

# The New Guild Chronicle

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## The Guild of Professional Farriers

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*“The Guild of Professional Farriers exists to define a valid standard of practical competence for professional farriers, and to effectively represent these farriers and the profession of farriery.”* – From the Preamble of The Guild Constitution.

**Ten Years Ago** a group of well-known farriers from across the United States banded together to establish an organization to promote farriery as a true profession. In this issue of **The New Guild Chronicle** we will identify some trends that are happening in the horse industry, discuss how the Guild needs to respond to these trends, and outline our new strategy for achievement.

## The Pet Horse

The statistics from the 2005 **American Horse Council** report, “NATIONAL ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE U.S. HORSE INDUSTRY” show that over 42% of the 9.2 million horses in the US are used strictly for recreation. Beyond these statistics it is fairly common knowledge that the *fastest growing* segment of the horse industry is the first time recreational horse owner. Many of these folks acquire horses without considering the idea that caring for equines requires much more knowledge and experience than keeping a dog or a cat. When faced with their newfound responsibility, where do these people go for information?

“HorseTV Media Group, Inc. has created the first national entertainment brand focused entirely on the equestrian industry, directed to the millions of people who own, ride, compete and care for horses as well as the tens of millions of enthusiasts who simply admire the romance and mystique of the horse.” - [www.horsetv.com](http://www.horsetv.com).

Imagine a market so vast that it merits its own 24/7 dedicated television channel. Are we becoming a nation of armchair horseman? There seems to be a never-ending supply of infomercials from horsemanship gurus. Masses of newbie equestrians are running up their credit card balances with videos, books, and “magic wands” to waive while they whisper to dobbin.

With all of the media based “education” available and thousands of Internet sites offering “free hoof care advice,” the next generation of horse owners is now presented with information overload from the “experts.” Horse owners seem to have no problem instructing their farriers about the latest hoof care fad or requesting that a farrier try such and such an appliance to solve their horse’s lameness problem. Yet these same people would never consider instructing their dentists on the latest cavity filling techniques. Why is that? Could it be because the general public does not have the **perception** that farriers are educated, competent professionals? Is it possible that there are so many folks attempting or pretending to be farriers that a layperson is unable to distinguish between a real professional and an incompetent?

Thus we raise the question; who defines the term “Professional Farrier?” Do farrier certification tests alone determine that a farrier is a qualified professional? Shouldn’t there be a

minimum level of field experience required, just like in other professions, before one can be considered a “professional.” Furthermore, who is responsible for creating and upholding the professional standards?

## We Are Accountable

In recent years there have been some major political battles fought in the farrier industry. Some farriers believe that licensing will bring professionalism to our trade. Some fear that state veterinary practice acts will be changed and as a result of those changes we may no longer be able to practice independently. Some believe that there should be an accredited farrier primary education system, which yields a recognized credential. Most of the proponents of licensing believe that there should be minimum standards of education and experience required before a farrier should be allowed to practice independently.

Most of the opponents of licensing believe that once the government is involved in creating and enforcing professional standards, regulation and control of farriers will be handed over to professional politicians and/or veterinarians as it was in the UK. Furthermore, any licensing regulation would require grandfathering all existing farriers as fully licensed professionals. Thus resulting in licensing of unqualified farriers, as it was in the UK. Without an enforceable requirement for examination of knowledge, peer review of skills, and a reasonable amount of field experience, a government-mandated **credential** has no real **credibility**.

The Guild’s definition of a “qualified professional farrier” is based on long-established tradition and the practical real-world requirements for a full-service hoof care provider:

- Journeyman knowledge and skill levels, as demonstrated by successful completion of appropriate examinations and peer review.
- At least four years of practical full-time experience in the field.
- Full-time professional status as a farrier.

You have to draw the line somewhere. We’ve drawn it at career journeymen with over four years of experience. That’s our minimum. Most Guild members surpass these requirements by a considerable extent, but no one gets into the Guild Registry with less. Therefore it is we, the members of the Guild, who should also hold ourselves accountable for defining the standards by which the American public determines who the professionals are.

## Marketing Strategy

One could argue that each of us should establish our value and credibility, as individuals, through our hard won reputations. However, this argument falls apart when you consider how successful some individuals have become at promoting themselves as hoof care gurus in spite of their gross incompetence and lack of consistently positive results. A good sales pitch will sell a lot of snake oil. There will always be a market for snake oil as long as nobody is putting any time and energy into promoting and selling real medicine.

In order for the Guild standard to be a viable credential, **the public needs to know about it**. We cannot leave it up to the public to “discover” who we are by happenstance or word of mouth. We cannot sit on our laurels and keep our organization a secret. Without marketing, which results in public awareness, our credentials are weak and meaningless. Along with membership in the Guild comes the responsibility to be proactive in our stewardship of the “professional standards.” We must go beyond defining the standard and get serious about **PROMOTING** it. In order for our promotion to be successful we need to **PLAN OUR SUCCESS**. We need to have a marketing strategy.

Marketing is about conducting research and then based on the research promoting a product **in order to increase awareness of and demand for** that product. The Guilds products are our professional credentials, the Registered Journeyman Farrier™ and the Registered Master Farrier™. Ten years ago we did an excellent job of defining our product. However, lately we have not done a whole lot to promote demand or increase supply. Perhaps the biggest reason for this is the fact that all of us are **ALREADY** fully established professionals. Therefore as individuals we do not feel that we need to promote our business. Most of us already have more work than we can handle. So why should we engage in activities that would ultimately increase the number of customers that we turn away because we are already over booked?

