



Dawn Gilbert (left) oversees the Chagrin Valley Farms arena's footing installation as part of the recent renovations happening at the Bainbridge equestrian facility.

Dawn Gilbert's passion for all things equestrian lands her in perfect position at Chagrin Valley Farms

By BETTY WEIBEL

Dawn Gilbert is a rare example of someone who has found a career that combines all of her passions. The lifelong equestrian and Bainbridge resident was named Managing Officer of Chagrin Valley Farms shortly after the equestrian complex was purchased by the Schneider family last fall. The dream job may seem far from her finance career with General Electric, but she will tell you it is a perfect blend of all her talents.

Dawn grew up in the horse world and took lessons, owned and boarded and competed in the Lake in the Hills area of Illinois. She worked as a riding instructor at Spring Hill Farm, which was owned by Pat Boyle (Showplace Productions and Balmoral Park). She learned barn operations as a young adult working at a number of equestrian facilities that catered to different disciplines. Her passion was fueled when she broke young horses for clients to pay board for her own horse.

After earning a business degree from Northern Illinois University, Dawn was at a crossroads, working at a private hunter/jumper show barn in Barrington as a barn manager. She decided to pursue a career in business and worked at General Electric for the majority of her career. While working at GE she continued riding and actively

has been competing on the "A" show circuit her entire life.

After being approached by a headhunter, Dawn joined Schneider Saddlery in 2016 as Director of Finance and Administration. She and her husband, Matt, live in Bainbridge with their two children, Taylor and Ryan. Taylor, a senior, and Ryan, a freshman, are very active at Kenston High School so they were thrilled with a career change that didn't require relocation.

Dawn was involved in the due diligence and business details behind the scenes when the Schneiders (Stan and Karen of Gates Mills and Eric of Aurora), owners of Schneider Saddlery, decided to purchase a horse farm.

"When the Schneider family asked me to take the lead role in their newly purchased Chagrin Valley Farms, it was a dream opportunity because everything we are doing is something I have worked in before, but it is all in one place. It is a great job and allows me to pursue my passion," she said.

What's new at Chagrin Valley Farms?

Chagrin Valley Farms has launched a number of renovations in its first phase of improvements as the 25-year-old facility gets a makeover. Among the major investments is new arena footing. "We made the decision to work with Footing First™ and co-owner Karen Leeming

for the front indoor arena. It is a completely dust-free footing that provides excellent traction, stability, and cushion for unrivaled shock absorption and performance. This is the company that worked with Olympians McLain Ward and Beezie Madden" said Dawn.

In addition to new footing, they made the timely decision to heat the indoor riding arenas just in time for the coldest winter months. Chagrin Valley Farms is also getting a makeover with new lighting, refurbished walls and ceilings, new flooring and windows in the Club room/lounge, and more. In the main barn, stall fronts, Dutch doors and wash racks are being repaired, as well as fencing. Even the lesson horse barn has received an upgrade and improvements. Progress is underway with more planned for spring.

Coordinating the construction work takes special talent, while Chagrin Valley Farms continues to host a full calendar of horse shows, riding lessons and boarding services. Work has been happening in shifts around the riding activities from early morning hours to overnight. The Schneiders found the perfect solution to providing expert construction management around the clock with equestrian experience. The Farm retained the services of a seasoned pro, Matt Gilbert, Dawn's husband, in the role of Facilities Manager and the results have been exceptional.

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