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*The Bauman family (from left, Amber, Austin, Adam, Alexis and Tyson) traveled to Florida for the Winter Equestrian Festival circuit.*

## The Bauman Family Basks in Support

After a devastating barn fire, the Baumans recover with the help of the USHJA Foundation 'Making A Dream' Grant Program.

By Lindsay Brock

On the evening of November 22, 2014, the Bauman family, of Woodstock, Illinois, was immersed in celebration. Tyson, a police officer, and Amber, the trainer at their farm, Valley View Acres, were attending the Illinois Hunter Jumper Association banquet with their 11-year-old daughter Alexis and various clients. They were at the peak of a year full of success until a single phone call rattled their lives.

Adam, 15, called his mother during the banquet and told her their 40-stall barn was on fire. Together with his 9-year-old brother Austin, Adam dialed 911 and did his best to free horses from the spreading flames. What was a thriving breeding, boarding, lesson and show facility just hours before lost 32 horses that night. Eighteen of those that perished were part of Amber's personal string and lesson program. Only five boarder horses were rescued from the blaze.



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*Alexis Bauman shows off the first ribbons she won on the Winter Equestrian Festival circuit.*



Alexis Bauman, left, met her show jumping idol Beezie Madden and worked with trainer Charlie Moorcroft during her family's "Making A Dream" trip to Florida.



While one phone call brought the family's world crashing down, another call a few weeks later started to rebuild it.

Lynn Jayne, a fellow Illinois resident and president of the USHJA Foundation, reached out to Amber with news that the programs within the Foundation might be able to help her and her family. The USHJA Foundation is the charitable arm of the United States Hunter Jumper Association, with a vision that embraces, supports and protects the people and horses who give their hearts to the Hunter/Jumper sport. In part, it fulfills this vision by assisting USHJA members facing adversity through exceptional experiences.

Jayne's call was the first time Amber heard of the "Making A Dream" Grant. The grants are custom-designed, depending upon the specific interests of the recipient. After an outpouring of written and verbal support from the USHJA community, including the likes of "Making A Dream" Task Force Chair Charlie Moorcroft, Co-Chair Louise Serio, and competition managers Nicole and Patrick Boyle, Jayne called a second time with good news.

The USHJA Foundation awarded the family a trip to Wellington, Florida, where Alexis trained with Moorcroft for two weeks at the Winter Equestrian Festival. The USHJA Foundation, along with sponsors who provided clothing, tack and other items to complete the dream, facilitated the opportunity.

"It was a 'pinch me' kind of moment," said Amber in reaction to the call. "We don't have a 'normal' anymore. Everything is still a blur, but this was a step toward getting some semblance of a life back."

Since 2011, the "Making A Dream" Grant Program has helped five other riders achieve their dreams in the face of unpredicted challenges. Alexis Bauman was the sixth recipient.

"I think when you're in that situation you don't necessarily know what you need, and we felt this would be a wonderful way to get them away from the tragedy and see a piece of happiness," said Jayne. "You can never give back too much, and this sport has been so good to us. We just want to give a piece of that back."

During Week 11 of the Wellington, Florida, circuit, Alexis rode Moorcroft's Matilda and her own Two For The Bunny, winning her first WEF ribbons. She also piloted Party Till Dawn—donated by the Sweetnams at Sweet Oak Farm—during Week 12. She garnered ribbons on all three ponies.

"It constantly reminds me how fortunate all of us are and how much we can give back," said Moorcroft. "We all should appre-

ciate what we have. That family has been so gracious, appreciative and wonderful to be around. Alexis is an amazing kid and quite a good rider. It's fun to help someone who wants it so badly."

For Alexis, the grant allowed her to meet equestrian idols like Lillie Keenan, Beezie Madden, Kent Farrington and Geoff Teall, while escaping an Illinois winter with her family. But she admitted the highlight was riding a pony of her own again after losing hers to the fire. Fellow equestrians June Ahern and Abbi Ferrigno donated tack, gear and the green pony "Bunny" to the Baumans after their tragedy. Amber said the pony was the motivation she needed to keep going.

"Something horrible happened to us, but on the flip side something so beautiful has surfaced," said Amber. "The love that has been shown to us and our customers from complete strangers has been amazing. A woman I met at an American Warm-



*Alexis Bauman's "Making A Dream" trip to Florida included gifts and support from numerous donors, including, from left, Charlie Moorcroft, Louise Serio, Catherine Holahan and Lynn Jayne.*

blood Society Inspection contacted me and wanted to give me her two horses because she couldn't imagine what life would be like without a horse. Despite being a competitive industry, these people do care about one another."

After feeling loss far beyond her years, Alexis hasn't abandoned an ounce of her passion for the sport. "I'm in fifth grade, and my favorite subject is science, but I'm going to be a rider when I grow up," she said.

Since that tragic November night, the Baumans—along with two barn cats who escaped the fire—have been living in their original home, which only suffered minor damage. But a constant reminder of their loss sits in ash just a short distance out their windows, the cause of which was never determined.

"It took me two months to take the pictures from the banquet off my camera," said Amber. "It's the last evidence I have of us before our lives were forever changed."

The Baumans, while mourning, are far from defeated. Amber, who did all the training and teaching at Valley View Acres, leased a local facility until she can move her business back home, which is exactly what she plans to do.

Amber said that deciding to rebuild wasn't easy, but she was inspired by support from the equestrian community and

## A Special Thank You to the Donors

- **Charles Owen**—provided a new helmet for Alexis
- **Equestrian Sport Productions**—awarded tickets for the family to watch the \$500,000 Rolex CSI5\* Grand Prix from The Suites at Palm Beach International Equestrian Center
- **The Gochman Family**—provided housing for the family
- **Catherine "Nips" Holahan at Ann K. Hubbard Tack Shop**—awarded two Essex riding shirts and a pair of Tailored Sportsman jodhpurs to Alexis
- **Lynn Jayne**—coordinated the grant
- **Charlie Moorcroft**—coordinated the grant, trained Alexis, introduced her to his other pony riders and boarded her pony
- **Palm Beach Equine Sports Complex**—provided a stall for Two For The Bunny
- **Cheryl Rubenstein**—donated a Beval Saddlery gift certificate
- **Aprile Runchie**—donated braiding services
- **Jennifer and Roger Smith**—provided housing for the family
- **Ali and Shane Sweetnam and Sweet Oak Farm**—provided Party Till Dawn for Alexis to show

beyond. The outpouring of donations and care her family received left Amber positive despite irreplaceable loss.

"Through this experience with the USHJA Foundation, we have learned to pay it forward because there's always someone who's in a worse position than you are," she said. "As bad as our situation is, my human family is safe. My boys were in a barn fire, and I could have lost them."

While the family enjoyed the Florida sunshine, work was already underway to

piece their world back together in Illinois.

"Demolition was 95 percent complete when we left. Blueprints are done, and trusses for the roof of the new barn have been ordered. If nothing else, at least I learned what a truss is through this experience," joked Amber. "You're in a tailspin when your whole life stops, but we have to rebuild—it's who we are."

For more information or to make a donation to the USHJA Foundation, please visit [www.ushjafoundation.org](http://www.ushjafoundation.org).