

Victoria Therapeutic Riding Association 2025 Annual General Meeting

The Nominations Committee recommends the following candidates be elected for 2-year terms (2025-27). Candidates were selected after reviewing the skill set of the current board and considering future capacity requirements to implement the 2025-30 Strategic Plan.

Deborah Gaul (Director & serves on the Risk Committee)

(appointed per VTRA Bylaw 6.16 to complete the term of a director who resigned in 2024; standing for election as the original director term has expired (per VTRA Bylaw 6.17))

Deborah started her involvement with VTRA eleven years ago as the parent of a 5 year old neurodivergent boy that very quickly found his love and passion for horses through the Adaptive Riding program. Now at the age of 16 years, he attends as many sessions and camps as he can throughout the year. Deborah and her family have seen first hand not only the joyful exuberance Michael experiences but also the physical therapeutic benefits he receives from his riding programs. So when the opportunity to volunteer on the Board came available, it was an obvious “Yes” to be able to give back to the program that has provided so much for her son. Deborah’s professional career is a bit unique in that she has gone back and forth between OR Nursing and Law. She received her B. Sc. N in 1987 from the University of Alberta and her Law degree from University of British Columbia in 1992. While practicing Medical law for 10 years, she focussed predominantly on Risk Management issues as they related to BC hospitals, health authorities and their employees. Currently, Deborah is back working casual in the operating room, exclusively in ophthalmology.

Deborah Donahue (Director & Treasurer)

(appointed per VTRA Bylaw 6.16 to complete the term of a director who resigned in 2024; standing for election as the original director term has expired (per VTRA Bylaw 6.17))

Deborah is the Finance Manager for Garden City Tree & Landscape LTD, a Landscaping company in Saanich, BC with integrity, core values and commitment to sustainability and nature. She has a solid career history of ensuring that organizations follow financial practices that comply with generally accepted accounting principles and has supported both for-profit and non-for-profit companies in the preparation of detailed financial reports covering all facets from budgetary performance to account reconciliation to modeling and forecasting. The VTRA is the 3rd Therapeutic Riding Association on the Island that Deborah has volunteered with. She began in her 20’s at the Association in the Comox Valley and continued with the Errington Therapeutic Riding Association when her family moved to Qualicum. Deborah started with the VTRA in 2024 as a side-walker and enjoys seeing first-hand the incredible impact and benefits that participation in therapeutic riding has with the smiles and growing confidence of the riders, she has been lucky enough to work with. Therapeutic riding is a huge asset to the community, and it is an honour to serve on the board.

Kate Carmichael (Director & chairs the Risk and HR Committees)

(appointed per VTRA Bylaw 6.16 to complete the term of a director who resigned in 2024; standing for election as the original director term has expired (per VTRA Bylaw 6.17)

Kate is a certified Insights Practitioner and Talent Management Practitioner with HR experience across large national organizations, and she currently leads HR for Rugby Canada. She began her career as a swim coach, co-developing a learn-to-swim program, which she is still involved in today. Her background in sport and people development eventually led her into HR, where she has built a career focused on supporting teams, volunteers, and communities through growth and change.

Kate has been riding her entire life and first discovered VTRA as a young rider, hoping even then to volunteer. When the opportunity finally arose in 2021 to join the HR Committee, she embraced it enthusiastically. Since then, her involvement has continued to expand—serving on the HR and Risk Committees, joining the Board of Directors, and volunteering as an exercise rider, where she especially enjoys her time with Karl, one of VTRA's iconic Fjords. Kate is passionate about accessible sport and values the impact VTRA has on participants, families, volunteers, and the broader community. Outside of work, she enjoys riding, swimming, and spending time with her young family. She is honoured to stand for re-election and continue contributing to VTRA's mission and positive momentum.

Maria Howard *(new candidate for director)*

Maria Howard is an experienced leader with a demonstrated record of advancing the non-profit sector in support of people in need. As a professional rehabilitation counsellor, she has spent her career working in government and social service/health organizations to support those who are living with vulnerabilities to live the life they choose and have the experiences they want. Maria holds an MBA in Leadership from the University of Athabasca, and an M.Ed. in Rehabilitation from the University of Washington. With decades of extensive business experience, she has held leadership positions in the public healthcare sector, as CEO of the Alzheimer Society of BC, as well as provincial and national governance roles. Currently, she is the CEO of Family Services of Greater Vancouver; a large lower mainland social service agency supporting children, youth and families in complex crisis situations. She also volunteers as a board member with Voices in Motion, an intergenerational choir for people living with dementia in Victoria, BC. Maria's passion for horses began in her childhood. She has spent many years riding and competing. Simply being in their presence and caring for them provided her with experiences and lessons of compassion, responsibility, self confidence, and resilience. In her personal life, Maria enjoys living and gardening in her home of North Saanich, travelling with her family, and spending time with her two best four legged friends!

Wendy Kotorynski *(new candidate for director)*

Wendy grew up on the Saanich Peninsula being very involved with horses and first volunteered briefly at VTRA as a teenager, ultimately donating a horse to the program. Wendy has worked and volunteered for over 30 years in the nonprofit sector as a Social Worker, Executive Director, Fundraiser and Nonprofit Organization Consultant. She has a Certificate in Nonprofit Management from the University of Illinois, Chicago, a Bachelor of Social Work degree from Dalhousie University, and Bachelors of Education and Arts degrees from University of Victoria. Wendy is passionate about the well-researched benefits of therapeutic connections between horses and humans and is delighted to be able to serve on the VTRA Board with such a committed group. In her spare time she is an avid gardener and photographer of night skies, coastal life and flowers.