

# Chronicle Tested, Chronicle Approved

BY CAMILLE CORUM  
PHOTO COURTESY OF LIBBY HENDERSON



**Libby Henderson started making saddle soap as a hobby, but encouragement and advice from the *Chronicle* Forums helped her form a small business.**

O'Connor's mount Upstage or "Woody," and his hard-working staff. She included a container of her homemade saddle soap.

A few months later, O'Connor's groom, Max Corcoran, asked for more soap. "Could this be more than a hobby?" Henderson wondered.

"I didn't want to turn something I do for fun into work," Henderson remembered thinking after a friend encouraged her to sell her soap. But after a little push from her top eventer pals, she decided to

look into creating a small business. That's when she turned to a place and people she knew well—the *Chronicle* Forums.

Henderson said she owes the launch of her soap to the Forums. "Everyone that I've met that has been connected to [Higher Standards Custom Leather Care], I've met through the *Chronicle*," she said. "It's one of those things where you reach a lot more people than you think you do. [The *Chronicle* Forums] have been the best crowd sourcing for developing a product that I've ever seen."

Forums members helped Henderson choose the name, decide on a label design, choose colors for the jars, and even fix small mechanical issues. So, she wasn't surprised when she started receiving requests for samples.

"I sent out about 30 free samples and only asked for a review," Henderson said. One recipient started a product review thread. That same thread grew and grew, spanning more than 37 pages, 750 posts and 24,000 views.

**L**ibby Henderson, a prosecuting attorney for the Board of Veterinary Medicine in Florida, jokes that if you look up "cottage industry" in the dictionary, you'll see her picture—and a bar of soap.

She recently launched a homemade saddle soap company, Higher Standards Custom Leather Care, but the story of her business venture began on the *Chronicle* Forums.

It began about 14 years ago, when Henderson, of Greensboro, Fla., came across a homemade saddle soap recipe on the Forums that piqued her interest. After some tinkering, she produced an improved recipe and called the product her own. She made the soap as Christmas gifts for horsey friends and didn't think much more about it.

Henderson, 45, events at the sub-beginner novice level and hopes to achieve beginner novice soon, but she is an avid follower of the upper levels of the sport. During the week of Rolex Kentucky in 2003, Henderson sent a care package to one of her most beloved event horses, Karen

"I didn't set out to use the *Chronicle* Forums for advertising, but I couldn't have found a better thinktank anywhere else," Henderson said.

Henderson makes and sells four saddle soap blends (containing glycerin, oils and essential oils) and one conditioning balm (composed of coco butter, beeswax and safflower oil) on her Etsy site, [etsy.com/shop/HigherStandardsFarm](https://www.etsy.com/shop/HigherStandardsFarm). The soaps are named after horses that are no longer competing but are very special to her: Fox's Vanilla Lavender, Ben's Rosemary Mint and Buzz's Citrus Ginger. In the past, she's done a special edition scent for building confidence and a calming balm by request.

In mid-July, Henderson sent her first wholesale order to the Galloping Grape in Warrenton, Va. Although she'd love to outsource to more tack shops, she isn't sure a bigger business is the best move just yet.

"At this point I don't want to move it out of my kitchen," Henderson said. "I love that I can run a batch of soap while I'm loading the dishwasher."

Last summer, after enjoying an online friendship for many years, Henderson connected with fellow horsewoman Amanda Smith in real life, and Smith became the marketing and social media coordinator for Higher Standards Custom Leather Care.

"We, as horse owners, are the market for this product, and we know what we like and what we don't like," Smith said. "The *Chronicle* has such clout behind it as a valuable resource full of knowledge and great content."

The soap's pleasant scent combined with its reliable cleaning ability has created a loyal fan base.

"People act like my soap is going to do their taxes or clean their house," Henderson said. "I'm not making any claims that my soap will do anything other than clean your tack!" 🐾