

Eleuterio Arcese's passion is taking the American Quarter Horse to a new international level.

Story and photos by Candace Dobson

Passione



THERE ARE A LOT OF THINGS ELEUTERIO ARCESE HAS TO BE proud of in his life: a wonderful family, a successful business and countless awards in the horse show arena. But if you ask him what he's most proud of, he'll tell you it was hosting the 2005 Federation Equestre Internationale Reining Masters in his home country of Italy.

In September of last year, more than two decades of AQHA involvement paid off for Eleuterio as reiners from 19 different countries converged upon the town of

Verona, Italy, for what Arcese calls his biggest success.

Twenty-five years ago, a friend of Eleuterio's gave his daughter a horse as a gift. The family took the horse to the first AQHA show in Italy and has continued to increase its involvement since.

Northern Exposure

ACCORDING TO ELEUTERIO, ITALIANS AREN'T KNOWN FOR THEIR traveling spirit, and he said his success as a businessman was



The Italian countryside provides a picturesque setting for the Arcese Ranch.

partly thanks to his willingness to move for his job. He grew up in southern Italy near Rome and was working as a truck driver for a paper company when he was offered a job at a new plant the company built in Garda, in northern Italy nestled between Milan and Venice.

“The owner of the company really liked me, probably because I worked a lot of hours,” he said laughing. “He bought my first truck, and I slowly paid him back. So when he offered me the opportunity to coordinate the new plant

in Garda, I thought it was a great opportunity.”

Eleuterio headed north for his new job. Little did he know the new job would also turn him into a family man.

Sleeping in his truck after 24-hour shifts wasn’t anything new to the ambitious youth, and he soon met a young woman working in the shipping department who could keep up with him.

“Fiorella is like me. She loves to work,” he said. “We worked incredibly long hours every day. One day she didn’t

show up for work, and I found out it was her birthday.

"I worked extra hours to buy a handbag as her birthday gift, and then she invited me to share her birthday cake. Thanks to that bag, we got married," he said laughing.

Two years after the couple married, their first son, Leonardo, was born, and in the midst of settling into family life, Eleuterio was asked to move again for his job. So the couple packed up and followed his work.

The hard work and sacrifices the family made soon paid off, because what started out as a truck driving job turned into a business Eleuterio developed into one of the largest shipping companies in Europe. But before long, the family expanded its interests to something a little more western.

Newfound Passion

ELEUTERIO GREW UP LOVING THE OUTDOORS. HE SPENT PLENTY of time roaming his family's land at his childhood home near



Eleuterio poses in front of his first truck he got when working as a driver for a paper company.

Rome. But when he took his daughter, Paola, to her first Quarter Horse show in Verona, he was hooked.

"They are just such sweet and wonderful horses," he said. "You can trust them with anyone and that's an amazing thing."

In 1982, Eleuterio built his 100-acre facility in a picturesque location near Verona. Local vineyards and the historic Castelnuovo del Garda overlook the lush landscape. It includes a unique two-story mirror façade indoor arena, out-

door riding pen, a veterinary clinic and a view from the broodmare pastures that is tough to beat.

Eleuterio said he never imagined the facility would ever grow as big as it has but joked that building is another one of his passions.

"The facility is in a great location because if you go anywhere north, south, east or west, you generally travel right through this area," he said. "I built this place so people would have a place to ride."

Learning the Ropes

ELEUTERIO HAS SPENT A LOT OF TIME TRAVELING TO THE UNITED States meeting top trainers, including Bill Horn, Bob Loomis, Tim McQuay and Todd Bergen. His family also spent time researching bloodlines to perfect his skills as a leading breeder.

"My son Matteo loves to ride horses, but my other son Leonardo is fascinated by the breeding side of it. He is like a walking encyclopedia of bloodlines," he said. "My daughter Paola is in charge of public relations. She has been a key factor in making sure we work with the best people in the industry."

Blue Ribbon Bloodlines

AFTER DOING THEIR HOMEWORK, THE ARCESES SET OUT TO BUILD a band of broodmares that would be second to none.

"Mares are the foundation of any successful program, and it has always been important for me to have great mares with a performance record," Eleuterio said.

Perhaps one of the greatest mares he has ever owned and one he considers his most important is 1986 National Reining Horse Association Futurity champion Sophie Oak. The mare has more than \$111,000 in lifetime NRHA earnings and was a building block for the family's breeding program.

Another great horse carrying the Arcese brand is his stallion Surprise Enterprise, who is an AQHA world champion and NRHA Superstakes champion. Eleuterio's latest love is 1998 NRHA Futurity champion Chic Please. Eleuterio considers him the future of the program.

"I like to breed horses that people can do something with," he said. "That is what will carry on the sport. If you buy a prospect from me and it doesn't work, it means I'm not doing my job."

The family breeds about 50 outside mares and 25 of its own at its ranch each year.



Surprise Enterprise has a special place in Eleuterio's heart. The stallion is the foundation of the family's bloodlines.



The two-story mirror façade of Arcese's indoor arena reflects the family's vision for the future.

Hitting the Big Time

THE DEFINING MOMENT ELEUTERIO'S HORSE CAREER WAS WHEN he purchased a mare named Spirit Of Five an hour before she won the NRHA Futurity.

"I saw her, and no one really took notice of her," he said. "Bill Horn rode her to the championship, and when we saw three scores of 75 posted on the board, it was such an emotional moment for us. I will never forget that feeling."

When he purchased Chic Please as a yearling, he proved that he not only had an eye for a proven performer, but a prospect as well. The 11-year-old bay stallion has lifetime earnings of more than \$180,000.

Not one to ever settle, once Eleuterio started to gain momentum within the industry he set his sights on the United States and set up a second facility in California.

"I felt that if I wanted to compete on the highest level possible, I needed to have a strong presence in the United States," he said.

Gold Medal Dreams

Like many, one of Eleuterio's goals is to get reining approved as an Olympic event by 2012. He thinks events like the FEI Masters are an excellent showcase of what the sport has to offer.

"It's just a great sport that so many people love," he said. "I am convinced that if we continue to organize and work together like we have, we can make it happen."

The ranch in Clements, California, is home to roughly 30 of the family's own horses.

The Arcese name has become synonymous with the sport of reining, but since acquiring its ranch in California, the family has enjoyed the western influence and expanded its competition and breeding program to including reined cow horses and cutters.

Family Ties

THERE ARE TWO THINGS ELEUTERIO CONSISTENTLY MENTIONS when talking about his life and the success he has had. Passion and family are what drives him, and it is horses that keep the family close.

"We all have such great passion for the horses, and it brings us together," he said.

Eleuterio also mentioned with a grin that the only one the family who doesn't have much passion for the horses is his wife because she says they spend too much money on them.

"She sees how happy it makes us, so it's OK," he said.

There isn't much in life Eleuterio hasn't accomplished and done without great enthusiasm. He said he considers himself a lucky man because his dreams have more than come true in life. He lives by the principle that if you do anything in life with passion, then anything is possible. He has done so tenfold. ■

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Arcese's Italian ranch is home to approximately 100 head of horses. The ranch in California houses roughly 30 horses.