

Chestnut Lane Farm Welcomes MATT LIGHTNER

By Erica Rae Faulkner



Matt Lightner showed the sporty gelding Celebrity Son to much success while he worked as assistant trainer to Rob Turner.



Make Mine Black won numerous titles with Matt Lightner. It was during his time with Smith Lilly and Mercer Spring Farm that Lightner got to bring along this nice horse.

The Southeast show circuit has seen the return of Matt Lightner to the area. Taking on the title of Trainer at Chestnut Lane Farm in Monroe, N.C., Lightner is stepping out on his own after years of assisting other trainers.

Lightner grew up in the Monterey, Va., area and from a very early age he knew that his career in life was going to be to train American Saddlebred horses. As Lightner says, "I was born loving horses. I have been riding ever since I could walk. I was a kid that never liked school very much so for a reward for doing my school work, I would get to go watch the Saddlebreds show at Bonnie Blue and ASHAV in Lexington, Va., at the Horse Center. I remember watching a big pleasure class come into the ring and all the trainers were standing along the rail and it was then, at five-years-old I told my family, I want to be a Saddlebred Horse Trainer."

Lightner showed Tennessee Walking Horses when he was six-years-old, and at the age of 11 his family purchased him his first Saddlebred from Tre' and Emily Lee. Knowing from such a young age what he wanted to do with his life, he decided to go work for Saddlebred trainers to learn the business as opposed to go to college. "I have been working horses on a professional level since 2005," states Lightner. "I was 19 years old and had just graduated high school. I moved to Mooresboro, N.C., and got my first assistant trainer job with Harrison and Beverly Shiflet." Lightner spent a few years with the Shiflets, working such great horses as CH Jessie Cole, before he made the move to Mercer Springs Farm in Princeton, W.Va.

Lightner started working at Mercer Springs in 2008. It was during this time that he really got to focus on starting young horses and getting them in the ring at two and three-years-old. "I am very thankful for the time I got to spend at Mercer Springs with the Lillys," says Lightner. "I worked with Smith closely to learn how to prepare young horses, and how to get amateur horses fit for the show ring. I am so grateful for all that Smith, Sandy and Alexandra did for me and all that they taught me." It was during his time here that he got to help develop such noted horses as Memories Of Cabo, Pass With Care, My Stiletto, Dare To Care and Make Mine Black.

Knowing that in order to progress and improve his skills, he needed to learn from everyone he could, he decided to relocate to New Hampshire and went to work for Kristen and David Cater of Cater Stables. While at Caters, he helped to bring along the young stock, but also got a hand in teaching the lessons and really working with the customers and teaming them with their horses. "Matt gives an amazing lesson," states Kim Timmons, mother of Maggie Clark, a former student of Matt's while he was at Cater Stables. "He really knows how to teach horsemanship, he teaches more than how to sit and look pretty."

After a few years with Caters, Lightner then moved to the well-known L.M. Turner Stables, where he focused on working with the young stock and helping develop the amateur side of the L.M. Turner Stables. Lightner brought along some academy kids and grew the lesson program. Some



One of the horses currently in training with Lightner is Chardonnay's Firestorm. Lightner showed this good gelding to a reserve at the NC State Fair last year, the debut horse show for Lightner under the Chestnut Lane Farm banner.



Lightner had a big hand in the starting of multi-titled champion, Pass With Care (pictured here with Smith Lilly). This was one of the horses he worked while working at Mercer Spring Farm.

horses worth mentioning that Lightner had a hand in their training was Celebrity Son, Nubiana, Charming Madness, It's Mr. Personality, among others.

In the fall of 2015, Lightner accepted the position of head trainer and manager at Chestnut Lane Farm in Monroe, N.C. "I felt that after 10 years of being someone's assistant, it was time for me to take a step out on my own." Lightner says he always felt he would end up back in the south. "You can take the boy out of the south, but you can't take the south of the boy." Chestnut Lane Stables is owned by Dr. Bill and Amy Roberts, who reside in Denver, N.C.

