

OMSSU wins big at Colloquium



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By Kristena Schutt-Moore

A first place and second place win in pairs obstacle competition, an 11th place win (landing them in the top 30) for individual obstacles and winning third and fourth in the equitation and top 10 in all of North America, the Ontario Mounted Special Services Unit won big during the 34th annual National Mounted Police Colloquium.

This annual riding competition is held from Monday, Sept. 23 to Friday, Sept 27 at the Lexington Horse Park in Lexington, Kentucky. OMSSU cantered away from that event with some of the top awards, but OMSSU director Cindy Feurth, a resident of Wollaston Township, says the greatest honour was when they were asked to return next year for the 35 annual National Mounted Police Colloquium and perform their calvary precision drill ride during the opening ceremonies.

The OMSSU is made up of 14 members who train annually with the Toronto police, Arizona Texas border patrol, search and rescue units and the Lexington Mounted Police. However, they are not a federal, provincial or municipal unit. They are volunteers. Scattered across Ontario, these mounted, specially trained, volunteers participate in many events in Ontario, across Canada and the United States. The OMSSU has three groups where the volunteers can specialize their services. These include the precision drill team which is based in south western Ontario, the ambassador community services group which has members throughout Ontario, and the emergency response team which is based in Peterborough.

The members include people from various professional walks of life including retired police officers, nurses, EMT's, teachers and veterinarians. They are all highly trained and so are their horses. The work they do comes from wanting to use their skills to help their community and to spend more time with their horses.

?The members of the unit have a

dedication to their communities.? says Feurth. ?They want to take that specialized training with their horses and use it to help their community. They want to take their own backgrounds and their drive for community spirit and build on that with their horse and put it together in a package that will give them the avenue to do it.?

Some members add specialized training to their horses accreditation. One member, Dr. Corket, is on the Emergency Response Team and she has an Andalusian mare who she has trained to sniff out lost individuals similar to that of a search and rescue dog. This mare can pick up the scent of an individual over a kilometer away. All horses in OMSSU must be versatile and training is continuous. If a member lapses their horse's training they will be unable to participate in events or serve until training is up to date.

To become part of the team, a person must first apply during the six to eight month long application process. During this process the potential members are asked to fill out an application and send in a video of themselves and their horse. If they make it through the vetting stage they must participate in an orientation, then a preliminary testing. Those that pass the test are then have to participate in interviews. Those that pass the interviews are then asked to become part of the unit.

This year the unit will be starting a youth unit for those 16 to 19 years of age. However, the same testing of horse and rider applies. Those interested are invited to visit www.omssu.ca for more information. The youth unit will receive the same training and perform in the drill team and participate in community events.

In 2020, the OMSSU plans to return to the 35 National Mounted Police Colloquium as well as other events such as Mardi Gra, Christmas parades and other community events throughout the continent.

The OMSSU is not government funded, donations and fundraisers help the unit continue and cover costs. So the members would like to thank all their sponsors for their support in allowing the unit to continue to serve their communities.