

Equestrian professor to leave her 'home' at William Woods at end of semester

By Dani Moritz ^{4/3/13}
news@fultonsun.com

Through everything she has accomplished and everywhere life has taken her, William Woods University has always played a major role in Dr. Linda McClaren's life.

Now the professor of equestrian studies and hunter/jumper instructor at WWU is preparing to leave the place she calls "home."

McClaren grew up in Columbia, taking riding lessons locally and participating in summer riding programs at Christian College (now Columbia College) and Stephens College.

Throughout high school she aspired to attend William Woods, where she completed her undergraduate degree, and later her master's degree.

McClaren joked that she can tell stories of proficiency exams, a rigorous assessment for equestrian students still in effect, from 1976.

"We rode in front of the panel of faculty members and, while on our horses at the end of the ride, we rode into the middle and had individual things we had to do," she said. "I do remember sitting on the horse facing the panel of faculty members and answering questions."

After graduating from William Woods, McClaren worked for Deb Booker — a



Contributed

William Woods University equestrian professor Linda McClaren relays instructions to a young rider. A graduate and longtime instructor, McClaren will be retiring at the end of this year. She said she is going to miss her "home" at William Woods.

former WWU instructor — for six or seven years, helping manage her farm, the Horse Fair, in Columbia.

During the 80s, she worked with Kenny Burgdorfer, a professional horse trainer, breeder and dealer who taught at WWU while McClaren was working for Booker. Together, McClaren and Burgdorfer won several championships at the American Quarter Horse World and Congress horse shows.

McClaren was also an adjunct professor at William Woods during that time.

When she and Burgdorfer broke off their partnership with in 1992, McClaren spent a few years working

and showing on the "A" circuit in Omaha.

"Even though I was in and out of the 'A' horse show world, I was also in and out of William Woods during most of those years," she said. "I feel like I've lived my whole life at William Woods, or most of my life."

McClaren returned to her alma mater as a faculty member in 1995, and has been there ever since.

"I love that this is a microcosm of the horse industry," she said. "I love that all kinds of horses live here and all kinds of horse people and you can find your niche in a lot of different ways."

She added, "Even if it's not something we specialize in like racing and breeding, there are people on faculty who have connections in those industries or connections to connections in those industries. You can find a way to spend your life with horses at William Woods that may or may not have anything to do with

riding horses or teaching lessons."

While at William Woods, McClaren earned the Missouri Horse Shows Association Instructor of the Year Award twice (1999, 2001), as well as the Dads' Association-Louis D. Beaumont Distinguished Professor Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2005.

More importantly, she's made a major impact on students' lives.

"I've known Linda for a long time and I have always looked up to her," said Danielle Beaver, a junior equestrian science major from Fulton. "She is an amazing person. She has a great sense of humor and is such a joy to be around. Linda teaches you to set your standards high and never settle for anything less than your best. I am lucky to have had her as a teacher. She will be missed by all."

"My education with Linda has not only made me a better rider, but a better horse woman," said Jacque Franco, a senior equine science major from San Diego, Calif. "Her empathetic approach, both on the ground and under saddle, has had a profound influence on me and affected how I ride and work with horses. What I have learned from Linda will stay with me wherever I go in the horse

industry."

After she retires this year, McClaren plans to do a lot of traveling, writing and art.

"I am going to continue to stay in touch with all the wonderful students and graduates that I have met here over the years and travel and see what they're up to," she said. "I want to go see them and see what they're up to and do some clinics ... or I think I could be the ultimate barn sitter. They could have a day or two off and I could do their lessons or whatever. It doesn't have to be a formal clinic."

Although it is hard for McClaren to leave behind her home at William Woods, she looks forward to new possibilities.

She leaves this piece of advice for her successor—advice that truly embodies McClaren's philosophy on teaching as well as life:

"There's a wall of bits in my office. There's a horse for every one of those. There may only be one horse that that bit works for ... but when you have people coming in from all different backgrounds all over the country and you have horses coming in from all different backgrounds and all over the country, you have to try things that might be something out of the box and see if something works."