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Farmington Hunt Connects With 4-H Club

 Martha Drum

Earlier this month, Farmington Hunt (VA) huntsman, Matthew Cook, and I visited the Hoof-n-Woof 4-H Club in Albemarle County to introduce the young riders to foxhunting and encourage them to join us in the field. 4-H is an active youth organization in Virginia, and since Farmington seeks to increase junior

about the future of country lifestyles and wants their voice and vote to make a difference. You will also receive *Covertside* magazine 4x a year!

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participation, it made sense to reach out - and bring a few extra hunt horns, whips, and one couple of friendly hounds along to help.

Matthew gave an animated talk which held the attention of nearly twenty 4-Hers, despite the 7:30pm start time on a weeknight. He began by describing his daily routine in kennels and explaining how much behind-the-scenes, year-round work goes into the pageantry and action of hunt morning. To engage the nine- to sixteen-year-old audience, he demonstrated cracking the whip and invited the children to take their best shots. This is a skill that comes more naturally to some arms than others, but everyone who tried was loudly cheered on by her friends. A few 4-H moms greatly enjoyed taking a turn as well!



Huntsman Matthew Cook looks on as a 4-Her cracks the whip. M. Drum photo.



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Explaining control and communication with hounds, Matthew blew several different calls on the horn, which again captured the crowd's attention. The youngsters took a try here as well - a couple of ringers, or trumpet and other horn players, made decent novice attempts.

While he was speaking, the 4-Hers passed around the Masters of Foxhounds Association's "A Centennial View" coffee table book, admiring the paintings and photographs. We also distributed several copies of Wadsworth's booklet, "Riding to Hounds in America," to be read and shared among the Hoof-n-Woof members. Complete kits reflecting various attire, including the huntsman's pink coat, ratcatcher, and formal attire with colors, were on display as well. I reminded the riders that many details of hunt seat tack and turnout - the tall boots, extra billet strap, muted colors - have their practical origin in the field.

The highlight of the evening was the entrance of hounds Briar and OJ, who charmed the group and received plenty of affection while the kids crowded around to ask informal questions of their huntsman. As always, foxhounds and children were a terrific mixture. Four members of the Hoof-n-Woof Club will receive their MFHA Fairly Hunted Awards this season, and we hope they will encourage their peers to come out and follow hounds as well (Matthew's daughter, Pippa, who hunts alongside her mom, Julie, also earned the Fairly Hunted Award).



Hounds are the best ambassadors for our sport. M. Drum photo.

Parents were interested to hear that there is organization and leadership in the field, and that Farmington offers three flights at nearly every meet. We also have a full schedule of twice-weekly casual summer trail rides from Memorial Day to Labor Day, as well as hunter paces, so there are many opportunities for these riders to prepare ahead of time to join the field come autumn. As an extra invitation, each attendee received a certificate for a free cap. Many thanks to Matthew for doing such a great job interacting with these enthusiastic kids.

To learn more about 4-H clubs, visit their official [website here](#).

To learn more about Farmington Hunt Club activities, please [click here](#).

To learn more about the MFHA's Fairly Hunted Award for juniors, please [click here](#).



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