

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AYHC Names National Youth Horse Leader of the Year

Strong adult leadership and initiative are the backbone of the youth-horse industry and vital in transforming today's youths into tomorrow's leaders. The National Youth Horse Leader of the Year award, presented at the annual National Youth Horse Leader's Symposium, recognizes an outstanding adult leader whose dedication and volunteer efforts have furthered the youth-horse industry into the future.

Starting in June, local horse-club members and cooperative-extension personnel submit nominations and letters of recommendation for their favorite adult volunteer leaders. Then the AYHC Awards and Recognition Committee reviews each nomination and scores each candidate based on his or her involvement in and contributions to the youth-horse industry and the horse world in general.

At the 2006 National Youth Horse Leaders Symposium, hosted by The University of Florida, five nominees were spotlighted in a presentation at the Youth Leaders Celebration Banquet. According to Christy Bramwell, AYHC Awards and Recognition Committee Chair, Jennifer Chandler of Gobles, MI, Barbara Darr of Somerset, PA, Nancy Falconer of Naples, FL, Maynard Lawton of Lewisburg, TN and Will Swierenga of Wallworth, WI, "all help youths fulfill their dreams in the horse world in their own special ways."

However, only one winner can be selected, and this year the honor went to Will Swierenga.

Will's resume embodies the attributes of an outstanding youth-horse leader. His passion and enthusiasm for driving has led him to help many youth and their families enjoy youth horse programs through the Walworth County 4-H driving program. Will and his wife, Nancy, open their home to many youth and their families and find loaner horses for those who are not in a position to own a horse. In 2004, there were over 50 miniature horses in the program, all of them housed at Will and Nancy's place! Will involves the entire family in the driving programs and provides many fun adventures with miniature horses and ponies for youth and their families. The Walworth County 4-H Driving program is a great success and those who nominated Will say it is largely due to him. One of the youth he has assisted had this to say, "Will is a real inspiration to me and many of the other kids in the driving program. If you are having trouble with your horse acting up, Will helps you contain yourself and explains how to calm and control the horse."

Swierenga was honored at the NYHLS banquet with a beautiful silver buckle sponsored by the *Certified Horsemanship Association*, a framed western print donated by *Western Horseman* and Protégé animal clippers donated by Oster Products. Ethel Coleman, the 2005 National Youth Horse Leader of the Year, presented Swierenga with his award.

To nominate an outstanding adult volunteer leader for the 2007 National Youth Horse Leader of the Year award, watch for the nomination form in the June 2006 AYHC newsletter or download the form from www.ayhc.com The award will be presented at the 30th annual NYHLS to be held in Denver, Colorado on March 9 – 11, 2007.

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