For those of you who were 2018 GVDS award winners, you needn’t read the rest of this article as you already know how to strategize your show and ride schedule to maximize your scores and win cool year-end prizes.

But for others, some of these tips might help to achieve a different end-of-the-year outcome.

1. When you join RMDS, be sure to **join the correct chapter** – Grand Valley and NOT Western Colorado. Joining the correct chapter ensures that the points earned at any GVDS show count towards a year-end award.
2. **Read the GVDS Year End Award rules**. For most levels, including western, only two shows with four rides *at the same level* are required. You do not need to ride both days at a show for it to count towards the required number of shows but showing two days at one show still only counts as one show.
3. **Strategize your show schedule**. Anyone who has a horse knows that stretching your dollars is important. GVDS is one of the only organizations where schooling shows are treated equally with rated shows. There are four schooling shows and one rated show each year. If you can only afford two shows a year, showing one day at two different shows automatically makes you *eligible* for a year end award, assuming you get the required number of rides. Also new for 2019, you will have to show under two different judges. This is important for the August shows which have two days as a rated show and one day as a schooling show. Showing both the rated show and the schooling show would not meet the required two shows since it is the same judge for the entire weekend. Something to keep in mind when planning your show schedule.
4. **Strategize your rides at each level**. This year many riders were only one score away from being eligible for a year-end award. They had ridden three tests at a lower level and moved up to a higher level at their last show, leaving them one score short for qualifying. For divisions where four rides at the *same* level are required, any of the tests within that level are eligible.

For example, to qualify for a First Level Award, you must show FOUR first level tests at wo different shows. You can choose to show any combination of First Level Test 1, First Level Test 2 or First Level Test 3 to earn the required number of scores. You do not need to ride all the tests at a single show but could spread them out over the number of shows you intend to do in a year. If you show three First Level tests at two shows and finish the year with a Second Level test, you would be *ineligible* for both a First Level and Second Level award as you did not meet the required number of scores at a single level.

If you hope to move up to a higher level towards the end of the year, get your scores done at the lower level at the early shows to ensure your eligibility for a year-end award. You can always increase your average score (the highest scores are always used for year end awards) by showing in more classes at the lower level at any of the shows.

1. **Check your scores**. I, like many others, make errors in entering data into spreadsheets. I am happy to send anyone a score check at any time, although until you meet the minimum requirement, you will not have an average score. This also helps me to ensure that I am accurate in my calculations.
2. **Schedule your volunteer hours.** Every show needs help, so contact the volunteer coordinator, Krista Nobilio, to volunteer your time and talents. And for you procrastinators, the later shows are the lightest on volunteers.
3. Although not a “tip” for earning a GVDS year-end award, **consider expanding your learning and showing experience to areas other than the Grand Valley**. This year several riders went to clinics and shows on the front range, Estes Park, and in Utah. Attending an RMDS show or clinic does not require a USEF membership, so it is still very affordable, and maximizes your RMDS membership. Consider utilizing the newsletter to contact other members or send messages via Facebook, text or email to see who is going where. There might be others who are interested in an event but do not want to go alone. The camaraderie developed during these clinics and shows is priceless and often far better than any awards.

I hope this helps to increase the number of eligible riders for 2019. We are already planning awards for 2019 for both riders and volunteers and they should be great.