When we **do nothing** to **STIMULATE** demand for our products, the market itself will dilute the value of our products. In effect we are allowing the market to seek its own level. As full time peer-qualified professionals we provide a substantial value to the market. However, unless we educate the market about the added value, demonstrate that value, and **DIFFERENTIATE** ourselves, the market will not **perceive our products as valuable or credible**.

The Guild needs a marketing strategy that accomplishes the following:

1. Increase public awareness of the Guild credentials and demand for Guild farriers.
2. Develop and implement tangible **membership benefits**, which benefit **the farrier profession**.
3. Establish brand name recognition for the Guild credential. Certain brand names like Rolls Royce, for example, are universally recognized as being superior quality. As we give back to our profession, we should do so whilst displaying our credentials. As an example of this situation, how many of you are aware that the horseshoeing chapters in the two top **veterinary text books on lameness** used in American veterinary colleges were written by Guild farriers? What if our entire membership were to begin contributing articles in various equine publications on a regular basis – while making sure to put RJF™ or RMF™ following the author’s name? The more of us who are published **under Guild credentials**, the more recognition our credentials receive.

Creating and implementing this marketing strategy is a serious undertaking. Every objective needs to be clearly defined and broken down into individual tasks. Every task needs to be assigned a timeline for completion and a person to do the task. Many of the objectives will have interdependencies and funding requirements. In order for the strategy to meet its

objectives, **every Guild member** needs to educate himself or herself about it, contribute to it, and follow its progress through implementation. As a Guild member YOU WILL BE ASKED:

1. To contribute ideas.
2. To review the plan and make modifications and improvements.
3. To volunteer to develop and implement tasks on the plan within a specific timeline.
4. To report on the progress of tasks you have agreed to implement, or identify obstacles to your progress and ask for help in overcoming the obstacles before you exceed the timeline.
5. To communicate with other members and provide support and encouragement for their efforts and recognition of their achievements.
6. To share your knowledge of what the Guild is doing with other professionals and encourage them to join the Guild and help you accomplish your goals.
7. Every Guild member who has reached the 8-year minimum experience requirement for the Registered Master Farrier™ credential should set a goal to work toward earning his or her RMF. Every Guild member who already has their RMF should be encouraging his or her peers to pursue this credential. Every thesis, which is reviewed and approved for the RMF credential, should be published in one of the trade journals. Thus as we earn our titles, we also **contribute to our profession**.

There will be no Guild members left in the dark about what is going on within the organization. Because each of us will be asked to contribute, review, and follow the progress of our strategic plan, we will all be informed, up to speed, and “in the loop.”

## FYI Recent and Near Future Guild Activities

Last year the Guild members voted to make the **International Hoof Care Summit** the venue for our annual membership meeting. The 2007 IHCS is on the horizon. Please plan to attend this event and our meeting. More information on the IHCS is available on [www.americanfarriers.com](http://www.americanfarriers.com). The Guild will have a booth in the IHCS trade show. We will need volunteers to help staff this booth and answer questions about our organization. The following is a just a list of stuff we are doing and when we are doing it.

Date----	Activity-----
10/12/06	Guild Exam in Alabama announced to regional association, S.H.O.E. and GPFA, presidents asking them to notify their members.
10/24/06	Guild web site Update – <a href="http://www.guildfarriers.org">www.guildfarriers.org</a>
10/24/06	Guild Exam in Alabama placed on Internet web calendars – American Farriers Journal, Hoofcare & Lameness, <a href="http://www.horseshoes.com">www.horseshoes.com</a> , American Farriers Association
10/29/06	Approval from Frank Lessiter for publishing future Guild articles and a regular news column in the AFJ, naming AFJ as the Guild’s official trade publication, naming the IHCS as the Guild’s official annual convention.
11/04/06	GPF Exam flyer for December (Alabama) distributed at Danny Ward’s fall clinic.

11/10/06 Newsletter (the one you are reading now)

11/10/06 Exam Prep handout distributed to exam candidates

11/15/06 AFJ article announcing Guild exam in Alabama, Guild news column in AFJ, Guild meeting/annual convention at IHCS, new Guild web site and feature article

12/01/06 Guild web site Update – Invitation to the IHCS and Guild Annual Meeting

12/16/06 GPF Exam Alabama

12/17/06 Appoint replacement interim Vice President

12/30/06 Guild web site Update – Feature w/photos article on GPF exam in Alabama

12/30/06 AFJ Guild news column

12/30/06 Member benefit proposal - draft

12/30/06 Marketing Plan overview - draft

12/30/06 IHCS trade show booth staffing

12/30/06 IHCS Guild meeting agenda

01/01/07 Guild Newsletter

- Member Benefit plan outline
- Marketing plan outline
- Schedule for spring examinations

02/01/07 IHCS Guild Annual Meeting

- Nominations for officers
- Marketing strategy rollout
- Member benefits proposals

02/15/07 Guild web site Update – Online membership directory

02/15/07 Guild Newsletter

- Officer candidacy platforms
- Election ballots

03/15/07 Election ballot returns

04/01/07 Guild web site Update – New officers

04/01/07 Newsletter

- New officers announced
- Begin Marketing Strategy implementation
- Member benefits update

04/15/07 GPF Exam Delmarva

05/15/07 GPF Exam New England

## Summary

People will form their opinions based on the information that is provided to them. They do not need to seek knowledge. The **knowledge** is delivered to them through marketing material on television, the Internet, and numerous equine publications. In the face of mass media marketing, word of mouth and earned reputations are at best a passive means of determining professional farrier qualifications. In order for the market to look upon the farrier trade as a profession, we must engage in an ACTIVE promotion of a minimum professional standard TO THE MARKET. Successful promotion requires careful planning and execution. The Guild is moving forward with a marketing strategy that is focused on *“defining a valid standard of practical competence for professional farriers, and effectively representing these farriers and the profession of farriery.”*