

Ladies and Gentleman,

Welcome to the Pony Club Conference. It's great to be back at Cheltenham Racecourse which always proves to be a magnificent venue.

I hope that you will enjoy your day and go back to your Branches and Centres with answers to your questions and with renewed enthusiasm for the coming busy months which, I keep my fingers crossed, we will be able to call SUMMER!

Looking back to 2012 – despite the WET, WET, WET and dreadful economic situation - brings a glow of satisfaction when I remember all the wonderful achievements of Pony Club Members past and present.

The Queen's Diamond Jubilee produced many memorable Pony Club images of flag waving and celebration – my own special day was watching the Members of the Chiddingfold Farmers Branch performing an extremely polished and patriotic musical ride in front of a large crowd in the Grand Ring of the Surrey County show (in the pouring rain of course!) on the Jubilee Holiday Monday and then talking to the participants who were so pleased with a job well done.

Before we knew it the Olympics and Paralympics were upon us. The Pony Club celebrated to the full with the many ex Members who produced exceptional medal winning performances.

Then along came the army of Pony Club Volunteers who became Games Makers - there were Members, Equestrian Council, DCs, Branch Committee members and parents who gave their time, dedication and enthusiasm which turned the whole show into the enormous and special occasion it became.

I received some very complimentary thank you letters from some very important people for the help that our Members gave which makes me feel that the future of The Pony Club will be in good hands. It is now our job to nurture this enthusiasm and use our next generation of volunteers. They are wonderful and full of good ideas.

However exciting these external events were, my proudest memories of last year were the achievements of our current Members at our own Rallies, camps and competitions. All my visits to these were a delight and I am always astounded by the amount of work you put into giving the Membership such a fun and educational time. The culmination of all this hard work is shown by the extremely high standard of our competitors at the Championships in all disciplines.

I was delighted with the new venue at Cholmondeley Castle and cannot wait to see it again next year when the sun will be shining on perfect going and the Endurance Championship competitors will be joining in the fun! Next year sees another new venue, this time for the Tetrathlon Championships, which will take place at Bishop Burton College.

I will have been Chairman of The Pony Club for six years at the end of 2013 and feel that I must stand down to allow someone else to take on this amazing role. I cannot tell you how much I have enjoyed doing the job and I will be devastated to give it up but I need to be a Pony Club Granny for a few years or I will miss out on the fun of helping my three grand children enjoy all that my old Branch, the Romney Marsh, has on offer and, boy oh boy, do these grand children expect "Do Do" to run. I see a slim line and fit Cherry round the corner!!

My wish is that I will leave The Pony Club in the best possible health and fit for the 21st Century. To this end I have asked the Trustee Board and the Equestrian Council to consider someone from outside the organisation to perform a strategic review. I want to make sure that we are doing our very best to help and support so that we can make you, our volunteers', job as easy as possible; to give your coaches and instructors exceptional training so that every one of our Members, at whatever level they aspire to, has the very best education in the riding of and caring for horses and ponies; and to make sure that our brilliant, but very compact, paid staff at the office give you the service that you require – but that they are not overstretched or undermined.

I keep saying that The Pony Club is here not only to produce the next generation of top Olympic and International horseman but also to educate all those who will be working in the horse industry. Whether they wish to be a vet, physio, racehorse trainer, Hunt servant, groom, saddler, instructor, etc - so many people are needed, and a good start for our Members can only help the industry and protect the welfare of our wonderful friend the horse.

I believe that this is the right time for this review and I personally would be grateful to receive any of your ideas or suggestions.

I cannot believe that six years ago I looked out from this platform and was shaking with fear. Because of your support and friendship I now love being in this position and will miss it very much.

Thank you so much for all that you do and have a nice day.