

# Collinsville teens compete with giddyup

BY TERI MADDOX

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Kevin and Mindy Wilborn were stunned when their son, Ethan, and daughter, Megan, ended up in the same bracket during a pole-bending competition at the World Championship Appaloosa Youth Show in Mississippi this summer.

The Collinsville teens had competed extensively in horse shows across the country, but not against each other directly.

The announcer identified them as brother and sister, prompting murmurs from the crowd.

"I was in the stands," Mindy said. "My heart was pounding."

"I was in the back," Kevin said. "I couldn't hardly watch."

Ethan, 17, won the bracket, partly because he and his horse, Topper, were faster and partly because Megan, 15, and her horse, Stetson, knocked down a pole.

Ethan went on to become world reserve champion (second-place winner) in pole bending and received \$1,000. Megan came in seventh.

"I wasn't really disappointed," she said. "I was more focused on my next run."

Competition is a way of life for Ethan, a senior, and Megan, a sophomore, at Collinsville High School.

They travel to more than 25 horse shows a year, competing at barrel racing, showmanship, western pleasure, hunter-jumper and other events. Their rooms are filled with colorful ribbons and horse-shaped trophies.

Megan was this year's Illinois State Fair 4-H game horse champion. The competition combined pole bending, barrel racing and flags.

"In the speed events, Megan doesn't usually beat (her brother)," Kevin said. "But when she does, he hears about it."

Ethan and Megan started riding horses when they were 6 and 4, respectively. They took lessons for several years.

Their father and grandfather, B.C. Wilborn, are thoroughbred trainers at Fairmount Park race track. But it was their mother who suggested the family get its first "riding horse."

"My dad's philosophy was, if (horses) didn't race, we didn't need 'em," Kevin said. "So I never had a riding horse growing up."

The Wilborns bought a 19-year-old appaloosa "pony horse" nearing retirement at the track.

Today, they have one paint horse and four appaloosas, which are known for their spotted, leopard-like coats.

"The first one was Banjo, and he was a good one," Ethan said. "So we just kept getting more like him."

Topper is the most "high-strung" of the bunch. Banjo is the elder statesman, estimated at 30 years old.

The Wilborns lost their second appaloosa, Cool, in a freak accident seven years ago on their 7-acre farm.

"He ran into Banjo (after both got spooked in the pasture), and Cool died," Mindy said. "It was absolutely horrible."

Ethan works part time as a groom at Fairmount Park. He plans to attend college after graduation and eventually become a veterinarian for large animals. Megan is considering nursing.

In middle school, the siblings occasionally got teased for their unusual sport. Kids would say, "There's 'horse boy,'" or "There's 'horse girl.'"

But now many high-school friends see horseback riding as a "cool" extracurricular activity and like visiting the farm.

"We just grew up around it and liked it enough to keep doing it," Megan said.

"It's different," Ethan added. "It's unique. How many other kids at school can say they compete with horses?"

