The day is clear, and the sun shines with resolve, working to drain the ground of moisture. Just two days prior, on the first day of spring, an uninvited snowstorm had erupted over the Eastern Shore of Maryland, alarming the staff of Washington College in the final hours before their first foxchase, a fundraiser their interim president, Jack “Jay” Griswold, contrived to benefit the college’s equestrian club.

Partnering with Ed Fry and Dr. Harry Sears, Griswold and his staff had worked to create an event that would call riders’ attention from across the state and put the equestrian club on the map. And on March 22, at Chino Farms, outside Chestertown, Md., they did just that.

Jack “Jay” Griswold, contrived to benefit the college’s equestrian club. Partnering with Ed Fry and Dr. Harry Sears, Griswold and his staff had worked to create an event that would call riders’ attention from across the state and put the equestrian club on the map. And on March 22, at Chino Farms, outside Chestertown, Md., they did just that.

As guests arrive, exclaiming in joy at the sight of old friends, the hounds b ay and whine in the background. Griswold guides his horse off the trailer. The attractive bay has kind eyes and a solid, sturdy build.

“He’s from Ireland,” says Griswold. “He’s a very good hunter, particularly for an old man.”

Griswold slides the bridle over Frasier’s face, then pats him. Members of the Green Spring Valley Hounds and Wicomico Hunt Club call out their halloos to Griswold as he reaches for his saddle.

“There used to be hunting all around here, and there still is to a degree, but it’s not like it used to be,” he says in his low, distinctive drawl. “Hunting, steeplechasing, eventing, and, well, it’s different from the hunt seat, but it all revolves around the horse. Do...
you realize there are more horses per capita in Maryland than there are anywhere in the world? Except for Sweden. I’m on the Maryland Horse Industry Board, and they realize how important horses are economically to the state. People only think about the flat racing, but it’s such a tiny part of the horse world. Recreational riding and hunting are a big deal.”

Several members of the equestrian team crowd around Griswold as he tacks up his horse. He doesn’t seem the president of a college at this moment—he seems more a father figure—and they swarm him in adoration.

**The Horse Bug**

Griswold first climbed onto a horse when he was 4. Growing up in Monkton, Md., on his family’s Fancy Hill Farm, horses were as much a norm to his childhood as a bike would be to any other child.

“I just grew up with it. That was what you did. You see, in those days, there were no soccer or lacrosse leagues. You went to school during the week; you went foxhunting on Saturday and to church on Sunday. And the colder and more miserable out it was, the more you were supposed to like it. It’s what I knew,” he said.

In addition to Fancy Hill, Griswold’s parents owned a property near Tipperary, Ireland, where the family also foxhunted.

Although Griswold played football and lacrosse through high school, riding and racing were his true passions.

“All our heroes were amateur and professional steeplechase riders. Our calendars used to start with the Maryland Hunt Cup and worked backwards,” he said. “We all aspired when we were kids to ride in the Maryland Hunt Cup. We’d take pieces of tack from Mikey Smithwick. They were rock stars, and we wanted to be just like them.”

Griswold started his first job at age 14, working for none other than D. Michael and A. Patrick Smithwick, the famous duo of steeplechasing, where he earned his first $90.

“I remember it like it was yesterday. And I took [my pay] to the Timonium race track,” he pauses for effect, “and bet with it.”

The corner of his mouth is upturned, and I laugh at him. “I bet on a horse, and it won. It paid 10 to 1, I believe.”

Griswold would wake up at 3 a.m. to ride his bicycle to work, meet Paddy Smithwick, and they would drive to the Delaware Park.

“One morning, long before Interstate 95, we were right at Fair Hill, and Paddy says, ‘I am so tired, I can’t drive another step.’ Not a problem. Age 14, I get behind the wheel; he had a ’57 Ford convertible. It was the coolest car I have ever seen, and I drive into Delaware Park, and he gave me one of his Pall Mall cigarettes. I mean you talk about cool,” he says, grinning, his gaze directed over me as he recollects the memory. “Yeah, the older you get, the more you remember what was fun back in the old days.”

