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Hunt celebrates 90 years of equestrian pursuit

The Fort Leavenworth Hunt celebrates its 90th anniversary.

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The Fort Leavenworth Hunt celebrated its 90th anniversary with a sequence of events over three days that began Oct. 7 with a historical ride of post. In addition to the opening hunt Oct. 8, other activities and events included a reception and cocktail party at the Frontier Army Museum Oct. 7, the Hunt Ball at J.W. Crancers in Leavenworth Oct. 8, and a ceremony at the Buffalo Soldier Monument and tour of the Lewis and Clark Center Oct. 9.

“I have been with the Fort Leavenworth Hunt since 1978,” said Dave Drummond, retired former civilian deputy director of the Command and General Staff School. “In the beginning years, we hunted on post and very seldom did we hunt off post. Understandably, the post has changed significantly since then. Many of those places where we used to hunt are now other facilities and family housing. Today, many of our members are not military, which makes conducting the hunt off post more logistically convenient.”

The Fort Leavenworth Hunt was started in 1926 and is the only military-affiliated foxhunt in North America. Subsequently, many famous military leaders throughout history have participated, including Generals Jonathan Wainwright and George Patton.

“This is a special opening hunt. We’ve got people here from other places like Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, Colorado and Illinois,” Drummond said.

Vivien Van Buren, a hunt participant visiting from Colorado, is a board member of Bijou Springs Hunt.

“In Colorado we are a traditional hunt and hunt coyotes,” Van Buren said. “It’s great watching the hounds work — they are scent hounds.”

The historical tour consisted of four groups of 20 mounted horses that departed at timed intervals in order to allow spacing between each group participating in the ride. Two hay wagons also carried passengers. Gary Smith and his family rode in the second hay wagon. Smith travelled with his family from Springfield, Ill. Smith served in the Army from 1956-1958.

“Fort Leavenworth is probably one of the prettiest posts I’ve ever been on. And, the history here is tremendous too,” Gary Smith said. “I happen to be an avid reader of western history. There is so much written about events on the Missouri River that took place right in this area.”

Gary Smith’s wife said she found the tour to be a great learning experience.

“The tour was fabulous,” Nancy Smith said. “I learned a great deal. I was impressed with the age of some of the buildings here and how well they have been kept.”

The Fort Leavenworth Hunt pursues a fox or coyote with 25-35 foxhounds through designated hunt country while also offering the subscribers of the hunt an opportunity to view the chase. The intention of the fox hunt is only to chase and watch the hounds work as they are guided by the huntsman and assisted by the whippers-in. The field master leads the field of riders into position to view the fox or coyote being pursued. Riders are grouped by ability for a safe and exciting riding. Additionally, a qualified member of the staff leads a group of riders called “the hill-toppers,” who follow along at a slower pace without jumps.

The FLH provides opportunities for families who enjoy equestrian sports. Fox hunts emphasize the chase and are conducted from September through April. The club is active throughout the year with horse shows, riding instruction, horse and hound training and other riding and social events. Introductory courses in fox hunting are given August through September. Hunts are on Wednesdays and Saturdays from September through March.

The FLH clubhouse is at 650 McPherson Ave., phone number (913) 651-1141 or 684-1703.



PHOTO/ PRUDENCE SIEBERT, FORT LEAVENWORTH LAMP

After passing the U.S. Disciplinary Barracks Cemetery on Sheridan Drive, Fort Leavenworth Hunt member and tour guide retired Col. Mark French, on thoroughbred Gunner, right, leads Nancy Mitchell, huntsman for the Bijou Springs Hunt in Colorado, on quarter horse Delta Dawn, and her husband Rohn Mitchell, master of the foxhounds for the Bijou Springs Hunt, and other horseback riders to the next point of interest during a post tour conducted on horseback to celebrate the 90th anniversary of the FLH Oct. 7 on Riverside Avenue. Hunt clubs from Colorado, Missouri, Iowa, Texas, Nebraska and Indiana participated with the FLH in the weekend of celebratory events, which included opening hunt Oct. 8 and a wreath-laying ceremony Oct. 9 at the Buffalo Soldier Monument. Photo by Prudence Siebert/Fort Leavenworth Lamp