The Middleburg Page

August 5, 2026 .. Reach out to Editor@TheMiddleburgPage.com

Gold Cup Friends Pass the Reins

Fall Race Tickets On Sale

By Leland Schwartz
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Old and dear friends Will Allison and Al Griffin are passing Gold Cup's Chairmanship, from what they describe as something very much like from the mentor to the student; from the father to the son.

"Will has been so many things to so many people," Al says. "Part big brother, part uncle, part confidant, part friends, you know, all of those things he's been to, not just me, but a lot of people who have looked to Will to see how to do things."

How was always with "a combination of strength and kindness" Al says. "It is really kind of a roadmap, you know, on how to do things when you watched Will."

Watching and following Will started for Al in 1982, and crystallized years later when he saw Will inaugurated as the president of the Virginia Dental Association, where Al, also a dentist and now an adjunct faculty member at the Harvard School Of Dental Medicine, was a member.

Later, Al joined Will in the Warrenton Hunt and "I followed him forever in the hunt field and then as Master of the Warrenton Hunt where his leadership is what made the Hunt work."

And then "the same thing happened with Gold Cup," Al remembers, thinking back to 1998. "Basically, he brought me in at Gold Cup and I watched him lead."

LELAND SCHWARTZ

GOLD CUP

So, what will it mean for the Gold Cup races that Al Griffin is taking over as Chairman and Will Allison is becoming Chairman Emeritus?

"We are simply going to continue what Will has been driving for a long time," the new Chairman said," which is an opportunity to provide the best racing possible in a way that benefits the local community as well."

"I think we have one of the best racecourses in America, and we're going to run the races to the betterment, not just to horsemen, but to everyone that lives in Hunt Country. Those are the things that Will stood for, and those are the things we will continue," Al said.

Will Allison, Gold Cup's champion for the past 25 years -- the face of the races, the core engine behind their success, and one of the most loved people in Fauquier -- has a word or two to say about his successor.

"Al Griffin is the leading person nationally of Steeplechase racing. And that's not only because he's president of the national Steeplechase Association, but it is his personal involvement in all the races," Will says.

"And during his leadership tenure, we have seen enormous increase in quality horses, in ownership, involvement in purse structure increases, and the state of Steeplechase Racing rising nationally is at an all-time high, all due to Al's fantastic leadership."

Now that Al is following Will as both race Chairman and the president of the Virginia Gold Cup Association (which sets the race policies carried out by the Chairman), Will said "this means it is his total responsibility to put the races on."

Will recalls 30 years ago when he was master in Warrenton and brought Al in as joint master, where he "served beautifully."

Later, when Will was chairman of the Gold Cup races, he asked Al to join him as Co-Chairman. "And now, he has been joint-chairman for the last ten years and has carried Gold Cup to new heights in terms of purses and quality of racing -- and it hasn't always been easy."

The hardest part was overcoming the economy during COVID, he says. One of the best parts was the realization that all of Gold Cup – the Steeplechase Races -- came from fox hunting.

"Fox hunting, the old point-to-points developed into the classic steeplechase racing we know today," Will explained. It was the local hunt and the people joining the sport and then taking their good horses and racing them on the weekends. All that is the pleasure, that you kept.".

"Advice for Dr. Griffin?" I ask. "He calls me his mentor," Will says. "Yes, but he has succeeded well beyond any advice I could give him."

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