leg pressure and a minimal amount of signals with his reins, Brunson moves his horse with lightning speed to outfox a reluctant steer, then gently returns to a jog showing the ability of the horse to adjust to his commands.

"We like the Doc O'Lena and Hollywood Dun It bloodlines," he said. "These are docile, loyal and cow-savvy."

At present 18 horses graze on Vesely's land, some used for lessons, a few in a breeding program and the majority in training as sale prospects.

"My favorite is Captain, one of the two horses that Pat brought with him," said Vesely. "It will be here for the rest of its life."

Team penning, where three riders work together to separate and corral designated steers from a herd, is a growing sport in Virginia. Brunson works with riders and their mounts to learn the skills and cooperation needed to compete successfully.

"We go to a place in Culpeper on Friday nights to practice and also travel [with clients] around to regional competitions," he said.

Vesely encourages anyone interested in owning a horse to consider lessons, attend clinics and even take a horse on trial to see if it is suitable.

Brunson has brought an additional facet to Anna Valley. A former special operations forces member specializing in military insertions and extractions, he is currently a

state licensed bodyguard and private investigator, who retrieves runaway youth.

"I go take them out of gangs, crack houses ... at the request of parents," he said. "I work for law firms, individuals and security groups."

When appropriate, Brunson brings the youth to the farm as a short-term transition, exposing them to farm activities and, of course, the horses.

"He has a great ability to communicate with these kids," said Vesely.

Brunson's successes has led Vesely to consider another direction for Anna Valley. He is considering setting up a youth program, and is even exploring grant money from a foundation.

"I'm preparing a business plan to reach out to underprivileged and handicapped children to take riding lessons," he said.

Jacobs has therapeutic riding experience in her background, which would complement the possibility.

## **The Beginnings of Anna Valley Farm**

Vesely, the owner of Blue Mountain Data Systems, a software development firm based in Northern Virginia, hails from upstate New York.

Loaded with recollections from his parents about life on his grandparents' dairy farm, Vesely was first exposed to a similar atmosphere while working on his brother's hay farm. Those pleasant memories remain with him into adulthood.

"I learned to drive a tractor when I was nine," he said. "My older brother, David, grew up wanting to farm, as well. Even though he was an electrical engineer, he bought land in upstate New York ... As a teenager during the summer, I'd help him cut hay and do custom combining."

Living in city subdivisions as an adult, Vesely always had owning a farm in the back of his mind.



*Pat Brunson keeps a watchful eye as Amanda Jacobs works one of Anna Valley Farm's reining horses.*



*Pat Brunson, trainer, and Paul Vesely, owner, cut cattle at Anna Valley Farm.*

"I'm a pilot and I started looking for places in New York figuring I could get a weekend place and fly to it," he said. "I soon decided that was not practical."

In 2002, while searching online for a parcel nearer to his Centreville home, Vesely found 100 acres with a log house and a four-stall barn in the Patrick Henry district. Most of the land was in timber, with 13 acres of pasture.

"I saw it on a Monday, I visited it on a Wednesday and I signed the contract on a Friday," he said. "My goal was a getaway and maybe doing some hay."

Vesely recalls bringing his 84-year-old mother to see the land, although he had not told her he had purchased the property.

"We came through east Green Springs and a dirt road. She said, 'This is in the middle of nowhere and I wouldn't give a dollar for it,'" he said. "She passed away about a month later,



Paul Vesely spends a quiet moment with one of his paint horses.

and the name, Anna, is in her memory.”

Vesely divides his time between his two homes.

At first fencing land for a Boer meat goat operation, Vesely soon realized the project was impractical since he was an absentee landowner.

“At one time we had 92 goats,” he said. “I hired labor to feed and care for them. It was not profitable, so I ended it.”

Offering to board horses for people wishing to care for their own animals led to his meeting Brunson and the present focus of the equine operation.

More recently, Vesely purchased an additional 86 acres.

With the help of local foresters, he is proceeding with a long-term plan of land clearing and pasture reclamation, along with timber growth and sales.

“We have designed areas for pasture and a home site,” he said. “The current goal is to create 100 acres of hay and pasture but to preserve the areas around creeks and leave some older trees.”

Vesely has relied on Scott Byars, Fluvanna County agent for Virginia Extension Services, state forester David Stone, timberman Matt Dowdy (C & K Forestry Services, Louisa) and Roy Poindexter, a Kent’s Store farmer and cattleman, for advice. He recommends others seek expert help if considering a similar venture.

“It’s great to have people to bounce ideas off and discover options,” he said.

At first, hay will supply the farm’s animals, but as additional land is seeded, he anticipates selling round and square bales of an orchard grass-timothy mix.

“I’ve often been told that if you want to make a small fortune, start with a large fortune and invest in horses,” he said with a grin.

So far, the demands of farm chores and the investment in equipment and infrastructure have not changed his mind. Relaxing trail rides over the rolling countryside and the enjoyment of time spent cutting cattle have confirmed the wisdom of his decision.

Vesely welcomes inquiries into lessons, team penning events, sales and other projects at Anna Valley Farm by calling (540) 967-3259 or through email to paul@annavalleyfarm.com.

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