



Designing a Day of EQUESTRIAN SPORT *and* STYLE

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The call of a huntsman's horn rolls across the hills. The master responds, leading an energetically charged group of horses and riders through the countryside to pursue the hounds. Weaving through trees, charging down hills, and jumping over natural obstacles — riders gallop at speed, stirrup-to-stirrup. This is fox hunting, the foundation of the English jumping discipline known as a hunter derby. In stark contrast to activities in the field, most hunter derbies are held in enclosed rings on flat, manicured footing. Today, a select few across the country are returning the sport to its authentic roots. These derbies require a rigorous level of design; one that is both precise to the sport and aesthetically captivating.

The Showtime Group (TSG) Equine Events, a local company that runs horse shows in Buffalo, wanted to host one of these authentic hunter derbies. They needed a venue design that could showcase the sport's rich tradition, genteel elegance, and rigorous demands. In other words, they





needed a perfect union of form, function, and style. The challenge was in providing a demanding but safe course for top level horses and riders. Yet at the same time it had to transport the spectators back in time so they could experience the event just as it happened long ago.

The landscape design for a hunter derby poses a special set of issues. The course must be suitable for high-level competition while being aesthetically pleasing. This particular derby had to establish the ambiance of an-old time equestrian event. TSG Equine accomplished this by careful selection of their venue, hiring a professional course designer, and enlisting the help of reputable and skilled landscaping companies — Broccolo Tree & Lawn Care, Oriental Garden Supply, and Josh Lawn Care & Landscaping.

Genesee Country Village & Museum (GCV&M) was a clear venue choice. Central and Western New York's rich equine heritage is evidenced in GCV&M's exhibits. Actors dressed in period attire made spectators feel part of the vintage equestrian lifestyle. The Derby's rolling meadow course was laid out in The Great Meadow, a central gathering spot with an oversized, immaculately restored Victorian gazebo as the centerpiece.



The course itself was designed by Bobby Murphy, one of the nation's top derby course designers. Murphy wanted jumps that mimicked what riders would find in the countryside. He utilized materials found on-site at the museum and crafted them into a course that the nation's highest-ranking, derby horse and rider combinations found challenging yet rewarding. Split rails created an imposing stacked wood fence that riders nicknamed "the fort." A meandering fence line offered multiple heights and angles. Another jump mimics an old wagon complete with a set of wooden wheels propped against the main portion



of the jump. Ferns and groves of trees from Oriental Garden Supply adorned many jumps adding visual depth and volume. Murphy's course was breathtakingly beautiful, true to history, and technically accurate to account for a horse's stride lengths, scope, and bravery.

Two tents were set up for spectators to watch the derby and enjoy brunch and beverages. Laurie Broccolo of Broccolo Tree & Lawn Care volunteered to select and donate ornamental plants for the tents. Her landscape design experience and deep understanding of how plants and people interact were evidenced in her choices. Beautiful ferns wrapped in burlap adorned each table while roses greeted guests. Broccolo explained her selections, "Ferns were popular turn-of-the-century ornamentals and their ability to grow in shade or sun made them ideal take-aways. The burlap added a rural touch."

Other details polished the day. The Genesee Harmonic society, in period costume, sang "The Star Spangled Banner," including a rare second verse often omitted from modern versions. The Genesee Valley Hunt made an appearance with the hounds demonstrating hunt horn calls atop their braided mounts. The event concluded with a donation made by The Derby to the charity group, The Rochester Women's Giving Circle. It was a day to remember. **DESIGNNY**

