

SPIRIT OF CULTURE FOR WORK AND PLAY TAKES MAI-WEL STAFF MEMBER ABROAD

In the current culture of the working class citizen, it's not often you hear of a staff member in your office who embodies the very goals and vision of their employer – but things are very different at The Mai-Wel Group Telarah office.

For more than two years John Lechner, The Mai-Wel Group's Manager of Business Development and Philanthropy, has been working with the community to develop opportunities that advance the lives of people with a disability. But this time, John is about to realise a dream of his own.

In less than one week John will travel to the US capital of Florida, Tallahassee, to be one of five qualified Australian equestrian officials selected this year to take part in the five-year Global Education Programme for Eventing Officials, recently announced by Swiss based organisation, FEI – more commonly known as the International Equestrian Federation, and the major governing body for equestrian sport.

As part of this "once in a life time" opportunity, all accommodation, travel and living expenses will be paid by the programme during his two weeks abroad.

The multi million dollar project, completely funded by the International Equestrian Federation, is a valuable education initiative that will play a major role in expanding and raising the quality and experience of Eventing Officials worldwide.

Starting as a rider with a passion for the sport and a love of meeting new people, John exhausted his talent as a proficient rider, immediately setting his sights on the discipline role of officiating at local and regional events as a way of further involving himself in the sport and moving away from competition level participation.

John's determination and tireless efforts to reach his goals in this sport finally paid off when a last minute application to the review board for selection was successful.

With his bags packed, John will farewell his Mai-Wel colleagues and travel over 16,000 kilometres to officiate at the first 2010 HSBC Eventing World Cup Qualifier in Florida.

During his travels he will visit the home of horse racing, Lexington Kentucky, where the World Equestrian Games will take place in September this year for eight equestrian sports, including Eventing.

"To be part of the selected few who will represent Australia overseas is a fantastic opportunity," says John.

"Only 50 opportunities for the programme were offered for world wide officials to gain more overseas experience, which is vital towards ensuring the success of the sport in our own country. Education is the key in our sport."

"The mission for this education programme is to ultimately provide training to the sports support network, such as judges and officials. With only 20 qualified officials spread across Australia who will one day reach the compulsory retirement age of 70, this programme will ensure the future of the sport remains buoyant in Australian sporting circles," he said.

As part of the strategic plan of Discipline Development through Education in the Next Decade, the programme is designed to make a significant contribution to the education of officials world-wide within the first five-year period. The project was launched as a pilot scheme in 2009 but is now fully operational and will run through to the end of 2013. At the end of the five-year term, education of Eventing Officials will continue under the FEI's regular programmes.

John Lechner is available for interview upon request, prior to his departure on 26/02/2010

**Please direct all media enquiries and interview requests to Eclipse Media, Events & PR on 4961 3200
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