Abruptly he turns to me and asks, “Have you read any of Patrick Smithwick’s books?”

I reply that I haven’t. Griswold makes a long face, and I feel a pang of regret that my answer didn’t earn me the approving nod I’d seen so many others bask in.

“He’s Paddy’s son. He’s written some pretty interesting books about his father. One is called Racing My Father. He tells all about the race track in those days.”

I was realizing the effect Griswold has on people: an urgent resolve to impress him. This wouldn’t be the last time he’d turn the conversation away from himself.

Racing, with particular favor toward the Maryland Hunt Cup, was a family tradition for the Griswolds.

“My Dad rode in the Maryland Hunt Cup, uncles, grandfathers, brothers. My son, Jason, rode in it four times. None of us have ever won it—we’ve probably run in it a grand total of 40 some times—but we never won it.”

Although Jay’s father, Benjamin H. Griswold III and Jay’s older...
brother, B.H. Griswold IV, rode in the Hunt Cup five times, Jay surpassed all previous family records with 16 rides in the illustrious event. Although he can boast four seconds and four thirds in this grueling race, Jay was adamant his career can't hold a candle to others.

He initially eluded conversation about his first race by describing the success of his greatest comrade, Louis “Paddy” Neilson III, during Neilson’s first year of racing. “My greatest buddy in the world. He won both races at the Grand National [Md.] on his 16th birthday!” he says.

“Jay is my oldest friend; we’ve known each other since we were 5 or 6 years old,” Neilson says. “We hunted together, raced together, and we roomed together all the way thru Gilman [Md.] and Princeton [N.J.]. He is very smart, very determined and technically very sound. He’s a very good rider.”

At age 17, Jay jockeyed his first race, riding against his idol and mentor, Mikey Smithwick.

“I fell in a heap,” he says matter-of-factly. “But Mikey coached me all the way around and would talk during the race, wondering how things were going.”

At home, Jay’s father coached him and the horses he rode.

“My racing career is not that exciting,” he says hesitantly. He glances at the group who now sits around him.

“What’s your record?” Jonnie Jenkins, a staff member of the college’s Sports Performance Program, asks, grinning at Jay. He raises his eyebrows.

“You want to do this? This is going to print you know!” Jay says with a laugh.

“Nobody else will ever hold this record,” he begins. “I rode in the Maryland Hunt Cup 16 times and never won it. I think I was second more than anyone in history. There are others who have ridden in the Cup 20-some times—so don’t hold me to that. “But I am the first person to be beaten by a girl,” he pauses to measure our reaction.

We laugh at his ability to poke fun at himself. We laugh because his timing is perfect and his wit impeccable. “Kathy Kusner,” he continues. “She broke the glass ceiling, you know. She sued to ride. Then Joy Slater won it and beat me in 1980.”

In 1982, Jay had a near miss at victory, coming in second only by a nose. The photo finish still haunts him. “Mr. Ohrstrom, who used to own the Chronicle, in 1982 he had a very good horse named Appolinax, lovely gray horse,” Jay says, staring past me, transitioning into another era. “He was ridden by John Coles, who’s now the master down [with Orange County Hounds] in Virginia, and John and I are good pals; we used to duke it out on the race course. Well, Mr. Ohrstrom probably won every race in the world—he was a big deal in France, you know, and all over the place, Virginia Gold Cup, etc., but hadn’t won the Maryland Hunt Cup. And Appolinax was the horse he was apt to win it with. In 1982 I was beating that horse at the last fence, with Turney McKnight [on Tong] about 20 lengths back. The crowds were so large in those days, you couldn’t hear anything. I had no idea that this other horse was coming, like a house of fire, behind me, and he nips me at the wire.

Jay Griswold grew up foxhunting and has enjoyed it ever since, so he wanted to expose Washington College riders to the fun of it. “You went to school during the week; you went foxhunting on Saturday and to church on Sunday,” he said of his childhood.
“By this far,” he demonstrated with his thumb and pointer finger, the inches that he was beaten by. “It was devastating.”

