

An Open Letter to Walt Taylor concerning farrier licensing, professionalism, and the direction of the AFA from Henry Heymering



Far left: Henry Heymering; Near left: Walt Taylor, Bob Earl and Craig Trnka, AFA officers (Treasurer David Edens must have ducked.) From the Hoofcare & Lameness Journal archives.

Editor's note: Walt Taylor is secretary of the American Farrier's Association and, in fact, the founder of the AFA. After leaving AFA office in the 1980s, he concentrated his efforts on the World Farriers Association (which he also founded) and taught farriery in impoverished countries through a program called "Working Together for Equines", with his Scottish veterinarian wife, Dr Tina McGregor, under the auspices of the International League for the Protection of Horses. He returned to AFA office in 2002. He was the chair of the AFA's 2004-2005 special task force on farrier education/regulation.

Henry Heymering is a longtime AFA member and respected farrier author and opinion leader. He founded the American Farriers Journal in the 1970s; it soon became the official journal and voice of the AFA. Henry sold the AFJ in 1980, but stayed on for five or so years as executive editor. The AFA/AFJ relationship continued until soon after the election of Craig Trnka as AFA president. Henry went on to found the Guild of Professional Farriers, an organization for farriers with journeyman level achievements and proof of years of farrier experience; he is still the president of that organization.

August 21, 2005

Dear Walt,

Your goal to **"Establish farriery as a PROFESSION that can take place alongside every other profession"** as expressed in your Executive Committee Discussion Guide, is a very laudable goal, and one I agree with wholeheartedly. However, you and the Executive Committee have made some serious mistakes in your approach to that goal.

Your suggestion that a task force work in secret to investigate licensing was neither professional nor conducive to support from the members. Furthermore, you specifically suggested concealing the task force from two of the most professional farriers in the US – the only two who have passed the FWCF, the highest professional farriery standards in the world – Doug Butler and Chris Gregory. It was not right of you to suggest that, and it was not right for the Executive Committee and Task Force to exclude them

You suggested that farriers to be grandfathered in for the proposed licensing must meet the following baseline requirements: at least AFA Certified Farriers; have been practicing several years; and that farriery is their primary income. While these are reasonable baseline requirements for professional farriers, a large percentage (a majority?) of current AFA members do not meet these criteria. Members cannot be expected to support criteria that would exclude themselves.

You suggested that the way for farriers to be respected as professionals is for farriers to be licensed. Professions require high entrance standards. Professions require professional conduct. Professions require autonomy – not oversight by others. Professions do not necessarily require licensing. Computer network engineers are not licensed yet they are very highly regarded professionals. Hairdressers are licensed but they do not seem to have any level of respect due to their being licensed. Drivers are licensed, and get no respect or professionalism from the license. Licensing does not equal professionalism and respect. Professionalism and respect come from high standards – not from licensing

To firmly reestablish farriery as a profession there are several steps that will be far more effective than licensing, and in any case must be done to maintain professional status with or without licensing:

- 1) **Establish professional standards for membership in the AFA.** The baseline requirements you list are reasonable requirements. Grandfather in all current members and then require that all future members meet the new baseline criteria.
- 2) **Stop promoting farrier contests.** Veterinarians do not have spaying contests. Physicians do not have appendectomy contests. Dentists do not have cavity-filling contests. CPAs do not have accounting contests. Electricians do not have wiring contests. Professionals do not have contests. Tradesmen do not have contests. Sportsmen have contests – rodeo, fishing, golf, etc. Are we a sport or a profession? Let's portray a clear image to the world that we are a profession. Let's act like professionals – not sportsmen.
- 3) **Fight the encroachment on our profession by others – especially the veterinarians.** No group can claim to be a profession if it is required to work under the supervision and direction of another group. For more than a thousand years farriers have worked autonomously. In just the last ten years or so the veterinary practice acts of many states have been written to appear to require veterinary control of farriery. We cannot exist as a profession in these circumstances. We must clarify the laws in each state so that farriery continues to exist as an autonomous profession.

We agree on the goal of professionalism. Now let's take the steps necessary to be the professionals we should be – without government interference.

Respectfully yours,

Henry Heymering, AFA #222