

Scholarships Continue Despite Challenging Times

The Youth Equestrian Showcase scholarship program (Y.E.S.) was created with the purpose of recognizing and supporting local equestrian youth and involving them in the educational opportunities of the Stock Show by allowing them to increase their knowledge as well as having the opportunity to teach the public about a topic during the annual show. Although 2021 brought the cancellation of the show, the Y.E.S. program was able to continue its mission by transitioning to a virtual event. Two Colorado girls, Tess Gore and Lily Thomas, earned the titles of Champion and Reserve Champion among peer finalists and received scholarships from the National Western Scholarship Trust.

Tess Gore

Tess was born and raised on her family's cow calf operation in Crawford, Colo. Growing up as a ranch kid, horses have always been a part of her life. She often jokes she was "born on the back of a horse", recalling that she often sat in her baby carrier in the center of the arena while her mother was teaching riding lessons.

She recalls attending the National Western Stock Show since she was four or five years old, and eventually became a participant. Tess competed in the barrel racing during the 2017 AQHA Show and has been a volunteer through her rodeo royalty program. These experiences are what introduced Tess to the Y.E.S. program.

Her biggest takeaway is to not be afraid to try something you wouldn't normally do. For her, this included not only applying for the program initially, but setting goals. One component of the Y.E.S. program asks the participants to set goals, which they reflect on to ensure they are doing their best to meet those goals. Although Tess admits she didn't take her goals very seriously at first, she eventually came to focus on and appreciate them. "I didn't think of how much of an impact they would make on me. Since I have received this award, I still have not stopped trying to reach those SMART goals because I'm still not where I want to be with them."



Currently, Tess is studying Agricultural Mass Media and Communications with a minor in Ag Business and Economics at West Texas A&M University in Canyon, TX. Tess's long-term goal is to build her own equine breeding and training program that produces quality horses from start

to finish. To accomplish this, she hopes to raise, train, and eventually show the horses bred in her program.

Lily Thomas:

Reserve Grand Champion Lily Thomas calls her family’s ranch in Niwot, Colo. home. Her family has been an integral part of who is she. Her mother has always encouraged her to “try everything and do anything”, advice Lily has taken very seriously.

Lily has been around NWSS for many years. When she was very young, her grandparents ran a booth and she would spend time with them helping hand out stickers. As she has gotten older, she continues to attend, going to the Freestyle Reining or a rodeo with her 4-H and FFA clubs.

Lily is truly a “people person”. Although she has not decided on her future career, she knows she wants to work with people, especially in a way that allows her to share her passion for horses. Her dream is to make sure everyone has a chance to be involved and learn about the equine industry. One way she imagines she could achieve this goal is by becoming a coach for the Interscholastic Equestrian Association (IEA), an organization that she has been a part of and would love to have the opportunity to give back to. Additionally, Lily loves working with young horses and has demonstrated this passion by participating in the AQHA Ranching Heritage Young Horse Development Program.

Lily was amazed by the opportunities presented to her through the Y.E.S program. She especially enjoyed the interview that gave her the opportunity to speak with a panel of judges who represent various aspects of the equine industry. A unique part of the process was the incorporation of a “flip interview” where Lily asked the judges questions. She says that was an amazing experience and really allowed her to expand her knowledge.

Lily is truly grateful for the experience she had while participating in the Y.E.S. program, and would like to say “thank you to everyone who helped put this together”, including the selection committee and all the people who believe in helping young people succeed.



For more information about the Y.E.S. program, visit the Horse Youth Programs page on the NWSS website: [Horse Youth Programs | National Western Stock Show](#)

Story by Bailey Burke, NWSS Horse Show Intern