

✧ Making A Difference

The Inspirational Paige Johnson

By Dani Moritz

After watching the cartoon *My Little Pony*, Paige Johnson knew she wanted to ride. So her parents, Sheila and Robert Johnson, founders of Black Entertainment Television (BET), bought Paige her first pony - a small pony that Paige describes as "super lazy, but very cute." At eight years old, Paige started competing and she hasn't stopped yet.

Today, Paige is a show jumper with an impressive track record. She has won multiple grand prix classes such as the \$40,000 Bluegrass Festival Grand Prix and the \$25,000 Hagyard Lexington Classic at The Kentucky Summer Horse Show. Paige has not let her accomplishments go to her head. "I always try to get better and learn [from] and observe other top riders. I think no matter what you choose to do in life, you can always better yourself by educating oneself in your field and never assuming there's nothing left for you to learn. The more you are open to learning and working on your craft, the better you will be."

When Paige is not aboard one of her eight show horses working towards perfection, she donates her time to community service projects. She is an ASPCA Equine Welfare Ambassador as well as a volunteer for HomeSafe, a South Florida based non-profit organization that helps victims of child abuse and domestic violence.

As an ASPCA ambassador since 2011, Paige proudly speaks at ASPCA functions to help promote the organization and the welfare of animals. "As an equestrian, I have a strong love for animals, not just horses. Any organization that helps promote the welfare of animals and saves animals from devastating conditions is an organization I want to be a part of. The ASPCA has been around since 1866, and horses have been central to their work. It is a well-established and respected organization that works to protect and aid horses through rescue, enforcement, grants, anti-cruelty laws and legislation. It was an honor to be asked to be an



Paige Johnson
Photo by Sonny T. Senser

ambassador."

Paige is one of seven riders selected to be an ambassador. Other ambassadors include Brianne Goutal, Beezie Madden, Georgina Bloomberg, Hayley Barnhill, Jill Rappaport and Declan Gregg.

As of 2011, Paige also started volunteering for HomeSafe. "It's so wonderful what they do to help these children. They all come from difficult backgrounds. Last year, I went to visit the facility and I got to meet with the wonderful kids and the counselors who work with them, trying to set them up to succeed in the world after they leave HomeSafe."

Paige is the co-chair for HomeSafe's Jump For HomeSafe Event. Last year, she chaired the event alone; but joined forces with her friend Clara Lindner Belden to co-chair this year's event.

Jump For HomeSafe, held January 12, raised proceeds to support HomeSafe's efforts to help victims of child abuse and domestic violence. As part of the event, attendees enjoyed a buffet dinner and open bar, ringside seating to the Nespresso Battle of the Sexes event, a silent auction, horseless jumping competition for children, face painting, pony rides and more.

Paige attributes her success to two people the rest of the world labels famous; but who Paige simply calls mom and dad. "I have wonderful, loving and supportive parents who have always encouraged me to follow my dreams and work hard at it. To me they are my parents, not the people who started BET."



Paige aboard Chiron S., or "Tucker" for short, in the \$30K Mar-a-Lago Grand Prix.

Photo by Jack Mancini