Jay pauses and turns his gaze to the floor, no doubt reflecting on the moment that would have eradicated the century-old Griswold Hunt Cup curse. He then looks up quickly and says, “But we are still friends. When you ride, everyone is friends. It was great fun.”

Charlie Fenwick Jr. can attest to that. He recalls the competitive edge on the track, with the occasional profanity shouted in between fences, but he also recalls the amity between them.

“Griswold is the godfather of my son. We’ve known each other for a long time,” he says. “We had the kind of fun that neither of us will ever forget. We both have the same love of the sport. From my perspective as an amateur steeplechase jockey, all the fun I had was in large measure due to enjoying it with Jay Griswold.”

Fenwick adds, laughing, “He was legendary for his chicanery around the scales when he was a jockey. The clerk of the scale was his greatest enemy. But he brought tremendous enthusiasm to racing. He loved his horses, and he took good care of them.”

Jay admits to a fondness for small, bay horses. Hello Hal, whom Jay initially bought as a hunter and ended up winning the 100th Maryland Hunt Cup in 1996 with rider Billy Meister, fit the criteria perfectly.

“He just died last winter, at the age of 28, I believe,” says Jay. “He was a great character. Tiny little horse, 15.2, but he would jump the moon. Wonderful little competitor, smart as a whip. See, for a Hunt Cup horse, you need a horse that is both very smart and very brave. The brave ones typically are not smart, and the smart ones are typically not brave. So it takes a unique combination. And they have to be great athletes. And he was all that.”

Jay couldn’t recall how many falls or broken bones he’d suffered over the years. However, the last tumble was hard to beat and hard to forget. At age 49, Jay had a debilitating fall, where he described his shoulder as hanging down by his hip. “So that was that,” he said of his racing career.

A Jack Of All Trades

According to family tradition, Jay was destined to become a brilliant businessman. His father, a partner in the investment firm Alex Brown & Sons, was instrumental in ensuring the company’s survival of the Depression and its growth afterward, according to The Baltimore Sun.

Jay is a partner at Black Oak Associates and a director of Alex Brown Realty Inc. He is a former chairman of Alex Brown Realty Advisors, former director at Brown Investment Advisory, a former president of the Maryland Historical Society, a former board member of the Living Classrooms Foundation, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and Washington College, serving as chair for six years. He accepted the position of interim president at Washington College in

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Jay Griswold is a wonderful citizen,” says Fenwick. “The work he’s done with the Maryland Historical Society and Washington College—he’s not a public servant; he’s a private servant. He’s a citizen who is making a contribution to the state, and I think that is one of the highest callings that anybody can have. I am a great admirer of all of the work he’s done. He is a very fine human being. He is of the highest integrity, and there is a humility about him that is very attractive.”

A family man as well as a businessman, Jay and his wife, Toni, have two sons, Jason and Alex, and a daughter, Sarah. He has six grandchildren but only one has expressed interest in horses thus far. Nevertheless, this does provide hope that the Griswold fervor for the Hunt Cup will not perish.

Jay’s focus on Washington College began with his daughter’s enrollment but soon turned to pure passion for the institution.

“I have always felt this place can be a factor in this world. We are in the building mode. We are ‘in the hunt!’ If others are contracting, we are expanding. For our demographic and the type of person who would come here, they would also cross app, see, I have all the lingo,” he says with a grin. “They’d cross app with Sweet Briar [Va.] and those kinds of places. I think it’s good to get the word out there that if you want to ride and focus on education, come to Washington College.”

Upon his arrival as interim president, Jay was anxious to take their riding program to the next level. The equestrian program has 31 members in the club and 21 riders on the Intercollegiate Horse Shows Association hunt seat team, with eight riders attending regionals this season.

Hanna Myrdahl, a sophomore, has attended nationals two years running, last year finishing 12th out of 38 riders and this year finishing 10th. “I don’t think the college has a grasp of just how big the equestrian world is,” Myrdahl says. “But Mr. Griswold does.”

