



Katy Cowgirls Carla Fisher, Addy Alucema, Gretta Brong, and Jennica Davis



The group presents choreographed patterns at Katy's special events



Katy Cowgirls learn to work as a team



Photo by Marisa Hugonnet

Katy Cowgirls

Donned in tiaras and cowboy boots, the Katy Cowgirls celebrate over 70 years of tradition

Written by Ella Hearrean

Select photography courtesy of Katy Cowgirls

Carla Fisher was in fifth grade when she watched the Katy Cowgirls perform for the first time and told her parents, "I want to do that." Eight years later, as a senior line captain of the mounted drill team, the Katy High School junior says, "I've learned leadership skills, gained friendships, and I feel proud carrying the flag during parades and performances."

Representing the Community

This year, the organization of Katy ISD student horse-riding performers marks over 70 years of representing their hometown and school district at community events. Its 27 riders, whose ages range from 8 to 17 years, don their trademark tiaras and hats and present choreographed patterns at events like the Katy Rice Harvest Festival and Special Children's Day. The culmination of their hard work is the annual presentation of the flags at the Katy Livestock Show and Rodeo.

Anita Mancini, director of the Katy Cowgirls for the past 11 years, attributes the success of the group to the diligence of its members. "These girls are the cream of the crop. Most are in advanced academic classes and are involved in other school and social activities, but they are dedicated to their horses and to each other. They are learning to be leaders."



Katy Cowgirls support local charities such as the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life



The Katy Cowgirls team is comprised of Katy ISD students

Working as a Team

The Katy Cowgirls accept girls of all skill levels, which Mancini says distinguishes the group from other team sports. “We want them to simply be able to walk, trot, and lope a horse with a flag in hand. We’ll take on someone with basic skills and a horse.”

The differences in abilities help the girls work as a team. “Their talents are different. Without each person’s position, the performance isn’t right,” says Mancini. Nine-year-old rider Faith Mancini agrees. “When I’m scared of holding the flag or steering the horse, the older girls make me feel comfortable and confident,” she says.

Their challenges strengthen the team as well. “The horses are spooked by the flags at first, so we have to teach them,” says Mancini. “They are also large animals that will misbehave. The girls learn to discipline them with respect.” Fisher adds that working closely with friends can sometimes be difficult. “Sometimes we have arguments and have to work them out, but Miss Anita always helps us. These girls are my best friends. They are like family.”

The team relies on the support of others, including five cowhands who prepare horses for rides and watch for the girls’ safety. “These are strong, capable young men who are always available,” says Mancini. She adds that parents are critical to the group’s success. “They show support by driving the girls and helping them reach their goals. Their commitment is awesome.”

Spreading the Love

Their camaraderie is evident in fun group traditions such as smashing cupcakes in birthday girls’ faces and going on annual alumni trail rides. It is also evident in their ability to come together to meet goals, such as exceeding their goal to support the American Cancer Society’s Relay for Life. Mancini says, “Their horse rides, bake sale, and collections from family and friends raised over \$7,000. I was so proud of them.”

Mancini’s close relationships with her current riders, as well as her 400 alumni riders, are reflected in their nicknames for her: “Miss A,” “Barn Mama,” even “Nana” by her granddaughter Faith - one of the youngest on the team. “I get to know each girl and what is going on with her so I can help her reach her goals,” she says. “They are such a blessing in the way they love me back.”

Ushering a New Season

The team is gearing up for its annual membership tryouts at the Katy ISD rodeo arena, where newcomers are judged on basic skills and where veteran members interview for spots as captain. Mancini is confident the new season will hold wonderful adventures. She shares, “I just can’t say enough about these girls. I can’t do them justice.” **KM**

ELLA HEARREAN is a Katy-area writer and editor.



Katy Cowgirls' hard work is displayed during the presentation of the flags at the Katy Livestock Show and Rodeo



The Cowgirls' cowhands are committed to helping the girls stay safe while around the horses