

NWRRRC Member Profile: Marykay Ligocki, Member since 1999

Marykay Ligocki is currently a director on the NWRRRC board and has served on the board in many capacities since she joined in 1999. She founded and still runs the Club's annual Fun Days, is an admin on the Club's Facebook page, and serves as an area mentor for RRCUS. Marykay is known far and wide as an experienced breeder behind the Java Ridgebacks kennel name and more recently has partnered with Jeanette Ennis under the Java-RRelativity Ridgebacks kennel name. She enjoys a wide variety of activities and pursuits with her dogs including conformation, rally, lure coursing, agility, tracking, herding, scent work, and brace! Marykay likes to say that her happy place is with puppies.



Growing Up: I was born horse crazy! I showed, trained, gave lessons, rehabbed rescued horses and ponies, assisted with vet care, judged for years, bred 5 foals for myself and delivered many for other people. I haven't done anything with horses since my last one died (at 34 yrs old) and have found that dogs are a whole lot easier and less stressful.

We had multiple purebred rescue dogs of all different breeds that we rehabbed and re-homed but we kept a collie and a lab. I showed them in 4-H and obedience. The first dog I got as a puppy was a Dalmatian. I found her in the newspaper – she was four weeks old (her mom was killed by a car when the 14 puppies were one day old). She went with me to all my horse activities.

Education & Professional Background: I graduated from the University of Illinois Urbana with a BS in pre-med/pre-vet. From the time I was four years old until just before my junior year of undergrad, I wanted to be a vet until I became disillusioned with the state of the vet program there at that time. I then fell into a research job at Southern Illinois Med School and I loved it! I then spent 35 years as a technical scientist and senior research associate in academia and biotech, mostly in oncology and inflammatory disease research.

Ridgebacks: From the time I moved to the Seattle area (1989), I spent a tremendous amount of time each year at the Seattle Kennel Club dog show, despite the fact that I had no desire to get a show dog. I liked just sitting ringside and watching dogs, asking questions, and learning about different breeds. I happened to take our cat to a new vet and I told them that I was trying to decide on a dog breed. They

asked me the characteristics I wanted and said they thought I needed to look at Ridgebacks. I truly had never noticed them!

I spent about a year investigating and watching the dogs and their breeders. Lois Hunter had a litter that ended up being one of those perfect situations where there were lots of show pups in the litter and the waiting list for pets was miles long. Karen McClelland (co-breeder) and Lois convinced me that I could jump the line if I would agree to show. I was skeptical but agreed, thinking I would fulfill my obligation and then just go back to performance stuff. I was sold from the first show. I met more people with whom I enjoyed spending time during the first six months of dog shows than I had since I'd moved to the Pacific Northwest!

About our breed: They are the easiest breed of dog to train that I've ever worked with. They reason things out, and learn by watching, but require me to learn a different way of training to help them keep the joy of doing things. I made lots of mistakes with my first one and am thankful that she was easy and quite forgiving.

Ridgebacks are amazingly strong and they will eat until they weigh 300 pounds if given the chance. They are very good at training their people. The owners, no matter how experienced they thought they were with other breeds, get really good at a lot of new things when they get a Ridgeback.

Breeding Experience: My first litter was in 2003 and for quite some time, I had a litter every 18 months to three years. Then, after what is now assumed to have been an environmental trigger, I lost four dogs in 18 months, followed by losing the only remaining intact girl of my lines at her co-owner's house not long afterwards. I was completely broken. All I had left to go on with from my breeding was the frozen semen from two of my boys.



Shortly after that, Jeanette Ennis came up to me one day and asked me if I would be willing to teach her everything involved in breeding the right way. It was like a miracle dropping from the sky. We started with her girl Doppler who we successfully bred to a male, Easy, I had frozen down from my first litter

(who was co-owned by and lived with Cyndy and Tom Israel) and everything we have now has come down from that Doppler x Easy litter. I can't express how thankful I am to Jeanette for allowing me to be a part of a pack again. I no longer get to do much competing, but I do get to hang out with the Java/RRelativity pack fairly often and live vicariously through everyone else's activities. They are the joy in my life.



With Pascal & Cheyenne winning BIS Brace!

Puppy and Breeding Advice: Start with the best dog you possibly can. Not only in structure but in temperament. Realize that the perfect dog doesn't exist and very few people are going to be willing to give their best puppy to an unknown person but do the best you can. Make connections and establish relationships before you are actually ready to get a puppy. For that first show potential dog, try very hard to find a breeder that doesn't just have nice dogs, but is someone that you will trust and respect as a mentor and who you will feel comfortable contacting with questions, problems, and just as a sounding board.

If you are interested in breeding, not just showing, study! Evaluate your girl and what she needs. Look for dogs whose strengths will complement your girls' weaknesses (there are always weaknesses - no dog is perfect). Don't just go with a dog that's winning and has lots of pretty pictures out there or that is conveniently just down the road. Look at pedigrees and what they produced. What traits from a specific dog seem to pass consistently to the next generation (good and bad)? Realize that there are traits that can be fixed in one generation and others that are really difficult to change. Also, I believe that it's NEVER smart for breeders to say they aren't worried about some health issue being in their lines. You will have to make compromises, but you want to make the best, informed choice possible and then cross your fingers that you guessed right.

Proudest RR experiences: I am proud that I finished US and Can championships on my first 6 dogs as an owner handler. At the time, the GCH option didn't exist and while I never had any desire to have a special, I had one girl, Teq, who absolutely LOVED showing. At a time when judges only looked at RR males for breed and girls for opposite, Teq finished her championship with a BOB over a ring full of specials. Showing only in our area, with no advertisement, and just me showing her, we had numerous group placements (including several group 1s). She was top 20 for 2 years, was number 3 and then number 2 RR bitch in the country. We had 3 or 4 best BBE BIS. I had a blast because Teq had a blast. I also had a BIS BBE with Latte. I am also very proud to have many BIS brace wins in both the US and Canada.



Marykay's Teq in the RRCUS Top 20 in 2008

These days, I am now very proud of the dogs Jeanette and I have produced together. We are on our 3rd generation that have come down from Doppler and Easy.

I am also proud of the wonderful puppy people we have had over the years, including a large number with little kids, and how many of them have become lasting friends.

How the Club has grown and changed: The club has had various waves of activities and priorities over the years. It is far larger now than it was even a few years ago. The club now has a much more varied list of activities and hopefully more ways for people to be involved that don't have an interest in showing. We went through all kinds of hoops and drama to get approved for our first lure trial, but since then have successfully put on many events - lure trials, FastCATs, and now our regional specialty, plus the annual Fun Day.



An Early NWRRRC Fun Days