Monroe, N.C., is located just a short drive outside of Charlotte. The location is perfect for ease of travel to all the major North Carolina, Georgia and Virginia shows, as well as being a reasonable distance from Kentucky shows, such as Louisville. The facility boasts a spacious 180x80 indoor riding arena with a climate controlled viewing area so that customers can watch their horses or parents can watch their children ride. A large tack room and laundry room, with a washer and dryer, are also on the property. The wash rack for the horses also has both hot and cold water hook ups.

The stalls are all 12x12, complete with tailboards and automatic waterers. The barn also has a top of the line fly system that runs through the whole building. If all this isn't impressive enough, there are also fans throughout the farm that run on a thermostat. They automatically cut on and off



A calm morning at Chestnut Lane Farm

when the programmed temperature is reached. It is obvious that the care for the horses at Chestnut Lane is top notch.

The outside property is amazing as well with a 200x100 outdoor ring and four large pastures for horses to enjoy turnout. Caretakers are on site 24 hours a day to help ensure that horses are cared for and watched over.

Lightner is excited about the future of Chestnut Lane Farm. He says, "My vision for Chestnut Lane is to mold it into a barn for everyone to enjoy. I want everyone to feel welcome and just come and enjoy the horses." Lightner continues, "Whether it's a lesson rider, an amateur or juvenile, or even someone who boards their horse here, I want them all to be a part of the barn and all to enjoy the experience." Lightner truly loves horses, so he hopes to convey that to his customers and also to help that define Chestnut Lane Stables. "I really love the horses. And I want everyone to enjoy the shows and have a good time. I want to see every horse and rider that comes through Chestnut Lane do well. Everyone deserves the same treatment."

The customers of Chestnut Lane Farm are quick to show their appreciation of their new trainer and all he does for them. Amy Hunt Roberts, owner of the facility, states, "Matt has brought a fresh, new energy to our barn. It's been fun to watch Matt step into the role of trainer and make this barn his own. His



Lightner got to show and campaign the black beauty, Nubiana, during his years at L.M. Turner Stables in New Hampshire.



Matt Lightner showed CH Nuttin' Doing to top ribbons at the recent ASAC horse show. This is just one of the talented horses he is working at Chestnut Lane Farm.

enthusiasm and sense of humor is contagious." Isabella Leslie, a student of Lightners, also speaks highly of him. "He is very detail oriented and strives to bring every little detail to perfection. He's always looking for something that can be better and looks at all different angles, especially when he holds his head sideways. There's never a dull moment with him and he always jokes around and finds ways to make people laugh."

Suzanne Wright, another of Lightners students, continues on with the compliments of what he has brought to the barn. "Matt has brought a lot of positive energy and enthusiasm to Chestnut Lane. He impresses me with his instruction, patience and work ethic. I can tell that he truly loves what he does and we are proud to have him as our trainer."

It is obvious that his customers are happy with his work, and he in turn is thrilled to be a part of all their adventures, in and out of the ring. "I enjoy all of it. Teaching people the basics of how to ride, all the way up to putting people in the ring. I enjoy seeing the colts come along but I also have a lot of fun being on the rail watching an amateur or juvenile that

I train having the ride of their life. Or an Academy kid winning their first blue ribbon. It's all great to me."

Chestnut Lane Farm ended the year last season in the winner's circle, with numerous championship titles coming home with Lightner and his customers. This year, they've started off in stellar fashion, with top ribbons in every class they entered at the recent ASAC show. Keep an eye out for Lightner

and his horses that are turned out to perfection, at J.D Massey. Lightner is appreciative of all the support his friends and family have given him, and he is quick to thank them. "A few people who I would like to thank; all of my close family would have to come first, without their support it's hard to tell where I would be. Then it would go down the line to the trainers that I worked under and all the great friends I have made over the years. Lost a few too but the ones that have stuck around have made it worth the ride. No better place to be in my opinion than the horse show world." Keep an eye out for Chestnut Lane Farm, or better yet, stop by for a complimentary lesson. Lightner is always welcoming new faces to his program.



There are plenty of pastures at Chestnut Lane Farm, giving space for horses to enjoy their down time or for boarders to enjoy turning their horses out.