

About The Cover

Cover Photo By Craig Koshyk



German Longhaired Pointer Club Of North America

30 Years of Dedication By Jeff Obrecht Cheyenne, Wyoming

In 1990, five savvy hunters were convinced they'd found the dog breed they wanted to hunt behind for all their field days. So they met 30 years ago this June and the German Longhaired Pointer Club of North America was born.

The No. 1 thing that brought them together that evening in Yakima, Washington: ensuring well-bred longhair pups would be available in the future. That still is, and hopefully always will be, the foremost goal of the club, and the North American Versatile Hunting Dog Association has been a key partner in that endeavor.

Today, four out of five of those founders are not only still members – they are still hunting with longhairs. One is Del Peterson, who was the first in the group – and likely the first in western North America – to own one of the setter-looking dogs.

Like most of the longhaired pointing breeds, the German longhaired pointer descended from the pointing spaniel, and its closest relative is the Large Munsterlander. The longhair is known for its ability to switch

from a calm family member to a fiery, passionate hunter afield.

“We had seen a few bird dog breeds become so popular that breeding got a little out of control, and finding well-bred pups became a challenge,” Peterson says. “We wanted to make sure the focus for breeding our longhairs would always be ‘quality over quantity’ of proven hunting stock, and we needed to establish a core of dedicated hunters to carry that out.

“With serious hunters as the cornerstone of membership and the primary focus of maintaining good hunting dogs, I hoped to avoid the elitism, infighting and self-promotion I’d seen in some other clubs.”

Potential breeding dogs would have to show well in NAVHDA Natural Ability, ensure hips were sound via an x-ray, pass an independent confirmation evaluation, and most importantly prove themselves in the field.

“That formula has worked for us through the years,” says Peterson, a retired Washington Fish and Game habitat manager and former NAVHDA judge. “The club



has had to ‘roll with some punches’ along the trail, but the end result is we’ve got darn good hunting dogs.”

Truthfully, you could say the history of the club reaches back to when Peterson got his first longhair in 1974. “The main reason the breed caught my eye was their more cold-water tolerant coat,” says Peterson, who previously raised and hunted German shorthairs. “I’d been looking for a versatile breed that could better handle late-season duck hunting conditions found in the Pacific Northwest.”

Peterson found a longhair breeder in Ontario, chose a female pup with Dutch bloodlines and the longhair relationship with NAVHDA quickly ensued. A little more than a year later Kyra earned a Prize II in Natural Ability in October 1975. “That was real satisfying having my first dog of a new breed, that judges and others in attendance had never seen before, do well,” says Peterson, who first joined NAVHDA in 1969. “Plus, legendary NAVHDA founder and ‘Green Book’ author Bodo Winterhelt judged that test, and we continued being friends until he passed away last year.”

The following April, Kyra became the first longhair to earn a Prize I in the Utility Test in NAVHDA history. To continue building on this fledgling longhair foundation,

Peterson traveled to Czechoslovakia in the fall of 1976 to meet breed representatives and bring a male puppy back to Washington. Next, another Czech breeder shipped Peterson a female puppy the following spring. This pair of distantly-related dogs would test well and in 1978 produce Peterson’s first longhair litter – and likely the first in the western United States. You could say the longhair club unofficially started with those puppies joining their hunter-owners, Peterson offering training help, encouraging buyers to test with NAVHDA and keep in touch.

Peterson’s Czech trip would begin a substantive old-world influence for the North American longhair club. “This was a breed that was really very rare on this continent, so that required many more dogs to be imported if we were going to have our own breeding stock,” Peterson says.

More European trips would ensue over upcoming years – Holland, Germany (three visits), Denmark, Poland, and Czechoslovakia again– to build relationships with longhair reps, study training programs, hunt a little and select puppies. In addition to overseeing the club’s breeding and placing North American-whelped dogs, Peterson has imported “around 25” longhair puppies



from Europe for North American hunters. Returning the favor, he's hosted and guided "at least a dozen" European longhair folks, including the Swedish club president and her daughter. Peterson's international interactions have helped him hone his high school and college German classes into fluency, and he speaks enough Danish to successfully have a longhair conversation with a non-English speaking Dane.

The international contribution doesn't stop there. With Janet Vorenkamp's first longhair 23 years ago being of active Dutch descent and keen hunting instinct, her interest in the breed and Dutch system was piqued, so she traveled to Holland to learn more. The Yakima resident, and current club membership coordinator, connected well with Dutch officials, reflected by eight more trips to Holland. The latest was the Nederlandse Vereniging Langhaar's 100th Anniversary celebration last September, which was by invitation only.

Peterson reflects that the North American club has tried other testing systems and registries over the years, and the experiences always taught the club that NAVHDA was the best fit. After careful evaluation by the longhair board, the club has accepted test results from dogs in other registries into the breeding program.

In its early years, that included allowing testing with the Wirehaired Pointing Griffon Club of North America in addition to NAVHDA and the longhair club even hired NAVHDA judges to conduct its own test once in the mid-1990s. "But with the difficult logistics of many members traveling long distances across the continent to one location, and experiencing the extensive labor required to conduct a test, it wasn't a good idea for us," Peterson says.

In addition to Peterson at the inaugural meeting was insurance agent Milt Cobb, Dr. Bill Von Stubbe, an oncologist and airline pilot Bill Harris. All are retired from those professions now – but not from the avocation and passion of hunting behind their longhairs.

Many hunters have contributed to the club the past three decades, and Peterson specifically cites Bill and Donna Wichers. The Wichers became members in 1991 with the purchase of their first longhair and have in turn contributed their own litter, traveled to Germany to network with longhair officials and observe a breed show and hosted a 2008 club meeting and breed show in Casper, Wyoming that also included Norway's longhair president in attendance. The final day of the meeting the Wichers guided participants sage grouse hunting. Bill, a retired

Wyoming Game and Fish Department fish biologist/deputy director, also served several years as the club's vice president, and currently hunts over a three-year-old female imported from Norway.

If asked for advice for breed club longevity, Peterson encourages puppy production be in the hands of experienced hunters, responding to inquiries by phone and keeping bureaucracy to a minimum.

"The best breeders are experienced hunters namely because they recognize the pups need field and marsh introductions, as well as some loud noise experience, and along the way the pups receive some healthy socialization," says Peterson, whose Kennel Hubertus has produced a dozen longhair litters over the years.

But he also recognizes that not all members have the time, temperament or facilities to raise a litter, so some excellent dogs unfortunately end up not contributing to the gene pool.

Peterson believes in answering emails by phone to make more of a "human connection and get a better feel for the qualifications of potential puppy buyers."



"And, a needlessly complicated set of by-laws can be just plain cumbersome, and I've found a lean, streamlined board helps make things more efficient and results in fewer management distractions and more time to focus on what really matters: getting dogs afield," he adds.

The club's board consists of only three members who wear multiple hats, but their combined 90-plus years of longhair experience helps them accomplish all the administration.

Getting dogs afield included television cameras in 2007. That November a syndicated outdoor show filmed a show on Peterson's longhairs and the club for a California quail and chukar hunting 2008 episode.

He appreciates the solid baseline NAVHDA has provided the club for evaluation but has always recognized the human frailties in the testing equation. "Some owners have the focus, experience and opportunity to train for the natural ability, while others don't," Peterson says. "So, some well-bred dogs who have the potential to score well -- just don't."

"Obviously we like our breed or we wouldn't have gone down this road so far," Peterson says. "But, there're good dogs in all versatile breeds – when the breeding is judicious. And that's the exact premise that started this club three decades ago." 🐾

