



NEEC Adult Amateur 23-40 Champion Julia Gildea riding Ghandi.



NEEC Adult Amateur 41 and Over Champion Meredith Lipke aboard Accomplice.

PHOTOS CATHRIN CAMMETT

# New England Equitation Championships

CELEBRATES ITS 35TH YEAR

BY MELODY TAYLOR-SCOTT

**H**eld October 20-23 in West Springfield, Mass., and celebrating its 35th year, the New England Equitation Championships (NEEC) is considered one of the finest shows in the country. Co-Chairs Cookie DeSimone and Amy Eidson organized an exceptional four-day finals experience with Kelly Small and Manager Bob Crawford along with the help of 12 other committee members and a tireless group of horsemen. The six judge panel of Scott Alder, Rob Bielefeld, Joe Darby, Jean Marie Miller, Steve Wall, and Jim Zulia ensured an educated choice of champions from among the over 400 contestants.

Thursday was a busy day with two sections each of Middle and Older Adults competing over a flowing course of inviting fences.

Forty-one riders showed in the 23-40 Adult Medal, with 12 being called back for the second round over the course designed by Scott Alder of Chelsea, Mich. Consisting of multiple

bending lines, a one stride in-and-out across the diagonal, a two stride on the side line, and what proved to be the bogey fence of a skinny single set on the short side, riders were presented with multiple opportunities to demonstrate their ability to ride off their 'eye' on course.

The 2011 NEEC Adult Medal 23-40 Champion was Julia Gildea aboard Gandhi, who rides with Patricia Harnios of Holly Hill. Reserve champion went to Wynatte Chu on Leonardo, from the Fairfield Hunt Club with trainer Jenny Martin-Rudaz.

In the Older Adults competition, 42 exhibitors entered the ring to complete the same course with 14 returning for the second round. The challenging course of tight rollback turns with several inside turn options allowed the cream of the crop to raise to the top.

The 2011 NEEC Adult Over 41 Championship was won by Meredith Lipke and Accomplice. Lipke trains with Kristy McCormack of Oasis Inc. Reserve champion was awarded to crowd favorite Sean Rogers aboard Lido, who trains at Woodridge Farm with Greg Prince and Cookie DeSimone.

Friday was the Younger Adults' day to shine with a total of 98 showing. The Open classes were split into three sections of 30-plus riders, each providing intense competition. The Younger Adult Medal first round course rode well with two combinations and two jumps set across the middle line of the arena—the second of which, approached off a right lead circle at the end of the course, proved

to be one of the difficult efforts to get to correctly. A total of 29 riders were called back for the second round course that removed one of the combinations creating a number of single jumping efforts presenting exhibitors several approach options to demonstrate their riding skills.

The 2011 New England Adult 18-22 Medal Champion went to Samantha Smith and trainer Sachine Belle of Belle Equestrian and the reserve championship was awarded to Amanda Groher riding with Linda Langmeier of Kelianda.

Friday night was the Junior Celebration dinner held at the Marriot with a wonderful video presentation, sponsored by Oliynyk Show Stables and put together by the show committee, depicting the past year's trials and tribulations, interviews, and most memorable moments of the Junior riders.

Saturday brought a full day of competition with 78 Juniors showing in the Open Equitation Under 15 and 147 to ride in the Open 15-18 division. The course flowed throughout the ring with an oxer set on the middle line to the final jump also set across the middle line, both of which claimed a fair share of missed distances.

Also on the schedule was the ever popular Stepping Stone Farm sponsored Challenge of the States. Teams rode after the Open classes, and the practicum phase of the Horsemanship Challenge also took place for the top 12 scorers out of the 114 Juniors that took the written phase on Friday night, an examination comprised of 100 questions testing their knowledge of the rule book, veterinary care, current events, and horsemanship. The practicum is judged each year by a panel consisting of a veterinarian, a judge, and a previous winner, and requires the contestants to answer two questions posed by the judges by giving a hands-on demonstration of horsemanship ability. This type of challenge, which originated at the NEEC, was judged this year by Dr. Kate Choje, Ellen Raidt, and Ruth Drumm. The winner, determined by a combination of the written test, the practicum score, and the first round score of the finals ride,

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NEEC Adult Amateur 18-22 Champion Samantha Smith.

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was Elizabeth Kenny.

The hotly contested Challenge of the States saw 13 teams from Vermont to Florida. This fun, favorite class is run sans trainers—who are relegated to the grandstand and provided with dinner sponsored by JT Farms—while each team is responsible for its own preparations and costumes. The lowest score of each team after four rounds over a shortened equitation course is discarded and the remaining team members' scores are averaged together to arrive at the final score and determine a winning team. Winning the 2011 Challenge of States Gold Medal was Rhode Island's team of Jessica Donatelli, Madison Brayman, Margaret Magee, Lauren Henry, Caitlyn Doerr, and Victoria Perrotti.

Sunday started at 7:00 a.m. with the NEEC Junior Medal sponsored by Woodridge Farm with 222 exhibitors, plus the second round call back of 20. The competition was intense with no room for mistakes over a testing course of multiple jumps set on the middle line and a natural rails and straw bales 'pen' combination that was a two stride off a short approach by the ingate followed by a rollback left to jump through the bounce side of the 'pen.'



**NEEC Lifetime Achievement Award recipients Cathy and Mitch Steege.**

The second round course also contained the 'pen' jump at the end of the round. Five riders were called back to complete a test consisting of backing out of line, cantering three jumps, counter cantering the fourth jump, and hand galloping back to the line.

Congratulations to the 2011 New England Equitation Junior Champion Elizabeth Kenny and trainer David Oliynyk. Elizabeth certainly had a weekend to remember, also receiving the Junior High Score Award, the Horsemanship Challenge Award, and her horse Bravo van de Kwakkelhoek received the Judges Choice Award.

Reserve champion in the Junior Medal was awarded to Katie Tyler, also riding with Sachine Belle, who made an impressive move up from 18th



**NEEC Junior Medal Champion Elizabeth Kenny.**

in the call back order to place second overall.

Also taking place at this year's championships was the presentation of the NEEC Lifetime Achievement Award, given to a professional horseperson that has a positive affect on the New England horse community. This year's recipients were Cathy and Mitch Steege.

All and all, the New England Equitation Championships is truly a memorable event for all who qualified and competed and deserves to be considered one of the best finals in the country.

For more information on the NEEC, please visit [www.newenglandequitation.com](http://www.newenglandequitation.com). 