“I have a great idea! It’s premature,” he adds as he glances at the athletic assistant and the admissions director. Both staff members have a knowing look on their faces. They’ve heard this idea before. “I think eventually we oughta have our own facility here, near campus, like everybody else does. And try not to go out of business in the process. Try not to overspend. I think as we get more visible, we’ll gain information on what we need to do.”

His arms are crossed now. He frowns slightly.

“We don’t own any horses at this time. I think, and I have a simple way of thinking, if we get the demand, we are going to have to do that. So that is an aspiration,” he says.

“Young people just need to be exposed to riding, and some people will grab it. It’s something I think the high schools and colleges ought to pursue because it’s...” he pauses and smiles. “It’s fun.”

His arms are no longer crossed; describing his ambition for the college and its riding program has relaxed his shoulders again. It is only the murmur of the word “insurance” from Jenkins that squares his shoulders again.

“Money. Finances. If you want to
build your own facility, it’s expensive,” Jay says. “Let’s face it: Horses are dangerous. They can hurt you. So the insurance requirements are significant. And a society that wants everyone to live in a bubble, in a cocoon, and be totally safe all the time—it’s perfectly ridiculous.”

But Jay’s leadership has had an effect on more than just the equestrian team. Across the entire school, he’s spurred his staff to new levels of inspiration. “Jay has a way to get people to open up and connect with them. He is detail oriented without you thinking that he’s detail oriented,” says Satyajit Dattagupta, vice president of enrollment management. “So you don’t know. But if you mention your dog’s name that one time, he’ll remember. When you see Jay, who is doing this for the love of the college, leaving home at 6 in the morning, showing up for a 7:30 meeting, it’s very easy for me and my team to come into work because you have a leader for whom this place is so much more than just a college. It’s a community that he wants to see thrive, and so it’s very easy to follow a leader like that. “Because transitions can be very hard,” Dattagupta added. “You’ve lost a leader, and there are a lot of nerves while a new leader is coming in. And

what Jay has done, what he’s really taken care of, is causing people, instead of being nervous, they are excited. Which is very atypical during transitions. He doesn’t speak about himself much, but it’s purely his leadership style that has allowed the college to position itself for success.”

Despite working at an institution that embraces technology for communication, advertisement and advancement, Jay admits he doesn’t have a Facebook page and only learned to text six months ago. I didn’t even ask him about tweeting.

“In this world of email, Jay will show up at your office and talk to you there,” Dattagupta adds. “Talking to us is his preferred method of communication. That’s been such an interesting change for us.”

“But that’s how I grew up,” Jay protests. “I learned that from my father. You don’t summon people to your office; you go see them in their office. It’s a smart thing to do. Smart and brave!”

His Current Agenda
Describing him as zealous is an understatement. Trying to lure him away from his Washington College enthusiasm to focus on himself as a topic is like trying to call a hound off a moving scent.

At the Chino Farms fundraiser, Jay walks with purpose to the podium to greet the swarm of scarlet jackets, canary vests and black calfskin boots.

“She didn’t even know the college had an equestrian club. Well, I’m here to tell you they have a very vibrant one,” he says.

“In case you don’t know, I always have an agenda, and the agenda is to promote the equestrian team at Washington College and to promote Washington College generally,” he adds. His speech continues, full of witticisms that create waves of laughter and repartee from the crowd.

“I can’t imagine they are going to find anyone as good as him,” Nielson murmurs. “He has the wisdom to solve anything. And he’s just a very nice guy. I have enormous respect for him. He’s been there for me through thick and thin. He is loyal and steadfast. Which is no doubt why the college wants him here.”

Jay Griswold says he’s the only rider to have ridden in the Maryland Hunt Cup 16 times without winning. Here he competes in 1973 aboard Handsome Daddy (far right), with Evening Mail (far left, Frank Chapot) and Early Earner (J.W.Y. “Duck” Martin). DOUGLAS LEES PHOTO