



Florence Snyder: Postcard from Red Hills Horse Trials

*By Florence Snyder -
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Tallahassee's **Red Hills Horse Trials** isn't the first thing that comes to mind for working-class people looking to spend a spring afternoon outdoors with the kids. It's easy to feel intimidated by a United States Equestrian Association event that attracts an international crowd of die-hard members of the horsey set.

But the “suggested donation” of \$15 is a whole lot less than a day at Disney. And the look on children’s faces as they sit on a family picnic blanket watching Olympic-level stadium jumping, cross-country, and dressage is priceless.

Once inside the Elinor Klapp-Phipps Park, located on one of the canopy roads the locals love to brag about, people who aren’t rich feel as much at home as on a Little League field. There’s a pricier assortment of merch and food to tempt shoppers, but no pressure to buy. Families are welcome to bring their own coolers; if you can’t lift it by yourself onto the StarMetro bus that shuttles you from the parking lot, there’s always a bystander willing to help.

Red Hills was midwived in the mid-1990s by community volunteers **Sylvia Ochs** and **Sallie Ausley**. The idea came “like a lightning bolt out of the blue,” Ochs told Tallahassee Magazine in 2011. “Sallie and I heard that Tallahassee ecologist and horse enthusiast **Colin Phipps** was building a cross country course on his property called ‘The Farm’ off Meridian Road. He had asked Capt. **Mark Phillips** (Chef d’Equipe and technical adviser for the United States Equestrian Team and a former member of Great Britain’s Olympic team) to design it and Scotland’s **Hugh Lochore** to build it.

“Sallie and I had a lot of experience with horse trials, and we thought this was a great opportunity to establish a quality event in Tallahassee,” Ochs said. “Colin was very receptive, and Sallie and I began to twist every arm, bend every ear and look in every nook and cranny to find financial support.”

Now in its 17th year, Red Hills relies on the resources of the Northwest Florida Water Management District, the city of Tallahassee, Leon County, 100 committee chairs, and 400 volunteers to maintain the magic conjured up by Ochs and Ausley.

At any given picnic table, you might see vacationing school cafeteria lunch ladies snacking on popcorn with the ladies who lunch. There aren’t any name tags. You can’t tell the difference.