

Strong high school equestrian team is one of Santa Cruz program's many jewels.



Monte Vista Christian School is a little factory for lifelong equine enthusiasts. Many who were first introduced to horses through PE classes or summer camp at the college prep school are now top contenders on the open show circuit and in high school and collegiate competition. The school's equestrian center is the training base for the UC Santa Cruz Intercollegiate Horse Show Association team, competitors from other colleges and youth and adults who board horses there.

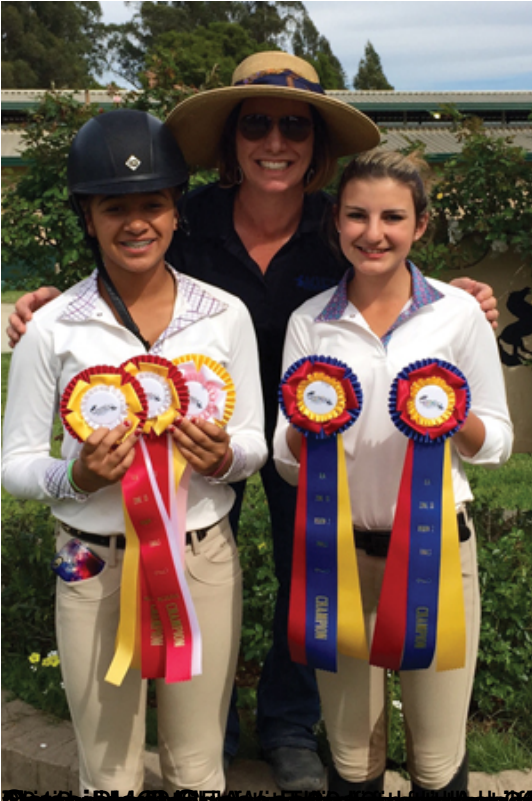


The school and its stables are set on 100 acres in the foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains. It's a peaceful environment for full days of activity at the barn, where trainer Cassie Belmont has been at the helm for eight years. Her days start with teaching youngsters in five PE classes of typically 10 students apiece. After school, it's students who own their own horses and compete on the open circuit and middle school, high school or collegiate teams. Beginners in western tack to riders winning in the 3'6" hunter/jumper classes on the open show circuit represent the range of riding styles and experiences that take place at MVCS Equestrian.

Seventh grader Sydney Shelby says she is "ecstatic" about having found the Monte Vista Christian School and its riding program when she was in fourth grade. She's progressed from having a little bit of riding experience to having contested her second IEA Nationals as a member of MVCS's Middle School team, for which she competed in the Intermediate Team competition in Wellington, FL in late April. Last year, Sydney won the Nationals' Novice Individual Over Fences class at Nationals.

"I love this program so much because I can ride during PE then come back after school and ride my two horses," Sydney explains. The Interscholastic Equestrian Association is an all-volunteer organization with the mission of bringing more young riders into the sport and hooking them on it for life. It has had exactly that effect on Sydney, who, at only 13, is already looking into colleges with opportunities to continue riding and competing, thanks largely to her great experience with the Monte Vista program.

Written by CRM
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