

“One person can make a difference, and everyone should try.”

—John Fitzgerald Kennedy (1917–1963), 35th United States President (1961–1963)

Eyes—and Ears— on the Future

BY KAITLYN CHAMPAGNE

I am a busy ten-year-old with many interests outside of school. For example, I am in my sixth year of Junior Girl Scouts. I am also a Presidential Service Award recipient, and I am currently working to earn enough volunteer hours to get my Bronze Award. I absolutely love horseback riding, and I have won many Hunter Grand Champion blue ribbons in the equitation and pleasure classes.

A Businesswoman at Age Ten

I want to buy my own horse, so I also became an entrepreneur. I am CEO of Kaitlyn’s Tack & Treats, and I have been a wholesaler through Jeffers Equine, Pet and Livestock since 2018. I also offer a horse blanket laundering service, and I am in my second season of operating that business. My passion for horses began in the summer of 2015, when I was just five years old. I began working on a two-horse farm every morning for a year. My job was to feed, water and exercise the horses, as well as take them out to the pasture. I would say to my mom, “There isn’t a store for horses,” every day on our way home from the barn. In 2018, my mom and I did some research and found a company in Alabama that has a wholesale department with supplies for horses, and I launched my home-based Tack & Treats business.

Hearing Loss Hasn’t Slowed Me Down

I didn’t notice that I had hearing loss until I returned to school during the pandemic in September 2020. I came home one fall afternoon saying that I couldn’t hear my teacher. I had read lips for so long and relied on lipreading so much that it had become second nature. I have difficulties hearing when I take riding lessons, which is a huge safety concern. Just one missed direction can throw me off course or spook the horse. I could even miss a call from my instructor or judge.

Caring for my hearing is important, so I began going to an audiologist at the University of Connecticut Medical Center at the Hartford Hospital for Children

Kaitlyn riding Crystal from Claddagh Equestrian Center in Clinton, CT

every two months, and I am currently going through many hearing tests for assessment for a hearing aid. I am also undergoing a cognitive test at Yale New Haven Hospital and seeing my ear, nose and throat doctor regularly.



My Dream: A Helmet That Will Help Others

I had heard that young riders find it difficult to wear hearing aids with an ordinary equestrian helmet, and currently there are no helmets for riders who wear cochlear implants or hearing aids. Riders—especially those younger than 18 years of age—are jeopardized when they don’t have a properly fitting helmet when they ride in any discipline. (So many riders go without a helmet!) I know that safety is really important when I ride, so I am dedicated to making sure a helmet for those with hearing loss will hit the market. If such a helmet were already available, I have the experience to bring it to market to many therapeutic riding facilities, the Special Olympics and a lot of young, middle-aged and senior riders who have hearing loss.

In fact, since 2018, I have been saving money so I can help design and create a special equestrian helmet for riders with hearing loss that I plan to patent one day. To fund this project, I sell merchandise and home-baked horse treats at horse shows in Connecticut. One of my latest fundraising items is a keychain that has a beautifully colored tassel, my logo and the name of the helmet I would love to see available one day. Please visit my Facebook page: facebook.com/kaitlynstreats to follow my journey for up-to-date information. **HL**

Kaitlyn lives in Connecticut. She is 10 years old and has hearing loss. She lives with her mom, dad and one-year-old sister. She also has a stepbrother who is 18 and a 16-year-old stepsister; they live in South Carolina. Her family loves to go to Six Flags on school breaks and during the summer. She enjoys going to the beach and traveling to see her friend in North Carolina during the summer, too. She also looks forward to going to Girl Scouts resident camp where she enjoys meeting new friends and riding horses.