

THE UNITED STATES PONY CLUBS, INC. Where Do My Membership Dues Go?

This question is asked by almost everyone who pays dues to their local Pony Club. Of course, the total amount that is paid to the local club includes club and regional dues, which vary, and national dues. Now wait a minute, many of you may be thinking that other than the *USPC News* magazine, you don't get anything else with that \$75.00 you have to spend. Perhaps the most important, and certainly the most publicized, benefit of USPC membership is insurance. Yes, this does include a relatively small amount of secondary medical insurance, but the greater benefit comes from the increasingly necessary liability insurance. What else though? Surely these two things don't cost *that* much...

Every time a member goes to a meeting, they are receiving benefits from their membership dues. For example, even a new, unrated member will be working towards achieving his or her first rating. To do this, that child will need to be familiar with the D Standards of Proficiency. All of the Standards of Proficiency are reviewed and updated regularly by a national committee, and while the committee members are volunteers, there are administrative and printing costs associated with the production. All USPC instructors must be able to teach to the Standards as well and be knowledgeable in safety matters. Standardized instruction and ratings across the nation are definitely benefits of membership and part of what makes USPC unique.

Speaking of ratings, upper level ratings must also be considered. Both national examiners and C3 examiners must be certified to test these levels and continue attending seminars to remain eligible. Other volunteers are also required to attend seminars on an annual basis. The education of these volunteers is organized and administered by USPC. Regional Horse Management Organizers (HMOs) and Regional Instruction Coordinators (RICs) bring back their knowledge to every club and member of their regions. Horse Management Judges for rallies must undergo an approval process administered by USPC committees.

Seminars for DCs and RSs are always available during the USPC Annual Meeting, as well as the workshops that are geared towards all members and their parents. Leadership support programs are available for clubs and regions offering problem solving and networking throughout the year. The USPC Grants Program is designed to assist with programs that will create learning experiences for youth members and have lasting value for the clubs and regions. All active clubs and regions in good standing may apply for these grants, including the Betsy Raine Fund, which is designed to support dressage training. These opportunities exist for the benefit of all members and volunteers.

National Championships are organized each year, and the planning and administration of this competition is supported by USPC. The USPC Festival, held every three years at the Kentucky Horse Park, is a weeklong extravaganza of competition and education of youth and adults in mounted and unmounted areas, and could not take place without national support.

Many opportunities are available to benefit older and/or higher rated members. The National Youth Congress and Academy of Achievement are offered during the Annual Meeting and provide unforgettable experiences and begin new friendships. International Exchanges are also supported by USPC and expose qualified members to unique cultural experiences. Some disciplines have special awards that recognize Pony Club participation and excellence in other organizations. These are some of the programs that encourage members to stay involved for an extended period of time allowing them to share their experiences and attitudes with younger, newer members. Giving back to Pony Club can be mutually beneficial and is a philosophy deeply imbedded in USPC's history.

If you're still wondering what exactly it is that your national dues cover, you should know that all of the programs and benefits mentioned average an approximate dollar value of \$150 per member. Considering again that national dues for a renewing member are only \$75, that's quite a value. The additional funding for these benefits must then come from fundraising. It may be true that each and every Pony Club member will not realize all benefits, however the opportunity is there. Life is what we make of it and some opportunities are worth the extra effort. Look into everything that USPC has to offer and make the most of your Pony Club experience.