



Wesley C. Dunham '87  
Distinguished Alumni Award  
October 6, 2017

Wesley Dunham's first trail ride was meant to be a grand adventure – just a young boy and his valiant steed riding into the forest beyond the horizon. Intent on discovery, Wes set out with Dolly, his headstrong pony, who decided at one point that she wanted to go left instead of right – running him head-first into a low-lying branch.

As you can imagine, the experience ended poorly for Wes. Unfazed by the rough encounter, however, Wes dusted himself off, took Dolly's lead, and continued their exploration of the woods.

And in that moment, his lifelong passion for working with horses was born.

Wes, a 1987 Houghton graduate, is the proprietor of Woodstock Stables, an equestrian dressage facility in the Hudson Valley of New York, where he teaches dressage to horses and riders. He works from dawn to dusk helping diverse and talented riders thrive and overcome their challenges and limitations.

Wes has long been inspired by England's high regard for para-athletes with physical limitations, and he has made it his mission to "develop students and athletes in the hopes of changing our cultural perception of athletes with physical disabilities" here in the United States. In 2010 he began training para-equestrian riders, and since that time has overseen two Para-Olympic riders – one in the 2012 London games and the other in the 2016 Rio competitions – as well as current non-para riders who place in national competitions.

Friends, classmates, and former professors recall Wes's compassionate, thoughtful approach to his work, as well as his poise, professionalism, and agility. Jo-Anne Young, former equestrian program director, recalls an incident where a large, opinionated horse named Isaac decided to perform a challenging jump up a steep bank, rather than climb as instructed. Young held her breath as she watched Isaac's hooves soar over her head, landing with Wes perfectly balanced in the saddle.

Wes's faith is integral to his work, and he seeks to demonstrate Christ's love, acceptance, and understanding in each word and action. In Young's view, "Wes has been a terrific steward of the interests and talents God gave him with horses," turning those gifts into acts of service on behalf of special needs and at-risk youth.

Wes, your successful career speaks volumes about your abilities and the servant heart that God has given you. Your dedication to your students demonstrates a quiet, humble leadership that changes the lives of para- and non-para riders alike. In honor of that attitude and your accomplishments, we are pleased to present you with a 2017 Distinguished Achievement award.

