

Courtney Smith learns to drive - horses, that is

By **KIERNAN SCHALK**
Sentinel reporter

Courtney Smith's love of horses spans several years and has developed into a personal passion.

Courtney, 16, of Port Royal, says she has been around horses since she was 4 years old.

Not long ago, Courtney met Jim Swartz, who has been training draft horses for as long as he can remember.

"I have been doing this for 20 years," he says.

Other than his son, nobody ever really took an interest in what he does with draft horses, until Courtney came along.

Courtney says she ran into Swartz' wife at Old Home Foliage Days in Port Royal in 2010 and expressed her interest in learning to drive horses.

"I could see from the beginning she was a real bright kid, eager to learn ... she was very much interested in learning about draft horses," Swartz says.

"So far this has been a really good experience; she is a real energetic kid," he adds.

Swartz says he has really enjoyed being around Courtney and her family and the opportunity has been very rewarding for him.

Handling draft horses was a little different than handling other types of horses, Courtney explains.

Swartz has seven black horses and two draft horses, Jethro, the larger of the two, and Julie, the smaller one.

Courtney took the smaller one to the Pennsylvania Farm Show in Harrisburg in January to compete in the Senior Youth Division.

At the Farm Show, Courtney says, horses are judged against the "ideal confirmation of that horse."

In one competition, she had 30 minutes to tie the tail and braid the mane, with no help.

"All you can have is some-

one holding the horse," Courtney says.

In the driving class, competitors walk and trot the horse and are judged on the pulling ability of the horse.

Terri Fulton-Smith said her daughter's first time at the Farm Show was a learning experience. She was in classes of 15 and didn't ribbon at the show, however, she did receive a lead rope and \$5 for participating.

"The people I met were amazing! I've never been anywhere where total strangers were willing to go out of their way to help you. I will go back next year, if Jim and Jean will allow me, and I will learn more. Being in the ring competing was incredible; however, it was an even more exhilarating experience to be asked to be part of the Governor's Parade," Courtney says.

Swartz says Courtney has competed in the 4H draft horse competitions and other competitions as well.

What is nice is that the draft horse competitors learn a lot from each other, Swartz says.

"They try to help each other give advice, it's a lot of fun ... the best thing about these horses is the people you meet, like Courtney," Swartz says.

In addition to the draft horse competitions, Courtney also shows a little bit and is trying to qualify for the Pony Finals in Lexington, Ky., which attracts people from all over the country.

When she isn't competing or practicing, Courtney takes horses to local festivals, weddings and special events.

"This is my second year at the ice fest," Courtney says, of the 2011 Festival of Ice in downtown Lewistown. She says she also has taken part in First Night, the New Year's Eve celebration in State College.

Fulton-Smith says her daughter would also like to be able to give sleigh rides this winter.



Sentinel photo by BUFFIE BOYER

Courtney Smith, 16, of Port Royal, poses with Julie, a Percheron draft horse, at the Pennsylvania Farm Show in Harrisburg in January, after competing in the Youth Decorating competition. **See more photos on Page 47.**

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— Jim Swartz, draft horse trainer